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## Professional Challenges and Coping Strategies of Women Superintendents from Selected School Districts in Illinois

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

PROFESSIONAL CHALLENGES AND COPING STRATEGIES OF  
WOMEN SUPERINTENDENTS FROM SELECTED SCHOOL  
DISTRICTS IN ILLINOIS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY STUDIES

BY

CYNTHIA A. BOUDREAU

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

JANUARY 1994

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I sincerely acknowledge and thank the nine outstanding women superintendents who contributed to this study. Without their time and their sharing of their lives with me this work would not have been possible. I learned much from them and grew professionally from their thoughts, and experiences.

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I thank my family, especially my children, Noah and Hannah, who quite literally have grown up with their mom's pursuit of this profes-

sional endeavor. Their love and understanding allowed me to balance motherhood and professional requirements; their responsibility alleviated much stress from my life. I hope that they can be as proud of me as I will always be of them. We survived my dissertation together.

## DEDICATION

To my father, Joseph Schmitt (1923-1971) who by the example of his life taught me to be a risk-taker, and to work hard with enthusiasm; to my mother, Catherine, and my grandmother, Rosa, whose lives have taught me that women can be incredibly strong and can survive anything that comes one's way in life; and to my children, Noah and Hannah.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The ranks of female superintendents are slowly increasing from one-tenth of 1 percent in 1973 to 1 percent in 1980, to slightly more than 2 percent in 1985 up to 5 percent as recent as 1991, according to Gary Marx, senior executive director of the American Association of School Administrators, based in Rosslyn, Virginia.<sup>1</sup> This organization, The American Association of School Administrators, in a study financed by the Ford Foundation, has suggested that 50 percent of today's school administrators are facing retirement in the next ten years, and predict that opportunities for women and minorities will greatly open. American Association of University Women executive director, Anne L. Bryant, recently stated in response to an AAUW study of women in educational leadership that "The figures tell me that we've made some progress, but we still have a culture and climate problem that we need to tackle with greater intensity."<sup>2</sup>

Women continue to be challenged by the very fact of underrepresentation within the top ranks of chief school officials. Role models are few in the school superintendency, even though the teaching profes-

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<sup>1</sup>J. P. Hicks, "Women in Waiting," The New York Times, 3 November 1991, 4a, p. 19.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

sion itself is predominately female.<sup>3</sup> If the doctorate is the key to unlocking administrative posts for women, and more than half of the doctoral students in administration are women, then a large number of women will be vying for these top positions within the next decade.<sup>4</sup> Others suggest that the growing number of women at the top executive level will not only serve to encourage women, but also will sensitize male-dominated boards of education to the successes of women in neighboring school districts. "We find that the more role models there are, the more likely women will aspire to the superintendency."<sup>5</sup> Without a doubt, the 1990s will continue to be the "breakthrough" decade for women in leadership positions throughout corporate America.<sup>6</sup> Paralleling this trend, it is likely that there will be an increase of women superintendents leading schools into the twenty-first century.

There are historic barriers, however, facing women who aspire to leadership. Many female superintendents feel that they are criticized harshly and need to work harder to establish their credibility than their male counterparts. Discrimination toward women in the view of lack of qualifications or experience continues to exist. Ironically, the majority of women actually hold higher degrees, have more classroom

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<sup>3</sup>American Association of School Administrators, Climbing the Career Ladder: A Research Study of Women in School Administration (Arlington: American Association of School Administrators, 1982), 30-43.

<sup>4</sup>S. T. McGrath, "Here Come the Women," Educational Leadership, February 1992, 62-65.

<sup>5</sup>Hicks, "Women in Waiting," 19.

<sup>6</sup>J. Naisbitt and P. Aburdene, Megatrends 2000: Ten New Directions for the 1990s (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1990), 240.

experience, and are generally older than the men with whom they compete.<sup>7</sup> The Project on the Status and Education of Women identified a number of ways that women are treated differently than men. Among some of the problems are:

1. Small numbers of women heighten their visibility.
2. Social etiquette is often inappropriately interjected into the professional setting.
3. Women's abilities are more likely to be questioned, downgraded, or trivialized.
4. Difficulties with collegiality result in feelings of isolation.
5. Women are more likely to be judged by appearance than achievement.
6. Women's communication patterns are interpreted as less powerful.<sup>8</sup>

These "micro-inequities" serve to undermine women's self-esteem, morale, opportunities for advancement, productivity, and full participation in advancement in leadership.<sup>9</sup> One study of women who have assumed administrative positions identified external barriers to a lack of qualitative opportunities, absence of or a limited informal network

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<sup>7</sup>L. L. Cunningham and J. T. Hentges, The American School Superintendency, 1982: A Summary Report (Arlington, VA: American Association of School Administrators, 1982), 73-80.

<sup>8</sup>B. Sandler, "You've Come a Long Way-Maybe-Or Why It still Hurts to be a Woman in Labor." In Employment Practices in Academe (Current Issues in Higher Education Monograph No. 4) (Washington, DC: American Association for Higher Education, 1986).

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

through which job openings and information could be shared, and outright sex discrimination in hiring.<sup>10</sup>

Internal barriers also exist which limit a woman's activity in administration. Some of these internal challenges are an unwillingness to accept increased responsibilities due to family commitments and deliberate curtailment of professional achievement due to family demands.<sup>11</sup> Femininity, in this society, is closely related to motherhood and how one performs as a mother is socially evaluated along with one's professional success, according to a study that goes back to 1982.<sup>12</sup> This deeply-rooted attitude was noted in a more recent study done in 1987, indicating that women need to choose between a career and a family, or balance the dual roles of work and home. Accomplishing this balancing of the dual role of a career and family/home caretaker is complicated further by the societal expectation of femininity conflicting with competitiveness, intellectualism, and individualization. Women administrators are faced with the stress that results from living with divergent, incongruent sets of expectations from society and themselves.<sup>13</sup> These expectations create role conflicts, therefore stress

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<sup>10</sup>S. F. Mark, Gender Differences Among Mid-Level Administrators. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education, San Antonio, TX, 1986, ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. 268, 877.

<sup>11</sup>L. J. Reisser and L. A. Zurfluh, "Female Administrators: Moving Up or Moving Out?" Journal of NAWDAC, Summer 1987, 22-29.

<sup>12</sup>T. Heller, Women and Men as Leaders (New York: J. F. Bergin Publishers Inc., 1982), 2-45.

<sup>13</sup>J. Z. Kline, "Women's Achievement in Educational Administration: Perceptions of Motivational Factors and Coping Strategies" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1987), 194-202.

and challenges for women to overcome. Yet women superintendents do just that; they resolve the conflicts within themselves with a variety of coping strategies.

This study is designed to investigate the challenges and the coping strategies of women superintendents inclusive of both their professional life and their personal life in relation to their career.

### Statement of the Problem

Challenges of the superintendency are not likely to disappear as we move into the twenty-first century. Pressures from boards of education and the school community at large to maintain fiscal responsibility while bringing all children to their educational potential will plague the chief school district leader regardless of that leader's sex. Stress of parenting and caretaking of elderly relatives will continue to present conflicting demands upon working adults, particularly women who traditionally are still expected to be the major nurturer of family. That these two roles converge upon women at the same time in their life is likely. Career development toward the superintendency takes many years, as does caring for one's spouse, children, or parents. Research is needed to explore how women who have achieved the school superintendency have balanced the complexity of multi-caretaker roles.

This dissertation specifically focuses upon women superintendents from selected school districts in Illinois and identifies their perceived professional challenges and their coping strategies which have led to their satisfaction in both their professional and personal lives.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate, analyze and report personal experiences and insights which were shared from the interviewed women superintendents. Studying both their professional challenges as well as their personal challenges in relationship to their careers gives significant insights, otherwise unavailable, into these women's lives. Their perceptions are valuable to future leaders, regardless of their gender, because as the roles of women change, so, too, do the roles for men. Resulting information from this study will benefit those who choose to manage a school district, as well as a family. With the changing role of women in their balancing of home responsibilities with their spouses in order to assume more career responsibility, future male administrators could also benefit from this investigation. The research is designed as a qualitative study using in-depth interviewing of the subject group.

### Research Questions

The research questions evolved from the review of the literature, personal experience and interest. In a study by Funk in 1986, there were eight problem or "challenging" areas for women in administration.<sup>14</sup> Whether these areas continue to present a challenge to women superintendents in 1993 framed several of the question probes for this study. In a study by Willower in 1983, 20 percent of the women superintendents stated that the superintendency negatively impacted upon their

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<sup>14</sup>C. Funk, Female Managers in Business and Education: Sacrifices, Stressors, and Support Systems (Arlington, TX: Annual Conference on Women and Work, May 1986), 2-20.

personal lives.<sup>15</sup> Role conflict was cited by Heller as far back as 1982,<sup>16</sup> and even earlier by Schmuck in 1975.<sup>17</sup> More recently Reisser and Zurfluh, 1987, cited conflict between a woman's professional and personal life reason for leaving leadership positions.<sup>18</sup> Whether this role conflict continues to exist for women superintendents in 1993 was explored in this investigation. Question probes regarding family responsibilities and coping strategies to maintain a balance between the professional and personal demands will determine if the women of this study are experiencing this high level of stress. In the Maienza study in 1986,<sup>19</sup> and earlier in the Frasher, Frasher and Hardwick study in 1982,<sup>20</sup> coping skills of women in leadership who balanced home responsibilities with work responsibilities were explored. Question probes regarding coping strategies used by women in 1993 are used in this study. The stress and coping models for executives presented by Quick and Quick, 1984,<sup>21</sup> Marshall, 1981,<sup>22</sup> and Guelso, Bird and Koball,

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<sup>15</sup>D. J. Willower, "Mystifications and Mysteries in Thought and Research in Educational Administration." Paper presented at a UCEA Conference on Thought and Research in Educational Administration, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, 1983, 3-22.

<sup>16</sup>Heller, Women and Men as Leaders, 2-45.

<sup>17</sup>P. Schmuck, Sex Roles (New York: State University of New York Press, 1975), 39-353, passim.

<sup>18</sup>Reisser and Zurfluh, "Female Administrators," 22-29.

<sup>19</sup>J. G. Maienza, "The Superintendency: Characteristics of Access for Men and Women," Educational Administration Quarterly, Fall 1986, 30-36.

<sup>20</sup>R. Frasher, J. Frasher, and K. Hardwick, "The Female Superintendent," Journal of the NAWDAC, Spring 1982, 36-41.

<sup>21</sup>J. C. Quick and J. D. Quick, Organizational Stress and Preventative Management (New York: McGraw-Hill Inc., 1984), 3-12.



1991,<sup>23</sup> all prompted questioning regarding challenge and coping strategies. This study interrelates all of these areas, professional challenge, personal challenge (as related to professional), and coping mechanisms utilized to balance both. Relating these three areas was relevant to the study as each is dependent upon the other.

Inquiry centered on the women superintendents' professional lives. Challenges in their personal lives were probed but only as they relate to their professional lives. Inquiry also solicited information as to coping mechanisms utilized by the women superintendents. Of interest are the techniques each woman has developed to withstand the "stressors" from the multi-facets of their lives.

There are three major components to the inquiry, each with a major question. First, to investigate the challenges resulting from the work of the superintendency itself, school board relations, community relations, collegial relationships, and their professional goals and aspirations. Second, to investigate the challenges of balancing the demands of their personal lives in relation to their career. Third, to explore the coping techniques employed by these women in both their professional and personal lives. The three major questions are therefore:

1. What are the significant challenges of the superintendency for women?

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<sup>22</sup>C. Marshall, "Organizational Policy and Women's Socialization in Administration," Urban Education, 1981, 226-28.

<sup>23</sup>M. G., Guelow, G. W. Bird, and E. H. Koball, "An Exploratory Path Analysis of the Stress Process for Dual-Career Men and Women," Journal of Marriage and the Family, February 1991, 151-62.

2. What are the personal challenges in relationship to their professional life for women superintendents?
3. What are the coping strategies utilized by women superintendents to respond to the professional and personal challenges?

Areas that were probed, with the specific questions listed in the Appendix, to answer these three major questions are delineated as:  
 What are the significant challenges of the superintendency for women?

Hiring Practices/Discrimination

The Work Itself

School Board Relations

Community Relations

Collegial/Organization Relationships

Subordinate Relationships

Goals and Aspirations

What are the personal challenges in relationship to their professional life for women superintendents?

Family Responsibilities

Community/Organization

Academic Pursuits

Goals and Aspirations

What are the coping strategies utilized by women superintendents to respond to the professional and personal challenges?

Networking/Mentors/Collegial Support

Home Caretaking/Housework Responsibilities

Professional/Feminist Organizations

Family/Spouse Support

Personal Activities (Exercise, Recreation,  
Hobbies)

Time Management

The research is exploratory and qualitative in nature, and the interviews were designed to probe in-depth for information as to the harmonizing of the subjects' professional and personal challenges.

#### Methods and Procedures

Initially, the ten female school district superintendents from the selected school districts of Illinois were located through the 1992-1993 Illinois Directory of Administrators. Second, phone contact was established to introduce the study, and to explain the nature of the research. Following the phone conversation, and based upon the nine superintendent's willingness to participate in the study, an Entry Questionnaire and Consent to Participate Form (Appendix) were sent to participants. The intent of the Entry Questionnaire was to identify further a variety of factors, such as: type/size of district, length of service to the district on role of Superintendent, service to schools in other roles such as principal/teacher (employment history), age, marital status, and parental/caretaker role. Following the Entry Questionnaire, the nine willing female superintendents were interviewed comprehensively. The interview probed the challenges of their professional lives, the challenges of their personal lives (as related to professional life), and their coping responses to their superintendent role and/or to their dual role of parent/child/spouse supporter. While the interview questions emerged as to the comfort level of the superintendent

interviewed and built upon the disclosures of the women themselves, question probes (see Appendix) within each category were covered. The one identified superintendent who declined to be part of the study was serving her district as an interim superintendent.

Analysis of interview responses included identifying commonalities or differences among the responses to the interview questions by the participating women superintendents where possible. Interview response analysis also determined through repetitive answers what are possible particular female challenges/stressors of their professional life in terms of the work itself, school board relationships, community relationships, collegial relationships, and personal professional aspirations/ethics. Analysis also focused upon the demands, and balancing of the personal lives of these women in their roles as wife, mother, or family member/home caretaker, as related to their professional demands. Analysis further identified commonalities and differences of methods of coping such as recreational activities, time management techniques, support groups or organizational membership, and other coping strategies utilized by these women.

The analysis went beyond mere reporting of findings and attempted to provide an understanding of what the slowly increasing numbers of women in administration face as challenges, and how they respond with coping strategies. Analysis was made of the interview data and the related literature to determine whether the challenges and coping strategies continue to be consistent with prior research.

#### Significance of the Study

The findings of this study will expand the understanding of the

complexity of the superintendency for women who balance the world of work with the demands of family life. Their success in both dimensions of their lives may inspire the yet untapped pool of qualified Illinois women who may consider aspiring to the chief school executive office. As retirements occur in this currently male-dominated field over the next decade, talented women may be encouraged to fill the position of superintendent while not necessarily sacrificing other aspects of their lives.

Barbara Dopp in a study conducted of women superintendents in Illinois in 1984-1985 found that two-thirds of the women entered the superintendency as a result of external influences, rather than as a planned conscious decision to pursue the administrative career track that leads to the superintendency. While the majority of the married superintendents felt that their marriages were strong and that they had supportive spouses and family, some hindrances to the superintendency were not possessing an earned doctorate, personal problems, and stereotypes, such as not being viewed as strong enough.<sup>24</sup> It is important that as the need for new leadership increases women will continue to break free of the female stereotypes and deliberately secure greater representation in top level administrative posts. A career with hierarchical promotions, such as the progression from teacher to superintendent, requires planning and commitment. This qualitative study is intended to bring in-depth information to the forefront regarding women's capacities to lead schools while maintaining the

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<sup>24</sup>B. Dopp and C. A. Sloan, "Career Development and Succession of Women to the Superintendency," Clearing House, November 1986, 120-26.

commitments of married or family life. The information presented may encourage all educators, particularly women, to plan their administrative careers early on and develop coping strategies to assist them with the increasing physical and emotional demands of leadership positions. Historically in our society women have been ignored as potential leaders.<sup>25</sup> In the 1990s, it is naive to believe that there is something called a "glass ceiling" that will forever exclude women from the top.<sup>26</sup>

### Scope and Limitations of the Study

#### Scope

This qualitative study used the interview approach to investigate the professional challenges and coping strategies of women superintendents from selected school districts in Illinois during the 1992-1993 school year. Through probing questions, extensive information regarding the interviewees' perceptions of challenges of school leadership along with the demands of their personal lives were shared.

#### Limitations

The sample of women superintendents is limited to the selected school districts in Illinois. While this group is representative of women superintendents in general, it may be that there are regional influences not accounted for that impacted on the interviewees' responses to questions. The nature of the interview, while following a set of

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<sup>25</sup>S. K. Biklen and M. B. Brannigan, Women and Educational Leadership (Lexington, KY: D. C. Heath & Co., 1980), 1-20.

<sup>26</sup>Naisbitt and Aburdene, Megatrends 2000, 216-40.

specific probes, was molded by available time and the comfort level of each respondent's direct communication. Data were collected from self-reports and perceptions.

#### Definition of Terms

Administrator: An individual responsible for the management of an organization.

Career: The progress of one's profession directed by attitude, behavior, work-related experience, and activity.

Challenge: Stress that compels an individual to overcome a barrier.

Coping Strategy: A skillfully planned technique to successfully contend with stress.

External Factors: Those variables existing in the environment, and not integral to one's own self-concept or personality.

Internal Factors: Personal attributes and self-defined personality traits.

Leadership: The process of persuasion by which a leader (or leadership group such as the state) induces followers to act in a manner that enhances the leader's purposes or shared purpose (vision).

Superintendent: An individual who holds the top level executive position of a school district, or school system.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the challenges that women superintendents face as both school district leader and home/family caretaker, and to explore the coping strategies employed to balance these two dimensions of their lives. This chapter provides a review of the literature in the areas of the Historical Perspective of Women in Education and Educational Administration, Challenges Facing Women in Administration and as Superintendents, and Models of Stress and Coping Responses.

#### Historical Perspective of Women in Education and Educational Administration

In the near future, we shall have more women than men in charge of the vast educational system. It is a woman's natural field, and she is no longer satisfied to do the larger part of the work and yet be denied the leadership.

--Ella Flagg Young

The role of women in education is a parallel to the role of women in society in general. Women have largely been in a subordinate role despite the historical achievements of a few. This is due to the stereotypical view that men are the natural leaders and the practice of



sexual discrimination that maintains this perspective.<sup>1</sup> Women themselves accepted, until the early twentieth century, society's narrow definition of women's roles and abilities. American women were restricted from positions of public authority. Gender disqualified women from participating in political affairs and stifled their ability to collaborate for political and social action.<sup>2</sup>

The role of women in education is also framed by the historical attitude toward school support in general. At the time of increased industry, during the late 1800s, employment opportunities grew. This growth saw increased urbanization and population, and a shortage of male teachers.<sup>3</sup> Women were chosen to meet the school labor shortage. Female teachers represented 66 percent of the teaching force in 1870. Teacher training for women began as minimal. During most of the nineteenth century, two years of normal school training was all that was necessary. This normal school training was equivalent to a high school education.<sup>4</sup> Some believed that women were in their "true sphere" as a teacher. Women had the natural instinct of maternal nurturing. Women such as Catherine Beecher and Emma Willard promoted the idea that

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<sup>1</sup>H. S. Astin and M. B. Snyder, Women's Education and Career Choice: Disparities Between Theory and Practice (Berkeley, CA: McCutchan Publishing Corp, 1984), 26-31.

<sup>2</sup>S. K. Biklen and M. B. Brannigan, Women and Educational Leadership (Lexington, KY: D. C. Heath & Co., 1980), 1-20.

<sup>3</sup>C. Shakeshaft, Women in Educational Administration (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1987), 5-32.

<sup>4</sup>E. Hansot and D. Tyack, The Dream Deferred: A Golden Age for Women School Administrators, Policy Paper No. 81-C2 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University School of Education, Institute for Research on Educational Finance and Governance, 1981).

teaching prepared a woman for the work of marriage and family; therefore teaching was suited for a young woman.<sup>5</sup> With limited training required, and the prevalent attitudes of the times, it is not surprising that women were the preferred teachers. The male superintendents perceived these female teachers as subordinates who would "mind" as did the children themselves.<sup>6</sup>

While women were thought of as having special talents for teaching such as being more gentle, patient, and caring about students, they also "filled the bill" as less costly to the school officials of poorly funded schools. Women earned about one-third of the salary that their male counterparts received. As an example, male city teachers earned about thirty-five dollars a month in 1870-1880, while a female city teacher earned about twelve dollars a month. Women also held less status than men. Male teachers often taught the older students and were addressed as "Professor," while female teachers were permitted to teach younger students and were often addressed as "Miss."<sup>7</sup> Regardless of the low pay and low status, women flocked to the teaching profession.<sup>8</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century teaching had come to be seen as one of the acceptable careers for women. Some saw the growth of the profession for women as a type of independence. Catherine Beecher and Emma Willard encouraged women to enter teaching because they believed:

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<sup>5</sup>Shakeshaft, Women in Educational Administration, 5-32.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>D. Tyack, The One Best System (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 2-56.

<sup>8</sup>Shakeshaft, Women in Educational Administration, 5-32.

A profession is to be created for women . . . a profession as honorable and as lucrative for her as the legal, medical and theological professions are for men. This is the way in which thousands of intelligent and respectable women, who toil for a pittance scarcely sufficient to sustain life, are to be relieved and elevated.<sup>9</sup>

Some believed, however, that if teaching was a woman's true profession combined with the low pay and low status ascribed to it, a lack of respect was promoted for teachers. The status of teaching was unequal to the highly regarded status given to lawyers, doctors, and ministers. One early advocate for women's equality in education was Susan B. Anthony. Being outspoken and insightful she "hit the nail on the head" in 1853 when she spoke at a meeting of educators. Only men were allowed to speak at such public meetings, and they debated for days regarding the low status of teaching. As her persistence to speak continued, they ultimately reluctantly gave her permission:

It seems to me you fail to comprehend the cause of the disrespect of which you complain. Do you not see that so long as society says woman has not brains enough to be a doctor, lawyer, or minister, but has plenty to be a teacher, every man of you who condescends to teach, tacitly admits before all Israel and the sun that he has no more brains than a woman?<sup>10</sup>

While some women achieved leadership positions before the twentieth century by opening their own schools, it was not until between 1900 and 1930 that women held 55 percent of the public school elementary principalships. This golden age for women in school administration was viewed as a natural extension of the women's natural role in schools,

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<sup>9</sup>T. Woody, A History of Women's Education in the United States, 2 vols. (New York: Octagon Books, 1966), 1:273.

<sup>10</sup>I. Harper, The Life and Work of Susan B. Anthony, quoted in M. Curti, The Social Ideas of American Educators (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), 190.

particularly on the elementary level.<sup>11</sup> A few pioneering women even rose to the level of school superintendent, such as Ella Flagg Young, Chicago Superintendent of Schools (1909-1915), and Susan M. Dorsey, Superintendent of Schools in Los Angeles (1920-1929). Unfortunately, many felt that the rise of women in school leadership was inappropriate because only men had the "constitution" for discipline. Social attitudes on women's competence was that they were too emotional, not task oriented enough, too dependent on feedback and evaluation from others, and that they lacked independence and autonomy. These attitudes along with the feminist movement being dormant except for the issue of suffrage, female principalships steadily declined from 1930.<sup>12</sup> National figures illustrate that during the 1940s, 41 percent of the elementary principalships were held by women; in the 1950s, 39 percent, and in the 1960s, 22 percent, and the 1970s, only 20 percent.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps the decline of women's participation in educational governance corresponds to the decline of feminist consciousness.<sup>14</sup> With the feminist power base eroding, school administration again became a male dominated field. The percentage of women in school administration in the late 1980s was less than it was in 1905.<sup>15</sup> Since most managerial positions have traditionally been held by men, to some it may not seem surprising that

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<sup>11</sup>Hansot and Tyack, The Dream Deferred.

<sup>12</sup>Biklen and Brannigan, Women and Educational Leadership, 1-20.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>P. A. Schmuck, W. W. Carlson, and R. O. Charters, Educational Policy and Management: Sex Differentials (New York: Academic Press, 1981), 2-13.

<sup>15</sup>Shakeshaft, Women in Educational Administration, 2-231.

more women are not educational leaders. However, when one considers the proportion of women in the "entry level" positions as teachers, compared to the corresponding entry level positions of women in other professions, it is startling that less than 5 percent of school superintendents in the 1990s are women.<sup>16</sup>

Continuing hindrances for women in administration are discrimination, sex-role stereotyping and lack of female role models for female aspirants. The lack of female role models has subtly discouraged individuals from learning school leadership behaviors and deterred women's achievement levels in administration.<sup>17</sup> The male-dominated superintendents and assistant superintendents who do the hiring often hire a man over a woman because women are an unpredictable and unproven commodity.<sup>18</sup>

Estler posited three reasons for the persistence of underrepresentation of women administrators in schools. These are (1) the women's place model, (2) the discrimination model, and (3) the meritocracy model. The women's place model presents the position that learned societal and institutional behavior for young boys and girls continues into adulthood. This model makes the assumption that there are fewer women leaders because of leadership (power) being a socialization pattern for men. As they grew up, women are taught to be the family

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<sup>16</sup>S. T. McGrath, "Here Come the Women," Educational Leadership, February 1992, 62-65.

<sup>17</sup>P. Schmuck, Sex Roles (New York: State University of New York Press, 1975), 1-16.

<sup>18</sup>R. Kanter, Beyond Sex Roles (New York: West Publishing Co., 1977), 5-27.

caretakers and nurturers; therefore, a woman's place is in the home. Society does not necessarily admire the hard work and sacrifice a woman must expend to succeed in her career because it is at great cost to her family.<sup>19</sup> According to Schmuck:

The social construct of women's place in the society of earlier times, thus women's place in the schools, was based on a belief in the inferiority of women. Implicit in this argument was the fundamental right of men to conduct lives in the public and secular sphere, whereas woman's place was to be in the private and domestic sphere. Men were to govern women.<sup>20</sup>

It was not until the 1940s that the dramatic ideological shift occurred which allowed married women to teach school. With men serving in the armed forces during World War II, married women who had been teachers before marriage were called back into service. Their competence began to influence the acceptance of teaching being a complimentary field of work for married women as they had shorter hours and summers off. Many of these women also became school administrators. Their retirement found no trained group of women to replace them, and again school leadership was assumed by men.

The discrimination model suggests preferential educational experiences, hiring practices, and salary discrepancy. It was in the 1960s that change for the American woman once again flourished. President Kennedy's appointment in 1963 of a report by The Commission on the Status of Women, documented the low status of women in education and

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<sup>19</sup>S. Estler, "Women as Leaders in Public Education," Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 1975, 21-28.

<sup>20</sup>P. A. Schmuck, ed., Women Educators. Employees of Schools in Western Countries (New York: State University of New York Press, 1987), 12.

work.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, a popular book, The Feminine Mystique by Betty Friedan presented the idea that the "American society had imprisoned women in their own homes by not encouraging them to pursue their talents and lead independent lives."<sup>22</sup> This climate brought forth several pieces of legislation:

- In the early 1960s, "sex" was added to Title VII of the Civil Rights Act.
- The Equal Pay Act of 1963, amended to include institutions of higher education, prohibited discrimination in salaries on the basis of sex.
- In 1968 Executive Order 11246, which prohibits discrimination by all federal contractors on the basis of race, color, religion, and national origin, was amended to include sex.
- The Public Health Service Act of 1971, the first legislation forbidding sex discrimination against students, prohibited discrimination against students and employees on the basis of sex in all federally assisted education programs including admissions, financial aid, educational and guidance programs, and student services and facilities.
- In Section 408 of the Education Amendments of 1974, the Women's Education Equity Act, Congress declared that educational programs in the United States are frequently unequitable and limit the full participation of women in American society.<sup>23</sup>

In Estler's analysis, it was shown that when both men and women hold the same credentials, the male teacher will be promoted to administration within five years, the female counterpart in fifteen years.<sup>24</sup>

Shakeshaft, Nowell and Perry cited the factor of heterosexuality and our unspoken beliefs about men and women working together as another type of discrimination. When male superintendents were asked if they would hire an "attractive" female as an administrator. Almost all responded "yes"

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<sup>21</sup>Astin and Snyder, Women's Education and Career Choice, 26-31.

<sup>22</sup>B. Friedan, The Feminine Mystique (New York: W. W. Norton, 1963), 53.

<sup>23</sup>Astin and Snyder, Women's Education and Career Choice, 28.

<sup>24</sup>Estler, "Women as Leaders," 20-27.

for a principalship, but "no" for an assistant superintendency. Most felt that they would be uncomfortable in a close working relationship with an attractive woman. Sexuality and the attention received from male peers or superordinates causes suspicion and caution for most women administrators. Women have to "think" about their responses whether there is a spoken or unspoken sexual message.<sup>25</sup>

The meritocracy model is one of sex stereotyping suggesting that men are superior to women in leadership roles. Estler hastens to add that there is very little data to support this belief. In fact, one of her studies indicated that teacher performance and student achievement was higher at schools headed by female principals.<sup>26</sup>

Challenges Facing Women in Administration  
and as Superintendents

Remember, Ginger Rogers did everything Fred Astaire did, but she did it backwards and in high heels.

--Faith Whittlesey

Superintendents, regardless of their sex, are expected to play several roles in responding to school and societal challenges. Sergio-vanni described a superintendent as a "manager, minister, servant, and high priest who protects the values of the school."<sup>27</sup> A woman who enters the top level position must not only take on these roles, but also must "prove herself" as a capable person. Capable in this sense is

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<sup>25</sup>C. Shakeshaft, I. Nowell and A. Perry, "Gender and Supervision in School Personnel," The Education Digest, February 1992, 14-17.

<sup>26</sup>Estler, "Women as Leaders," 22-23.

<sup>27</sup>T. J. Sergiovanni, "Leadership and Excellence in Schooling," Educational Leadership 41, No. 5 (1984): 12.



redefined as the strengths that women bring to this executive position, not necessarily capable within the existing male superintendent paradigm. Several researchers have noted distinct differences between male and female leaders. According to Pitner, males communicate more with external organizations such as the Lions Club and the Rotary, while women communicate more with internal organizations such as the Parent Teacher Association.<sup>28</sup> Bernard posited that women are better conditioned toward cooperation, while men are predisposed to compete.<sup>29</sup> The research of Abrams proposed that women learn to empathize with others and work toward building and maintaining social structures, while men learn to manipulate and study ways to destroy social structures. Relationships are most important to women, not the "separate and on top" attitude.<sup>30</sup>

Susan Paddock, in a study of characteristics of women superintendents, assistant superintendents, and high school principals in the United States found that they were more diverse in their ethnicity, religious affiliation, politics, marital status, and parenthood than the entire population of male administrators. The conclusion drawn from Paddock's investigation was that the obvious criterion in the selection of an administrator is sex. This homogeneity of "maleness" in the leadership of our schools deprives them of the talent of half our

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<sup>28</sup>N. J. Pitner, Notes of the Difference in the Behavior of Woman Superintendents in Suburban Districts (Los Angeles: Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, 13-17 April 1981, 1-17.

<sup>29</sup>J. Bernard, The Modern American College (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1981), 7-18.

<sup>30</sup>Schmuck, Women Educators, 15.

population, that is, our effective women leaders. We can no longer afford to do this. We need the best of both of the genders to meet the challenges of today's schools.<sup>31</sup>

Shakeshaft, in her study of women leaders found differences in leadership style. Women tend to want to build a sense of community, often with their professional and private worlds blurred. Men, however, keep clearer lines of separatism between the privacy of their home and their public demeanor. Shakeshaft noted that this paradigm is not fully accepted and therefore women are often criticized for their lack of separate behavior.<sup>32</sup>

Shakeshaft also noted in her study that many women try to appear less authoritarian, and more collegial than their male counterparts. Men tend to view this collegiality as less threatening but not necessarily as an indication of competence. This subtle, friendly leadership style in an effort to be more effective, often appears as less "in charge." Some researchers support, however, that this female ethos of promoting cooperation, empathy, and collaboration does promote productivity. This new view of leader as facilitator and servant, one who can listen, assist, convince, monitor, model, develop, redefine, and encourage in a collegial manner sounds very much like the leadership of schools headed by women.<sup>33</sup>

In terms of factors relating to job performance, women in high

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<sup>31</sup>S. C. Paddock, Educational Policy and Management: Sex Differentials (New York: Charters & Carlson, 1977), 1-4.

<sup>32</sup>Shakeshaft, Women in Educational Administration, 2-50.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

status positions often receive fewer communications, have less influence over peers and subordinates, and are generally more isolated than their male counterparts according to Miller, Labovitz and Fry. It was further found that most women self-perceived an area of weakness to be finance and budgeting; men did not note finance as a concern.<sup>34</sup>

Ortiz's study of the role of the superintendent suggested that there are four main barriers to women as they pursue administration: (1) the initial departure from teaching; (2) accepting positions that provide no further opportunity for advancement; (3) losing to white males when competing for line positions; and (4) following a "dead end" career path such as becoming a specialist rather than a principal.<sup>35</sup>

Anne L. Bryant, executive director of the American Association of University Women, has expressed that the dearth of female administrative leaders is a direct result of "out-and-out discrimination."

Women who have been teachers have not been given the opportunity for administrative positions because they are not often viewed as being potential managers and administrators.<sup>36</sup>

A study of the school superintendency by Cunningham, and Hentges as far back as 1982, revealed that many women superintendents expressed strong feelings about discriminatory hiring and promotional practices that limited career opportunities. These women superintendents also expressed that they actively encourage and recruit women to enter

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<sup>34</sup>Jon Miller, Sanford Labovitz and Lincoln Fry, "Inequities in the Organizational Experiences of Women and Men," Social Forces, 1978, 3-9.

<sup>35</sup>F. I. Ortiz, Career Patterns in Education (New York: University of California-Riverside, 1982), 18-72.

<sup>36</sup>J. P. Hicks, "Women in Waiting," The New York Times, 3 November 1991, 4A, 19.

administration to a greater extent than men. According to this study the profile of women superintendents include:

- 76% are in districts ranging in size from less than 300 pupils to 2,999 pupils
- Have spent less of their lives in rural areas or small towns
- Are slightly older
- Are more often divorced or separated
- Politically, more consider themselves to be Democrats
- Have parents with slightly higher levels of education
- Have more elementary school experience
- Have more years of teaching experience
- Have experienced less employment outside of education
- have slightly higher levels of formal preparation
- Began their graduate preparation at older ages
- More often serve as supervisors in first administrative post
- Enter their first administrative position at an older age
- Are more often appointed to their present position from outside the district.<sup>37</sup>

Funk, in a more recent study in 1986, of 66 female administrators in the Texas Metroplex area posited 8 problem areas encountered by women in administration:

1. Difficulty in gaining male respect. This problem was mentioned most frequently. Women felt that they had to work harder and longer to prove to men that they could do the job and had to be patient while they were proving themselves. Their insights and action plans were often ignored, and those who ignored them were guilty of male chauvinistic attitudes but they tried to hide them.
2. No entry to the "good ol' boy system"--the male network. Many women felt left out when the good ol' boys went fishing, felt left out in the decision-making process, found it difficult to speak out at meetings, felt "low on the pecking order," found that men turn to other men for support, and experienced loneliness and isolation in their administrative positions.
3. Not seen as an authority figure/not taken seriously. Women stated that they were not viewed as authority figures by men or women. They felt viewed as "pushovers," and were often taken for granted.
4. Must be better than male competition. Many of the female administrators felt that they had to prove themselves by being smarter, working harder, and being more diligent, with more

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<sup>37</sup>L. L. Cunningham and J. T. Hentges, The American School Superintendency, 1982. A Summary Report (Arlington, VA: American Association of School Administrators, 1981), 73.

- expertise than their male counterparts. One indicated that "this was not difficult."
5. Not being trusted by other women. Responses indicated that other women in some instances did not wish to work for female administrators, were less accepting than some males, and sometimes tried to take advantage of the "sister female" boss.
  6. Difficulty with male parents, maintenance men, and male school board members. Some women reported incidents in which male parents "threw their weight around until they found out that I was the boss." Other comments indicated that maintenance men were unsure that females could handle the administrative role and that males tended to stereotype women and were apprehensive in their dealings with them.
  7. Unequal opportunity/discrimination. Several members of the sample mentioned that they had not received equal opportunities for employment or had been discriminated against during their employment history; one indicated that during her principalship "unwritten personnel policies" dictated that female principals must have male assistants because they couldn't have "two women running a school."
  8. Seen as a threat to men. Some women stated that they were perceived as a threat to men and were careful not to "upstage" or "pre-empt" males in higher positions within their districts. One respondent stated that "male supervisors have trouble dealing with assertive, competent females." (In a few instances, assertive women were also seen as a threat to another women.)<sup>38</sup>

### Family Responsibilities as Constraints

At work, you think of the children you have left at home. At home, you think of the work you've left unfinished. Such a struggle is unleashed within yourself. Your heart is rent.

--Golda Meir

Women with the career goal of the superintendency are certain to face obstacles. Societal expectations for women present obstacles as well as the sheer paucity of women superintendents as role models add to

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<sup>38</sup>C. Funk, Female Managers in Business and Education: Sacrifices, Stressors, and Support Systems (Arlington, TX: Annual Conference on Women and Work, May 1986), 5-6.

the barriers in and of itself.<sup>39</sup> These barriers are generally described as internal and external in nature. Internal barriers are generally associated with women's lack of aggressiveness, low self-image, lack of self-confidence, and lack of social connections. External barriers include society's attitudes, systems and structures, and also a lack of role models, sponsorship, resentment of others, family responsibilities, and perceptions of female characteristics and abilities as incongruent with job demands.<sup>40</sup>

According to a study conducted by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) the most common internal barrier was geographical mobility.<sup>41</sup> Because nearby career opportunities are limited, those aspiring to a superintendency often consider relocating to accept a position. Due to the complexity of marriage and child-rearing responsibilities, a woman may not be able to move to accept an administrative position. In a study of women administrators in Washington state, internal factors limiting women's achievement in educational leadership include reduced leadership aspirations, unwillingness to accept increased responsibilities due to family commitments, and deliberate curtailment of professional achievement due to family demands. Most high-achieving women hold very high expectations for both

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<sup>39</sup>B. Dopp and C. A. Sloan, "Career Development and Succession of Women to the Superintendency," Clearing House, November 1986, 120.

<sup>40</sup>E. Jones, "Recent Trends in the Representation of Women and Minorities in School Administration and Problems in Documentation," American Association of School Administrators, 1982, 8-9.

<sup>41</sup>American Association of School Administrators, Climbing the Career Ladder: A Research Study of Women in School Administration (Arlington, VA: AASB, 1982, 30-43.

their home/family and their career, and will therefore seek positions that can accommodate both.<sup>42</sup>

In a comprehensive nationwide study of women superintendents conducted by Willower, 84 percent of the fifty interviewed women felt that "full time superintending" was the area of their work most affecting other areas of their lives. As one woman expressed, "The job takes all you are willing to give and then cries for more." Ten of the fifty women felt that the demands of the superintendency had negatively impacted their family life. Eight saw the lack of friends and social life to be consequences of their work. One describes her life as "cacoony."<sup>43</sup>

Women find themselves often battling the "superwoman" role. Trying to fulfill all of the demands of the profession and within their personal lives can lead to "role-overload." This overload occurs as women are conditioned into performing the very best they can at any job, and become increasingly frustrated as they realize that they cannot possibly be the best at every role they manage.<sup>44</sup> This role demand spills over into their personal lives as well with feelings of guilt and anxiety concerning the amount of time they are depriving their husbands and families. This inner feeling was reported as long ago as 1982:

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<sup>42</sup>L. J. Reisser and L. A. Zurfluh, "Female Administrators: Moving Up or Moving Out?" Journal of NAWDAC, Summer 1987, 22-29.

<sup>43</sup>D. J. Willower, "Mystifications and Mysteries in Thought and Research in Educational Administration," paper presented at a UCEA Conference on Thought and Research in Educational Administration, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, 1983, 3-22.

<sup>44</sup>B. Minick, "A Study of Dysfunctional Stereotypes Regarding Women and Promotion: Implications for Educational Remedy" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1984), 50-53.

Role conflict poses particular difficulties for female leaders. In the language of role theory, a woman who occupies a position of leadership is enacting both a sex role, woman, and an organizational role, leader. The former role is differentiated from the other by an act of birth, and the latter is differentiated by the set of behaviors which are expected of the person occupying such a position.<sup>45</sup>

If this incongruence of expectations continues, so does the role conflict eventually resulting in negative self-attitudes. As role models increase of women who have redefined these expectations, women will experience less role conflict. The woman who says, "I can't do it all" and sets meaningful priorities within herself does not continue to try to be "superwoman."<sup>46</sup>

Family constraints can also include that of parental care and fitting the societal expected role of "daughter." One woman superintendent relayed a piece of a conversation, "Mom, I finally got my Ph.D." Her mother remarked, "That's nice. Now when are you getting married?"<sup>47</sup> While there is little research relating to the caretaking of parents by women in school leadership, one can assume that the demands would be similar to that of caring for one's children. Research on the "sandwich" generation is sure to be forthcoming as those in their own middle years are caring for family on both sides of the generations.

Career advancement years often do coincide with childbearing years which places women in the dilemma of balancing both, or abandoning

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<sup>45</sup>T. Heller, Women and Men as Leaders (New York: J. F. Bergin Publishers, Inc., 1982), 7.

<sup>46</sup>Schmuck, "Deterrents to Women's Careers," 1-16.

<sup>47</sup>R. H. Williams and D. Willower, Female School Superintendents' Perceptions of Their Work (Montreal, Canada: Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, 11-13 April 1983), 12.



one role or the other. The parent role for the mother requires substantially more time and effort than the father role.<sup>48</sup> "Women are still the people who have to organize schedules at home and the children, while responding to the demands of the professional positions" said Nancy S. Grasmick, superintendent of schools for the state of Maryland.<sup>49</sup> In a speech delivered in 1991 to the City Club of Cleveland, Wellesley College President, Nannerl O. Keohane stated:

We are all aware of the difficulties of combining career and family; even with a cooperative and supportive partner, the demands are enormous. And women still take responsibility for almost all the housework and a large proportion of childcare. As we also know, statistics show that a large and growing majority of women of child-bearing age are employed outside the home. Yet jobs are still constructed with the expectation that there will be one partner in the home, and the other in the workforce, even though only a small percentage of Americans actually live that way these days. High-powered jobs, leadership jobs, mean you have to available many nights and weekends. Such jobs make no allowance for the fact that Johnny might get sick or Mary has the starring role in the school play. Our society has woefully inadequate support systems for young children and working parents, and these facts bear most heavily on mothers. In such a setting, it is hardly surprising that few women manage to sustain their ambitions long enough to make it to the top. For significant change to occur in the pattern of women in leadership, there will need to be more flexibility in our expectations for how one performs in high-powered jobs at different stages in one's life, and also changes in the support systems for working parents.<sup>50</sup>

Joan Raymond, when superintendent of schools in River Forest, Illinois, stated that her being unmarried and having no children has given her the flexibility to pursue her career which included moving

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<sup>48</sup>L. Larwood and G. N. Powell, "Isn't It About Time We Were Moving On? Necessary Future Research on Women in Management," Group and Organization Studies 6 (March 1981): 65-72.

<sup>49</sup>Hicks, "Women in Waiting," 19.

<sup>50</sup>Nannerl O. Keohane, "Educating Women for Leadership," speech delivered to the City Club of Cleveland, Cleveland, OH, April 26, 1991.

through four school systems from Houston to Yonkers, New York.<sup>51</sup>

Research by Fennema and Ayer on career satisfaction of women noted that of the group of women who were single and childless, 89 percent were highly satisfied. Is motherhood becoming an endangered species?<sup>52</sup>

Education experts note that many women married or raising children are unwilling to move from one school system to another, or to relocate from one city or state to another. In a study of Illinois female administrators in 1978, it was found that 78 percent of the thirteen hundred administratively certificated women educators surveyed were unwilling to relocate to get a position. Marshall reported that many of the women administrators she interviewed entered administration later in life, after children were raised. Then these same women felt limited to the principals office because of lack of the doctorate degree. As one woman in her mid-forties expressed, she was too "pooped out" to continue education for advancement.<sup>53</sup>

#### Female Personality Stereotypes as Barriers

It is simply a plain fact that the softness, the warmth, and the gentleness that are often used to stereotype us are positive human values. . . . No, I'm not saying that we are inherently those things that the stereotypes impute that we are, but I am saying that because of the

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<sup>51</sup>Hicks, "Women in Waiting," 19.

<sup>52</sup>E. Fennema and M. J. Ayer, Women and Education: Equity or Equality (Berkeley: McCutchan Publishing Corp., 1984), 1-82.

<sup>53</sup>C. Marshall, "The Stigmatized Woman: The Professional Woman in a Male Sex-Typed Career," The Journal of Educational Administration, 1981, 205-231.

long enforced roles that we have had to play, we should know by now that the values are good ones to hold. I am saying that by now we should have developed the capacity to not only hold them, but also to dispense them to those around us. This is the reason that we must free ourselves. This is the reason that we must become revolutionaries in the fashion of Christ, Gandhi, King, and the hundreds of other men and women who held those as the highest of human values. There is another reason. In working toward our own freedom, we can only allow our men to work towards their freedom from the trap of their stereotypes.

--Shirley Chisholm

As public figures, women superintendents cannot display inner feeling or emotions. Because they are subject to close public scrutiny, successful women administrators are expected to be calm.<sup>54</sup> One woman superintendent remarked, "The press finds women unique as superintendents. They watch you a lot." Others stated that this high visibility can be used to an advantage. One female superintendent shared her thoughts on this "fish bowl" position as,

A woman getting good publicity helps. Women who are not competent make a problem for the rest. Protect yourself and those women coming up by being competent.<sup>55</sup>

A common held discriminatory belief is that women tend to talk too much. Women are often advised to listen carefully and keep quiet. Male administrators often test women to determine if they can keep secrets. Men see a person as trustworthy when they do not divulge information, or

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<sup>54</sup>R. M. Kanter, Men and Women of the Corporation (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 1-30.

<sup>55</sup>Williams and Willower, Female School Superintendents, 20.

discuss actions or conversations with others. Women do not interpret discussing information as untrustworthy, in fact they usually expect people to have conversation regarding actions and feelings.<sup>56</sup> Women tend to determine untrustworthiness as those who say they are going to do something and then do not follow through. Men, on the other hand, see this as a time management issue, not one of trust.<sup>57</sup>

Another stereotypic behavior which is often problematic for women in administration is the "joking relationship." Upwardly mobile women administrators are often uncomfortable in participating in these complex interchanges. Established women administrators often willingly participate in these interchanges with ease. These "joking relationships" are reported to be a form of conflict resolution between male and female administrators. Spradley and Mann described this relationship as:

between two persons in which one is by custom permitted and in some instances, required to tease or to make fun of the other, who, in turn, is required to take no offense is a peculiar combination of friendliness and antagonism. The behavior is such that in any other social context it would express and arouse hostility; but is not meant seriously and must not be taken seriously. There is a pretense of hostility and a real friendliness. To put it another way, the relationship is one of permitted disrespect.<sup>58</sup>

Generally the witticisms reinforce the masculine values pervasive in school administration and maintain the role inequality of female administrators. This lack of collegiality was also mentioned in the Williams and Willower research with women superintendents sharing that they often felt isolated, or lonely. One respondent relayed that "After

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<sup>56</sup>Kanter, Men and Women, 1-30.

<sup>57</sup>Shakeshaft, Nowell and Perry, "Gender and Supervision," 14-17.

<sup>58</sup>J. P. Spradley and B. J. Mann, The Cocktail Waitress (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1975), 78.

you become superintendent, you figure out this collegueship thing. The male population is polite, but there is not so much buddy-buddy."<sup>59</sup>

Women administrators as tokens in the vast school system often find themselves getting plenty of attention because of their distinct visibility, yet they often are not noticed for achievement. The few women administrators in a district are often famous. They are held up as examples of an exaggerated administrator type. Their behavior, while often similar to that of their male counterpoint, is criticized as too harsh, too businesslike and not feminine. When a female administrator errs it is widely publicized. There is a disproportionate focus on appearance and other non-ability traits. In Kanter, an example is given of a male principal's remark regarding a newly appointed female associate superintendent, "She's attractive, dresses smartly, wears her hair short and in its natural color, and above all is well proportioned."<sup>60</sup>

Tokens are also often advised to make their superiors look bad by over-achieving. The woman behind the successful man myth is perpetuated through many women being associate superintendents for a male superintendent. They are expected to support the male administrator, not to challenge his position on an issue. This expectation may account in part for the reason that many women superintendents did not advance in a district where they held a supportive position, rather they were hired by an outside district.<sup>61</sup>

Internal barriers of low self-image, lack of confidence, and

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<sup>59</sup>Williams and Willower, Female School Superintendents, 14.

<sup>60</sup>Kanter, Men and Women, 217.

<sup>61</sup>Marshall, "The Stigmatized Woman," 205-31.

lack of motivation or aspiration are often attributed as personality characteristics of women that hold them back. An inability to visualize oneself as an administrator was reported by Schmuck.<sup>62</sup> Data from this study suggested that what was observed as lack of self-confidence might more accurately be seen as a consequence of sex-stereotype societal beliefs that women lack ability. Reynolds and Elliot in a later study found that women were not necessarily lacking in motivation, but their definition of achievement differs in terms of experience and value perspectives.<sup>63</sup> Women who wish to establish careers must change regarding the cultural expectations for women. Somehow, at the same time they must also remain defined as "women." One administrator stated,

I know I can't be like the male administrators. I know I can't be like the female teachers, so I've learned to adjust here, comply there, and remain wary. Sometimes, I think it isn't fair, but most of the time, I just think about doing and keeping my job.<sup>64</sup>

#### Women Administrators and Job Satisfaction

Women in administration may not be using their energy to pioneer, but may instead be struggling to survive within an institutional environment that seems hostile or dehumanizing.

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<sup>62</sup>P. Schmuck, J. Kavelage and M. Smith, "Women Getting Together and Getting Ahead," Women's Educational Equity Act Program (Newton, MA: U.S. Department of Education, 1982), 61-86.

<sup>63</sup>B. Reynolds and B. Elliot, "Differences Between Men and Women in Their Aspirations for Careers in Educational Administration," unpublished manuscript, in Shakeshaft, Women in Educational Administration (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1989), 2-14.

<sup>64</sup>R. Kanter, Beyond Sex Roles (New York: West Publishing Co., 1977), 203.

Unless we gain an understanding of the pressures they face, and provide those aspiring to leadership positions with the tools they need, they may find themselves in a "revolving door," looking for a way out of the influential positions they have worked so hard to achieve.

--Reisser and Zurfluh

Reisser and Zurfluh report that while women administrators may be paving the way for future women, the women in leadership roles may be facing pressures which cause them to seriously question the benefits of continuing in leadership roles.<sup>65</sup>

Reasons for this lack of job satisfaction included having responsibility but no authority, being required to spend too much time on nonessential paperwork, being assigned tasks no one else wants to do, and being viewed as a threat rather than respected for abilities.<sup>66</sup> While these job task attributes may be the case for entry administrative positions such as supervisors or assistant principles, it may be enough to discourage some women from the further pursuit of a superintendency. In Reisser and Zurfluh's study of Washington state female administrators, 78% of the respondents said that they had considered resigning from their current administrative positions. Internal factors affecting this attitude were stress or burn-out (34.8%), feelings of isolation (21.7%), conflicts between personal and professional priorities (19.6%), changing personal priorities or values (17.4%), desire for further

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<sup>65</sup>Reisser and Zurfluh, "Female Administrators," 22-29.

<sup>66</sup>B. Sandler, "You've Come a Long Way-Maybe-Or Why It Still Hurts to Be a Woman in Labor," American Association for Higher Education, 1986, 2-18.

education (8.7%), and a sense of internal transition or developmental turning point (15.2%). Other factors mentioned by respondents included institutional morale and turmoil, desire for a geographical change, family responsibilities, and health.<sup>67</sup>

In the Winter 1992 Illinois Women Administrators Newsline publication, Judith E. Albino summarized that:

Women do not tend to think strategically about career advancement. They do not set goals, take risks, or compete as well as their male counterparts. They are painfully conspicuous in non-supportive environments and do not have mentors to help them change their behaviors or deal with non traditional work environments.<sup>68</sup>

To succeed in a male dominated work environment, she suggests that women

1. Must have a strong sense of self, they must exude confidence.
2. Remove the perception that they are unavailable for long hours due to family responsibilities.
3. Deal less on the feeling level (cry at the office only once every 11 years)
4. Volunteer for the new job, men carry cards "generalists," women can do any job, but tend to self eliminate because they have had no experience. Neither has you male counterpart.<sup>69</sup>

Stoke's research on organizational barriers and their impact on women indicated that 87% of the female administrators believed that they were excluded from informal networks; 87% felt that they worked twice as hard as their male colleagues; 79% believed they had less influence on supervisors' decisions; 74% said it was difficult to receive recognition

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<sup>67</sup>Reisser and Zurfluh, "Female Administrators," 22-29.

<sup>68</sup>J. E. Albino, "Women as Leaders: The Dirty Word They Mustn't Learn (Strategy)," IWA Newsletter 4, no. 4 (1992): 1-2.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 2.



for their accomplishments.<sup>70</sup> Some of the organizational problems for women administrators include "micro-inequities" that undermine self-esteem, morale, opportunities for advancement, productivity, and full participation. Sandler noted these to be:

- Small numbers of women heighten their visibility.
- Social etiquette is often inappropriately interjected into the professional setting.
- Women's abilities are more likely to be questioned, downgraded, or trivialized.
- Difficulties with collegiality result in feelings of isolation.
- Women are more likely to be judged by appearance than achievement.
- Women's communication patterns are interpreted as less powerful.<sup>71</sup>

External factors such as these may also contribute to job dissatisfaction and thoughts of leaving school administration for many women. Women respondents to Reisser and Zurfluh's questionnaires when asked for reasons that contributed to consideration of resigning from an administrative position included dissatisfaction over institutional decisions, resource allocation, personnel matters, policies and practices (46%), limited upward mobility (26.1%), and lack of mentors or organizational support (26.1%). It is suggested by Reisser and Zurfluh that the problems often associated with job dissatisfaction which relate to sex discrimination, discomfort with salary, status or authority, gender equality are not the most important factors for women who consider resigning.<sup>72</sup> More important problems seem to stem from

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<sup>70</sup>J. M. Stokes, Organizational Barriers and Their Impact on Women in Higher Education (Research Report) (Washington, DC: National Association of Women Deans, Administrators and Counselors. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 264-747.)

<sup>71</sup>Sandler, "You've Come a Long Way," 16.

<sup>72</sup>Reisser and Zurfluh, "Female Administrators," 22-29.

interpersonal climate, the processes whereby decisions are made and communicated, the ways that support and opportunities for growth are encouraged, and the mismatch between personal values and organization expectations.<sup>73</sup>

### School Boards and Community Challenges

Most women administrators hold central office staff positions as specialists, supervisors, or as elementary school principals. They generally remain in these positions without further promotion until retirement. Those women who do move to the superintendency follow a similar career path to that of male superintendents: teacher, high school principal, assistant superintendent, and finally superintendent. A women generally spends more time at each one of these levels and must also convince existing leadership of her capability to handle the next step of advancement.<sup>74</sup>

Women in the top position of school districts suggest that they are accorded much more scrutiny by the press and the public. They feel pressure to succeed, to be better than "good." A study by Edson found that some female aspirants believes that inexperienced men were selected for their potential, whereas women were required to have proved their competence already.<sup>75</sup>

Many school board members see female leaders as less effective

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<sup>73</sup>C. Gilligan, In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 1-18.

<sup>74</sup>McGrath, "Here Come the Women," 62-65.

<sup>75</sup>S. K. Edson, Pushing the Limits: The Female Administrative Aspirant (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 21-25.

than their male counterparts. Ninety-one percent of the respondents from a 1990 American School Board Association survey were primarily male, however, suggesting that they may not have been comfortable with the collegial leadership style of most women. This school board attitude may change since there appears to be a trend of increased female school board membership. In 1990, the American School Board Association's annual report indicates that 40 percent of school board membership is comprised of women.<sup>76</sup> As more and more women succeed, the more school boards will recognize the success of women and look to the pool of talented female administrators vying for top school district positions.<sup>77</sup>

In the Williams and Willower study, 96 of the women felt that while their relationship with the community was positive, it was also stressful. Pressure groups, unpredictability and resistance to change, and the community's high expectations preyed upon their time and attention. One woman superintendent remarked,

If you want the support of the community . . . you have to be there when they expect you to be. Sometimes you have a headache, or your feet hurt, but you go anyway.<sup>78</sup>

Superintendents, regardless of gender need to participate in and understand their school community power bases.

#### Thoughts from the Ladies at the Top

Barbara K. Dopp investigated women superintendents in Illinois

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<sup>76</sup>American School Board Association, Annual Report, 1990, 30.

<sup>77</sup>Hicks, "Women in Waiting," 19.

<sup>78</sup>Williams and Willower, Female School Superintendents, 10.

in 1984-1985 regarding their career paths and personal and professional development. Her personal interviews of twenty female superintendents indicated that most of these women entered school administration as elementary principals. Most held central office positions before being appointed superintendent.<sup>79</sup> Several of these women mentioned that they gained great confidence during their first administrative position. They saw themselves as much more capable than even they themselves first imagined. They also perceived themselves as strong in interpersonal skills and more collegial in leadership style. While most felt that mentors or educational associates were helpful, they were not essential. More than half of these women superintendents entered administration due to external influences. The majority did not plan early in their career to become a superintendent. It was rather that at each career ladder level, they were encouraged to pursue and personally decided to achieve the next administrative career rung. Across all of the research reviewed, women superintendents did not plan to be superintendents, but rather their career evolved. Many arrivals at the superintendency could be characterized as serendipitous.<sup>80</sup> Most of these women who have arrived recommend that female administrative aspirants identify their career goals early and map out a game plan to get there. In a study by Pavan, the conclusion was that women needed to persevere. Women submitted more applications, had more interviews, and searched longer than their male competitors. The terminal degree of a doctorate

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<sup>79</sup>B. Dopp and C. A. Sloan, "Career Development and Succession of Women to the Superintendency," Clearing-House, November 1986, 120-26.

<sup>80</sup>Williams and Willower, Female School Superintendents, 1-24.

appeared to have afforded more interviews.<sup>81</sup>

The majority of the superintendents in Dopps study felt that the support they had from their spouse and/or family members greatly contributed to their success.<sup>82</sup> In a study of women superintendents, Maienza reported that most of the women were the oldest child in a family where the mother worked. The women in the study shared that they had family responsibility early in their lives. The behavior of coping with family and home responsibilities while maintaining the primary responsibility of school attendance may have contributed to these women having success later in their lives in balancing career, marriage, and family.<sup>83</sup> Frasher, Frasher, and Hardwick conducted a study of 82 women superintendents and concurred that the majority of these women were married (65) and found their spouses to be supportive of their career. Fewer than one-third of those who were married, widowed, or divorced indicated that their marriage or children had disrupted or inhibited their careers. While several of the women superintendents in this study indicated that they had taken substantial breaks from their career to spend time rearing children, only 14 respondents cited childbearing and homemaking responsibilities as impeding their career. Women superintendents appeared to be able to combine the traditional

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<sup>81</sup>B. N. Pavan, "Certified But Not Hired: Women Administrators in Pennsylvania," Paper presented at Annual Research on Women in Education Conference, Boston, MA, Spring, 1985, 1-15.

<sup>82</sup>B. Dopp, "Profile of Women Superintendents in the State of Illinois" (Ph.D. dissertation, Northern Illinois University, 1985), 173-78.

<sup>83</sup>J. G. Maienza, "The Superintendency: Characteristics of Access for Men and Women," Educational Administration Quarterly, Fall 1986, 59-79.

feminine roles of childrearing and homemaking with their job responsibilities throughout their careers.<sup>84</sup>

Being female was not seen as a hindrance by half of the women superintendents in the Frasher, Frasher and Hardwick study. Gender may have been a factor before their appointment at the first administrative position, but subsequently had no bearing. Most felt that the demonstration of their competence was of major importance. They indicated that they had strong beliefs in the necessary qualities for success in the chief school official role: energy, job enjoyment, interpersonal skills, communication skills, and a genuine interest in people. Sex bias was not perceived as a major impediment to the progress of their careers. In fact, most of the women credited a degree of their success to their feminine characteristics of being able to work well with all kinds of people, to compromise, and to be both sympathetic and empathic.<sup>85</sup> In the Hick's interview study women administrators stated that their management style is well suited to today's restructured site based managed school systems. They are often more collaborative and collegial, managing in a circular structure rather than the traditional pyramid structure.<sup>86</sup>

Advice from women superintendents in Dopps study focused on personal and professional strategies for success. Having competence and successful achievement in one's present position was critical for

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<sup>84</sup>R. Frasher, J. Frasher and K. Hardwick, "The Female Superintendent," Journal of the NAWDAC, Spring 1982, 50-59.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 36-41.

<sup>86</sup>Hicks, "Women in Waiting," 19.

success at each next level. To overcome the obstacle of experience they recommended a broad base of experiences. To combat the barrier of the perception of female weakness in the financial arena, they recommend the development of strong finance management backgrounds. In summary, women superintendents recommend to aspiring administrative candidates the following:

1. Gain broad backgrounds in education, including principalships and central office positions.
2. Engage in advanced educational degree programs, especially those involving school finance and practical administrative experiences.
3. Engage in early career planning.
4. Develop personal and professional support systems to aid them in their successful careers.
5. Perceive themselves as social change agents on behalf of women and society.
6. Possess the ability to communicate and work well with people (the number one asset of successful superintendents).
7. Have positive interpersonal skills, excellent conflict resolution skills, and a high energy level.
8. Be willing to be geographically mobile.<sup>87</sup>

Those women who possess the motivation and perseverance equal to others who seek executive administrative positions will succeed.<sup>88</sup>

There is no doubt that the 1990s will continue to be the breakthrough decade for women in leadership.<sup>89</sup> The glass ceiling is ceasing to exist as women now make up over 40 percent of the managers, half of all accountants, one-third of computer scientists, and one-third of the

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<sup>87</sup>Dopp and Sloan, "Career Development," 125-26.

<sup>88</sup>M. McCarthy and A. Zent, "Affirmative Action for School Administrators: Has It Worked, Can It Survive?" Phi Delta Kappan, March 1982, 61-63.

<sup>89</sup>J. Naisbitt and P. Aburdene, Megatrends 2000: Ten New Directions for the 1990s (New York: William Morrow & Co., Inc., 1990), 240.

managers in advertising, marketing, and public relations.<sup>90</sup> It is therefore predictable that more women will be appointed as superintendents in the years ahead. Women will provide vital, new leadership for the continued reform of the educational system as we know it.<sup>91</sup>

#### Models of Stress and Coping Responses

A thousand reasons for worry,  
A thousand reasons for anxiety  
Oppress day after day the fool,  
But not the wise (wo)man.

--Hitopadesa of Narayana

#### Administrative Stress for Women

Stress continues to be a major twentieth-century ailment. Heart attacks and strokes now kill more people than all other diseases combined. Cancer is, perhaps, the most dramatic of an array of additional diseases that are thought to be stress linked. Others include alcoholism, drug abuse, colds, flu, and a host of mental disorders.<sup>92</sup> Stress, as defined by James C. Quick is "Any demand, either of a physical or psychological nature, encountered in the course of living is known as a stressor."<sup>93</sup> The style of living for the many women who have moved into top level administrative and managerial positions is in-

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<sup>90</sup>M. Webb, "Pushing Through to the Top," Working Woman, June 1992, 57-60.

<sup>91</sup>McGrath, "Here Come the Women," 62-65.

<sup>92</sup>N. A. Scott and S. Spooner, "Women Administrators: Stressors and Strategies," Journal of the National Association for Women Deans, Administrators, and Counselors 54 (1991): 31-36.

<sup>93</sup>J. C. Quick and J. D. Quick, Organizational Stress and Preventative Management (New York: McGraw-Hill Inc., 1984), 5.



creased demands in both their professional and personal lives. Quick and Quick present a model of four dimensions of the "executive." The demands within these four areas create internal and external stress. The external environment is inclusive of parents, PTAs and PTOs and the teachers union; the personal demands of family, friends and community; the interpersonal relationships of superiors, peers, and subordinates, and the informational role as spokesperson and evaluator all prey on the executive's time and energy.<sup>94</sup>

Brown found that gender was an important personal variable in predicting stress levels.<sup>95</sup> Today's women are even developing their own gender specific stress-related diseases, such as female stress syndrome identified by Watkin-Lanoil.<sup>96</sup> The incidence of ulcers and cardiac disease has increased dramatically for the contemporary woman. Coronary heart disease, once rarely seen among premenopausal women, is now quite common. Lung cancer is on the rise among women, and recent statistics indicate that while males with peptic ulcers outnumbered females 20 to 1 three decades ago, there are now 5 to 10 women with ulcers for every 20 men. Warshaw states from his research of women at work:

It is suggested that these trends reflect women's greater use of cigarettes, alcohol, and caffeine rather than increases in stress, but, as is well known, excessive use of these substances is also

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<sup>94</sup>Ibid., 3-12.

<sup>95</sup>R. D. Brown, S. Bond, J. Gernot, L. Krager, B. Krantz, M. Lukin and D. Prentice, "Studying Stress Among Student Service Professionals: An Interactional Approach," NASPA Journal 23 (1986): 2-10.

<sup>96</sup>G. Watkin-Lanoil, The Female Stress Syndrome (New York: Berkley Books, 1984), 121-49.

symptomatic of stress. This is growing evidence that the stress of the new lifestyles of liberated women is having an impact.<sup>97</sup>

The superintendency is stressful regardless of gender. In a study entitled, Stressed for Success: A Study of Stress and the Superintendency Eastman and Mirochnik observed that superintendents in Maine are rarely off the job. The scope and variety of tasks are myriad. Attending community events, talking to the media, meeting with parents, supervising buildings, working with teacher unions and school boards can be interrupted by small tasks such as answering the phone, filling in for principals (and in some small districts, teachers), or driving school buses. In short "superintendents must wear every hat and juggle every ball . . . and well."<sup>98</sup>

Of persons experiencing stress, those who believe they have control tend to remain healthy. Those individuals who are able to transform situations and respond with flexibility are generally effective in not being threatened by stressful situations. One only needs to believe that they are able to influence the course of events. These people are able to adjust the stressful situation to one of creative opportunity. Persons successful at transforming stressful events into part of their life plan are in better control of their responses emotionally and in their health.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup>L. J. Warshaw, Managing Stress (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1982), 141-42.

<sup>98</sup>M. Eastman and D. A. Mirochnik, Stressed for Success: A Study of Stress and the Superintendency (Orono, ME: Orono College of Education, 1991), 8.

<sup>99</sup>E. M. Ruocco, "Time Management, Personality Hardiness and Personal Characteristics in Women School Administrators in Connecticut" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Connecticut, 1990), 34-49.

Of those persons experiencing a considerable amount of stress, those with a strong sense of commitment to the various aspects of their life are more able to remain healthy. This sense of commitment to the superintendency or to ones family provides the necessary support needed to cope with stressful situations. Those without commitment are unable to justify the effort to cope and the need to tolerate the stressors.<sup>100</sup> This lack of commitment results in job dissatisfaction, illness, or withdrawal from tasks causing individuals to perform below their potential.

Marshall describes women facing career-role strain as they consider the administrative career. Administrative training and pursuit requires an extra expenditure of time, thought, and energy, along with commitment. Becoming an administrator requires a woman to redefine her identity to make the strain tolerable and manageable. Making the transition from societal expectations of femininity to that of competent administrator is a progression. Women in transition experience anxiety, anger, and inner warring as they break away from cultural roles. Sufficient support and incentives must be strong enough for the woman to abandon her traditional roles and assume the new balanced role of feminine identity and professionalism. "They learn to live being marginal women."<sup>101</sup> As marginal women they are moving toward a self-defined congruence in their dual roles rather than deciding between culturally defined separate roles.

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<sup>100</sup>S. Howard, National Council of Administrative Women in Education (Arlington, VA: Spring, 1985), 1-8.

<sup>101</sup>C. Marshall, "Organizational Policy and Women's Socialization in Administration," Urban Education, 1981, 209-10.

Guelsow, Bird and Kobal present a path model of stress that can be applied to the woman superintendent. Role strain is defined as the individual's level of perceived conflict between the number of hours worked, flexibility of working hours, number of children, and the age of the youngest child. Meeting these multiple role demands, alleviating stress, occurs through coping responses in the form of role reduction, cognitive restructuring, and marital relationship equity. The model presents affective stress in the manifestations of marital, professional, and parental stress as indicators of the level of conscious emotional stress the individual experiences as a result of the interactions between life strains and coping within a particular role. Distress is the outcome measure, and can be observed in such symptoms as anxiety, depression or anger. Women in the study where this stress model was employed were highly committed to their professions and are combining full-time employment with marital and parental roles without consequent high levels of stress. These women reported sharing more household and child-rearing tasks with their spouses. Having a flexible work schedule also significantly lowered stress levels.<sup>102</sup>

In a paper presented at the Annual Conference on Women and Work in May 1987, Funk posited that the major stressors for female managers in business and education are lack of time, deadlines, personnel problems, and family responsibilities. Lack of time for social life, leisure, and just for themselves was the greatest sacrifice for achieving career success. Comments from Funk's respondents included that they

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<sup>102</sup>M. G. Guelsow, G. W. Bird and E. H. Koball, "An Exploratory Path Analysis of the Stress Process for Dual-Career Men and Women," Journal of Marriage and the Family, February 1991, 151-64.

had given up "time for personal enjoyment--time for me" and "worked long hours, not having enough left to have time for myself." "I've spent many long and extra hours to get where I am, and I sometimes wonder if sacrificing time with my husband and my friends is really worth it. I've also put off having a family," and "When I am with my family at home, I am too tired to enjoy them or the occasion."<sup>103</sup>

Coping Responses of Women  
Administrators

Coping strategies can include the clarification of goals, a high self-concept backed by a support system, adequate qualifications and skills, and the ability to relieve pressures through humor are supported by several researchers; Scott, Ten Elshof and Tomlinson, and Slimmer.<sup>104</sup> Warshaw also posited that women were more reactive to stress than men, but relaxed more easily and recovered from it more quickly. While some studies suggest that women may be more susceptible to emotional difficulties, dwell more on their problems, are more introspective, and are more likely to be negative in their self-image. Warshaw's research questioned how much of these data are not merely a stereotypical reflection of male and female self-perceptions of their

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<sup>103</sup>C. Funk, The Female Executive in School Administration: Profiles, Pluses, and Problems (Arlington, TX: Annual Conference on Women and Work, May 1987), 4.

<sup>104</sup>K. Scott, "Language and Gender: Stereotypes Revisited," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, CA, Spring, 1979, 1-12; A. Ten-Elshof and E. Tomlinson, "Alleviating Stress for Women Administrators, Journal of the NAWDAC, Winter 1981, 37-41; V. M. Slimmer, "Being in the Right Place at the Right Time: Strategies for Employment," Indianapolis, IN: Annual Conference of the National Association for Women Deans, Administrators, and Counselors, March 31-April 3, 1982, 7-16.

strengths and weaknesses as prevailing "cliches." Beliefs such as "men are happier when doing and women when feeling," and women are "more proficient in social skills rather than administrative" are possible self-talk, self-fulfilling prophecies. While women may seek out mental therapy more often than men, there is no evidence that there is greater emotional illness among working women than among their male co-workers.<sup>105</sup> Although stress exists for all executives, professional women with myriad roles experience specific challenges and cope in a variety of ways.

Coping and overcoming a common barrier labeled "avoidance syndrome," which fosters stress and threatens the career of the woman combining the roles of wife, mother, and professional, develops confidence. Women with family responsibilities often do not aspire to high professional expectations. While changing slightly in today's family structure, women still bear the major responsibility of the parental role. Women aspiring to top-level positions must strive to overcome career paranoia of setting their goals too high, and instead convince themselves that they can achieve. This coping skill of recognizing and having confidence in one's own administrative ability brings about a positive self-concept and attitude needed to seek the superintendency.<sup>106</sup>

Career planning is an important skill that most of the studies reveal women have delayed whether consciously or not. Recommended as a coping skill, setting career goals early on with parental or mentor

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<sup>105</sup>Warshaw, Managing Stress, 2-49.

<sup>106</sup>Slimmer, Being in the Right Place at the Right Time, 7-16.

support may alleviate later stress. Many women superintendents reflect being forced to career plan. Either they found themselves widowed, or divorced and had to set goals just to pay their bills. One woman stated,

I only knew that I had to teach to get my husband through school, then he left me with two children, and it was a goal just to feed and clothe us all. I was 38 when I began working on serious career planning for administration.<sup>107</sup>

According to Shakeshaft, Nowell, and Perry, a method of coping with possible discriminatory overtones is to imagine a member of the opposite sex in the situation. For example, if a woman is working with a man and wonders if she has lowered her expectation, she can try to apply the situation to a woman and consider if the treatment would be the same.<sup>108</sup>

Sexism can take many forms. Consider the "Queen Bee" role of some women who demean other women by pretending that sexism does not exist, and interact primarily with successful men. Other women, the abrasive rebels lose the potential to influence because they continually react defensively to sexist language and behavior. Women must not tolerate sexism not only because it destroys their own credibility but because of the larger responsibility of allowing it to continue for future women and girls. However, one must become an influential advocate while preserving her status as a competent colleague.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup>Funk, The Female Executive in School Administration, 13-14.

<sup>108</sup>Shakeshaft, Nowell, and Perry, "Gender and Supervision," 14-17.

<sup>109</sup>M. A. Smith, J. Kalvelage and P. A. Schmuck, Women Getting Together and Getting Ahead (Eugene: University of Oregon Center for Educational Policy and Management, 1983), 61-86.

In her book, The Female Advantage: Women's Ways of Leadership, Helgesen reported that successful women leaders demonstrate high levels of skill in communication, problem solving, organizational savvy, team building, instruction and curriculum Helgesen concluded:

Self confidence is a characteristic of women leaders, and, in spite of all the evidence documenting sex discrimination, they don't get hung up on gender. These women don't "whine" but command equality through their actions. It seems the best way to stop being a victim is to stop acting like one.<sup>110</sup>

In Funk's study, she found that most women superintendents suggest that to cope they must "Play the game but be sure you know all the roles." "Never use being female as an excuse to get out of doing something." "Learn everything about everything. You've got to know it all."<sup>111</sup> Creating one's own opportunities and moving ahead can be accomplished through

1. Getting the attention of superiors. Become visible in the district, demonstrate leadership, give talks, and be sure your superiors know you are participating in these activities.
2. Making your aspirations known. Enlist a person powerful in this network to become your mentor and let him/her know what kinds of jobs you eventually want.
3. Not getting stuck in a dead-end job. Remember that you have more opportunities for advancement through secondary education and line positions in the central office, than through elementary principalships and curriculum specialties.
4. Moving often. You will be seen as more ambitious if you change roles and if you change locations.<sup>112</sup>

Exercise, hired help for household duties, and conversation about concerns reduces stress for women managers in business or in school administration. Types of exercise most often mentioned by the

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<sup>110</sup>S. Helgesen, The Female Advantage: Women's Ways of Leadership (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 60.

<sup>111</sup>Funk, The Female Executive, 15.

<sup>112</sup>Smith, Kalvelage and Schmuck, Women Getting Together, 69.



respondents in Funk's study were running, biking, sailing, swimming, doing aerobics, playing golf, and square dancing. Other strategies included art or craft work, reading, cooking, and yardwork. Another recent study by Scott and Spooner, concurs that women managers employ physical and psychological coping strategies. A major physical strategy is exercise, particularly walking or jogging.

Setting goals and priorities, delegation, and scheduling commitments alleviate some stress. Maintaining support groups, religious activity, relaxation or fantasy time (television/movies), healthy sleep patterns, and hobby time also reduce stress. Scott and Spooner state that according to their male and female respondents, women use more coping mechanisms than men, but that women also report higher incidence of stress to begin with.<sup>113</sup>

Making time for a social life, and just to have fun is difficult for women in administration. Women early in their career often remarked that their social life was nonexistent, yet other more established administrators urge that, "I leave work at work when I go home, and I leave family at home when I go to work." "One must make time for a social life--there is life after work!"<sup>114</sup>

Women need practice at managing their time to secure personal and family time, not to sacrifice it to the demands of the job. Time management techniques often include lists or blocking out time for preferred items. Keeping calendars, schedules, and developing daily or weekly routines lower stress level frequency both for the career and the

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<sup>113</sup>Scott and Spooner, "Women Administrators," 34.

<sup>114</sup>Funk, The Female Executive, 5.

family. The planning book is often "the bible" for managerial women.<sup>115</sup> At the Center for Creative Leadership, a group of women managers were asked to develop an agenda to balance work, family, friends, and health. This type of visualization of time management helps women reexamine their balancing of roles. Writing down twenty enjoyable activities and scheduling in five of these over a few months time may assure that resentment or guilt over not taking the time to do them will not occur. A participant in this workshop stated, "If you spend all of your time in business, you get tunnel vision, and in the end you won't be effective anyway."<sup>116</sup> A summary of time management coping techniques for women from the Center for Educational Policy and Management at the University of Oregon are:

1. Plan deliberately. Take ten minutes each morning and evening to set your goals, anticipate needs and interruptions, and decide what you want to accomplish.
2. Make a list. Buy a small notebook, write down a "to do" list for today, and jot down other items on a list for the future.
3. Set priorities. Note urgent or high-value items A, medium-value B, and unimportant or low-value items C. Then number the A's, B's, C's in order of importance.
4. Concentrate on the essential. Dig into the most important item and stick to it until it's done. Then tackle the second in the same way, and so on.
5. Give yourself uninterrupted time. Block out certain hours such as 9:30-11:00 A.M. every day, when you are "in conference" and have your secretary field all but dire emergencies during that time. Choose you own most productive time, such as morning for early risers.
6. Break down a large, complex project. Plan to work on it each day in small tasks or small time periods. For example, if you must prepare a budget, you might start by getting a copy of last year's budget, writing a memo to principals for their input, working on the task for ten minutes every day.

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<sup>115</sup>Ibid., 2-21.

<sup>116</sup>M. Webb, "Pushing Through to the Top," Working Woman, June 1992, 57.

7. Use small pieces of time. Use travel time, waiting time, eating time or that ten minutes before the next appointment.
8. Set up availability hours. Choose appropriate times, such as 8:00 to 9:30 A.M. and 2:00 to 3:30 P.M. every day, when you're available to anyone and can give them your undivided attention.
9. Streamline routine work and delegate it. Don't be a secretary. Handle each piece of paper only once; jot down the gist of a reply when you read a letter, create form letters for frequent requests, learn to dictate, and delegate routine queries and calls to your secretary.
10. Don't try to do everything. Make a list of ten items, doing two of them will yield 80 percent of the value. Finish those two items, do them, and let the rest go.<sup>117</sup>

In combating loneliness and feelings of isolation, women are beginning to form formal or informal support groups. Organizations such as the American Association of University Women, and Illinois Women Administrators can form a foundation for networking and peer support. Coping, by talking to other female managers, helps to solve problems that are not necessarily unique.

It used to be when I walked into a room full of men and only one woman, I would tend to ignore her. Now when I walk into a similar situation, the woman and I at least have eye contact. There's too damn few of us women; we found out we need to support one another, commented a woman in the Smith, Kalvelage and Schmuck report.<sup>118</sup> Women need to support each other. They need to talk and share common problems, and they need to provide assistance for each other.

The "superwoman syndrome" while still alive for many women can be combatted by family commitment and redefinition of expectations. One woman stated that while she "tries to keep her cape in good repair," she discusses demands with her family and finds much support from both her

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<sup>117</sup>Smith, Kalvelage and Schmuck, Women Getting Together, 66.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid., 84.

husband and children.<sup>119</sup> In a study by Levi of female workers it was stated:

One additional obstacle that easily creates emotional stress in females is the fact that many females, in addition to working full time, also have to carry the burden of the full responsibility for housework and/or rearing of the children. In extreme cases this means that women may have to work more or less without interruption for, say, sixteen hours a day, seven days a week.<sup>120</sup>

Successful women are still expected to be successful at everything, but more are willing to ask for help or hire help. Women who still try to do everything and be everything to everyone, succumbing to the superwoman syndrome, need help in recognizing which facets of their personal and professional lives take precedence.<sup>121</sup> In a dialogue between two women superintendents one woman stated:

For \$125.00 a month you can hire a cleaning service and so you have taken responsibility cleaning. You can buy a freezer and buy enough food for a month or two, for other people to cook while you are in the Board Room, and you can buy underwear and socks in bulk so that laundry can wait until the weekends and you don't have to shop for months at a time.<sup>122</sup>

Emotional support from spouses and family was often in just listening, being a sounding board, and in giving advice. Encouragement and reassurance often relieve the stress for women superintendents. Often this support comes after the first few years in management. In the beginning, family members can resent the time their wife or mother

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<sup>119</sup>Funk, The Female Executive, 3.

<sup>120</sup>L. Levi, Preventing Work Stress (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1981), 57.

<sup>121</sup>Funk, The Female Executive, 2-21.

<sup>122</sup>M. Rogers and J. Davis, Women of Substance (New Orleans: Annual Meeting of the American Association of School Administrators, March 1991), 17.

is spending on her career. One woman in Funk's research remarked, "My family, while they are very proud of me, very often increase my level of stress by not understanding how little extra time I have." However, most remark that they receive support. Another respondent in Funk's study said that her husband protects her from the outside world by screening her calls at home. Another said her daughter often says, "go for it, Mom!" Their families belief in them appears to be a tremendous support for these women.

Giammatteo and Giammatteo in their study of executive well being for administrators provide a list "external" stress reducers as:

- Learn to plan a free weekend every other weekend.
- Avoid situations where you have to wait by shopping during off hours; going to a matinee; eating before or after the supper crowd.
- Cut back on the number of things you try to do when you're out on the town.
- If you have a family, do a small but in-depth one-to-one activity with each family member during the source of each month.
- Develop a vacation attitude after work (treat your home as your vacation home).
- Live by the calendar, not the stopwatch.
- Plan easy-going, nonstructured vacations, three to four days in duration.
- Get involved with a friend, spouse, or child in an activity which will teach you new concepts, new skills, or new processes (this is a person-to-person commitment as well as a chance to expand your skills).
- Devise a three-times-per-week, 20 minute physical activity schedule-like jumping rope or riding a stationary bike.<sup>123</sup>

Stress reduction "on the job" can also be created. Giammatteo and Giammatteo further suggest:

- Ask your secretary not to interrupt you in at least one conversation or meeting each day (your most important one).
- Read at least one article each day while all calls are held.

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<sup>123</sup>M. C. Giammatteo and D. M. Giammatteo, Executive Well Being: Stress and Administrators (Reston, VA: National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1980), 40-41.

- Plan down-time or idle-time every day.
- Grab a folder and walk around the building each dy as if you were going to the other end of the building (on a nice day, do this outside).
- Have a private retreat where you are off limits to everyone for from two to five minutes every hour or so (the restroom may be as good a place as any).
- Avoid irritating and overly competitive people prior to lunch or near the end of the school day.
- Concentrate on one task at a time so accomplishment is enjoyed.
- At least three days a week have lunch away from the job with non-school people, or with conversation not school related.
- Practice mini-mind trips where you can visualize a scene that is especially comforting to you (about 60 to 120 seconds each day).
- Design your daily calendar so you have a chance to perform at least one activity each day at which you are good.
- Interact at least once each day with someone in your school who makes you laugh.
- Think about involvement in outside activities which provide personal satisfaction.<sup>124</sup>

Women superintendents, and those individuals in general, who arrive at a sense of challenge rather than stress from difficult situations and utilize a variety of coping skills necessary to maintain their perspective, are often energetic adventurers on the road of life. They believe that change is the essence of life and normal in the course of events whether on the job or within the family. In fact, many successful female superintendents thrive on change and growth. They welcome new and interesting experiences. This sense of personal hardiness is often a neglected trait according to a study by Howard. However, the resilient executive whether in business or a chief school administrator is resistant to the often excessive demands of work. Hardy individuals are happy, healthy, and work hard while being high achievers.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>124</sup>Ibid., 40.

<sup>125</sup>Howard, "Why Aren't Women Administering Our Schools?" 1-50.

### Summary

A summary of the literature focusing on the Historical Perspective of Women in Education and Educational Administration, the Challenges Facing Women in Administration and as Superintendents, and Models of Stress and Coping Responses present several insights:

1. The role of women in school leadership parallels the role of women in society in general. As more women redefine their societally expected role of wife and mother to also include career success, more women will seek and succeed in the role of chief school official.<sup>126</sup>

2. The superintendency is challenging regardless of gender.<sup>127</sup> Women superintendents have used a variety of coping strategies to balance the demands of home/family with professional demands.<sup>128</sup> Some women have made the "hard choice" between career and family.

3. As leaders, women have been successful even in such stereotypic "weak" areas as finance and building and grounds. While women are generally more experienced in teaching, older, and more educated than their male counterparts, they have also realized their less experienced areas and sought experiences to prepare them for career advancement.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>126</sup>Dopp and Sloan, "Career Development," 7-52.

<sup>127</sup>M. Eastman and D. A. Mirochnik, Stressed for Success: A Study of Stress and the Superintendency (Orono, ME: Orono College of Education), 7-52.

<sup>128</sup>Marshall, "Organizational Policy," 1-26.

<sup>129</sup>R. Kanter, Beyond Sex Roles (New York: West Publishing Co., 1977) 1-18.

4. Women tend to bring certain leadership qualities to their positions. They are generally more people oriented, collegial, cooperative and involved more directly in classrooms and with children.<sup>130</sup>

5. There are certain internal and external barriers for women to overcome to advance in school administration. There is evidence of sexist, discriminatory behavior are evident, however, there is also encouraging, supportive and mentorship behaviors by male co-workers.<sup>131</sup>

6. There are unique stressors for female managers such as lack of personal time and constraints to job commitment due to family responsibilities.<sup>132</sup>

7. Suggestions for women to achieve superintendency positions include early career planning, advanced degree scholarship, and internal perseverance.<sup>133</sup>

8. The future looks bright for women in school leadership. We need the best of both of the sexes to lead our schools. As the stereotypes for women break down, so too will the stereotypes for males. We will then have a gender-harmonious society with the strengths of positive leaders both male and female being utilized.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>130</sup>Shakeshaft, Women in Educational Administration, 2-53.

<sup>131</sup>Ortiz, Career Patterns in Education, 1-32.

<sup>132</sup>Funk, The Female Executive, 2-21.

<sup>133</sup>McGrath, "Here Come the Women," 62-65.

<sup>134</sup>Naisbitt and Aburdene, Megatrends 2000, 216-40.



## CHAPTER III

### PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

Now a new wave of women is making its way into top management, not by adopting the style and habits that have proved successful for men, but by drawing on the skills and attitudes they developed from their shared experience as women.

--Judy B. Rosener

Less than 1/2 of 1% of the fortune 1,000 officers are women. Approximately 1/2 are childless and 1/3 are unmarried.

Fortune Magazine

#### Presentation and Analysis of Questionnaire Research Findings

Nine of the ten women superintendents contacted in the selected school districts of Illinois agreed to participate in the study. The superintendent who declined participation was serving as an interim superintendent. The questionnaire sent to the participants prior to the personal interview provided attribute data of the nine participating women superintendents, as well as introductory remarks regarding challenges and coping strategies in preparation for the interview. A sample questionnaire is in the Appendix.

Of the nine respondents, one woman is superintending a high school district, consisting of one building site. Three of the subject

group are superintendents of elementary (K-8) one school districts, and the remaining five women superintendents are chief school executives of elementary districts (K-8) made up of three or more school buildings. One member of this last group superintends a large urban district consisting of twenty-two schools, four of which are junior high schools (Figure 1).

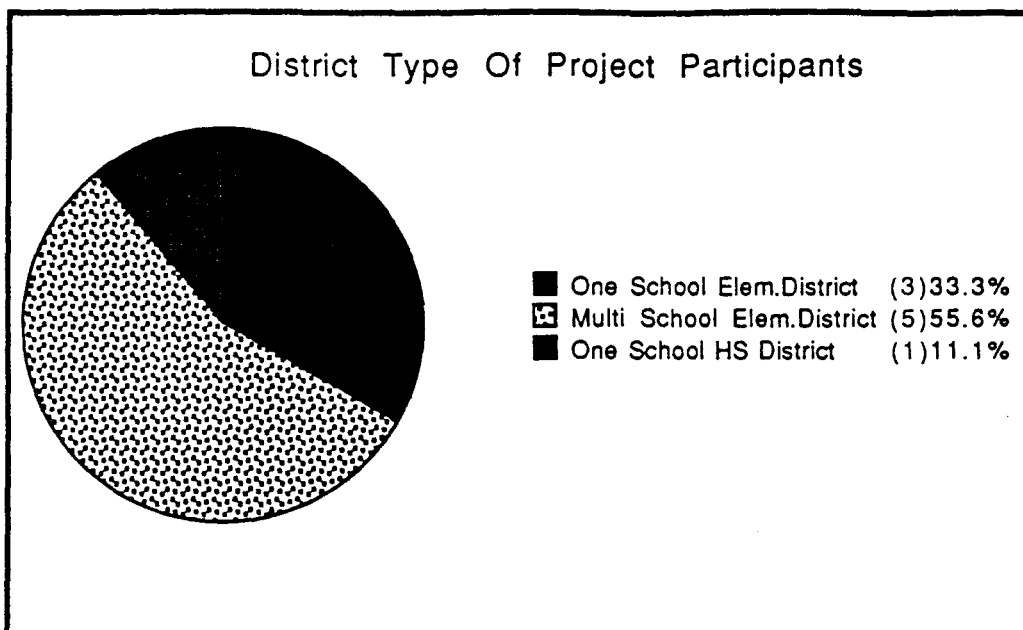


Figure 1

Eight of the nine women are in their first superintendency, one being in her second superintendency. Seven members of the sample had been principals previously with the exception of two who came up through the ranks in central office positions. Previous to these entry level positions, all had been teachers; six in elementary settings, and three in high schools (Figure 2).

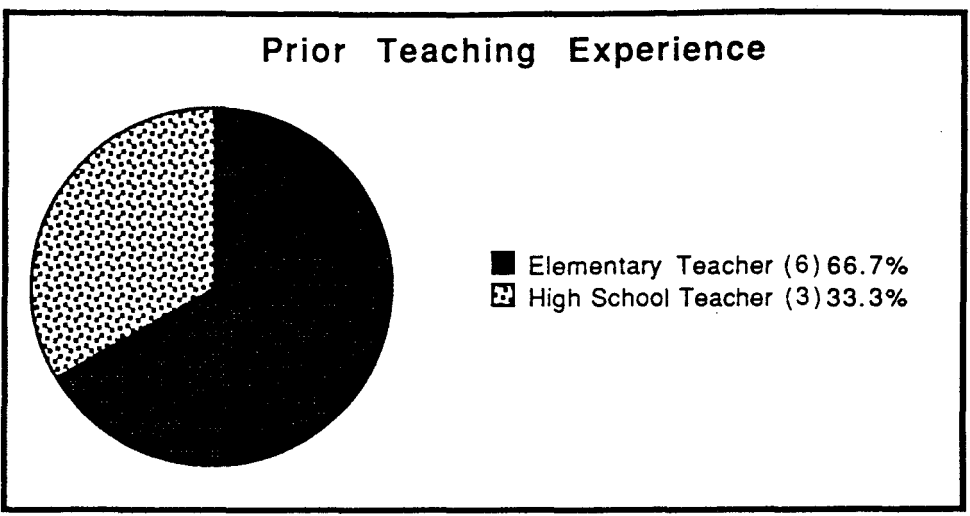
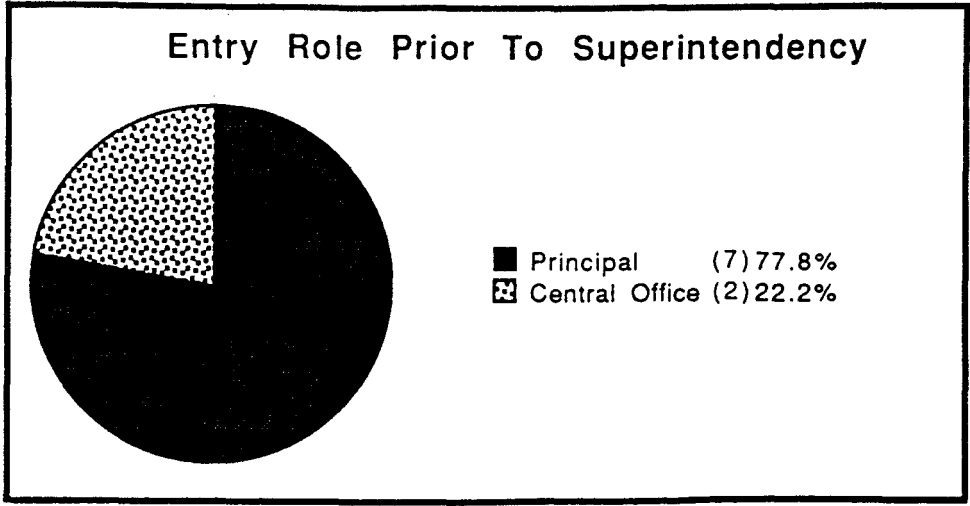


Figure 2

One woman achieved the superintendency in a district where she was a principal, and one other achieved the superintendency in a district that she had previously served as a department chairperson. The remaining seven women in the subject group became superintendents outside of the district that they had served in their entry level administrative capacity (Figure 3). The one high school superintendent was a department chairperson in her district, left the district and

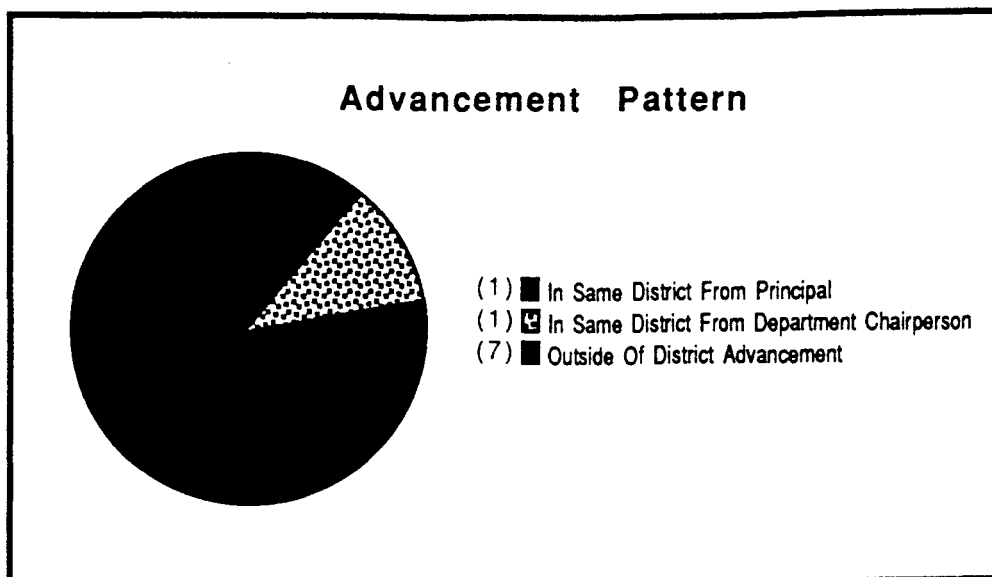


Figure 3

assumed a high school principalship outside of the district, and then returned as superintendent several years later. The vehicle for advancement to the superintendency for seven elementary district superintendents was assistant principal, then principal. One elementary superintendent left high school teaching and a department chairmanship to assume a position outside of her district as a curriculum director. She then had a title change to assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction, and later left this district to assume an elementary superintendency. Eight of the women entered their superintendency preceded by a retired Caucasian male. The remaining one superintendent, the only African-American women in the sample group, was preceded by a Caucasian woman.

It was said by one woman that women have a "tremendous knowledge base, much more so than their male counterparts, because they have spent

so much more time in the trenches as teachers." The range of years spent in the classroom by the subject group was six to twenty years.

Range of length of time serving as superintendent is from a minimum of two years to a maximum of eleven years. The average amount of years of service as a superintendent is just over five years (Figure 4).

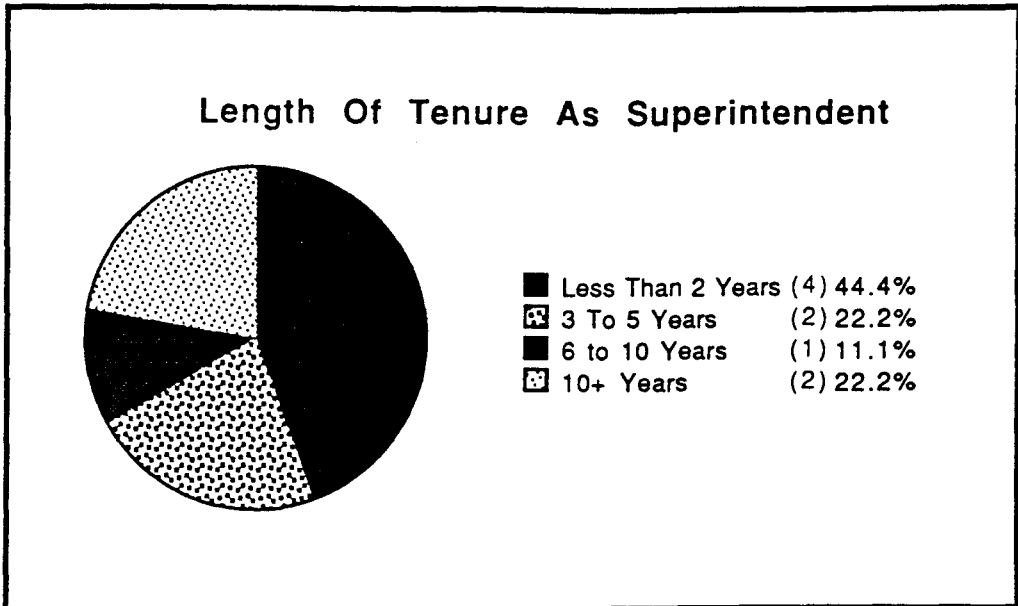


Figure 4

An interesting common history element reported by all nine of the women was that none of them began their career with any higher sight than teaching; however, the late 1960s and the 1970s were a time of school reform and population growth and each of them was asked to fulfill some leadership roles, be it department chairman or a curriculum chairperson. This time period was one of recognition and development of their potential as the interviewed women, now with hindsight, recognized.

Age of the women superintendents was seven in the 40-49 age group, and two in the over 50 age group (Figure 5).

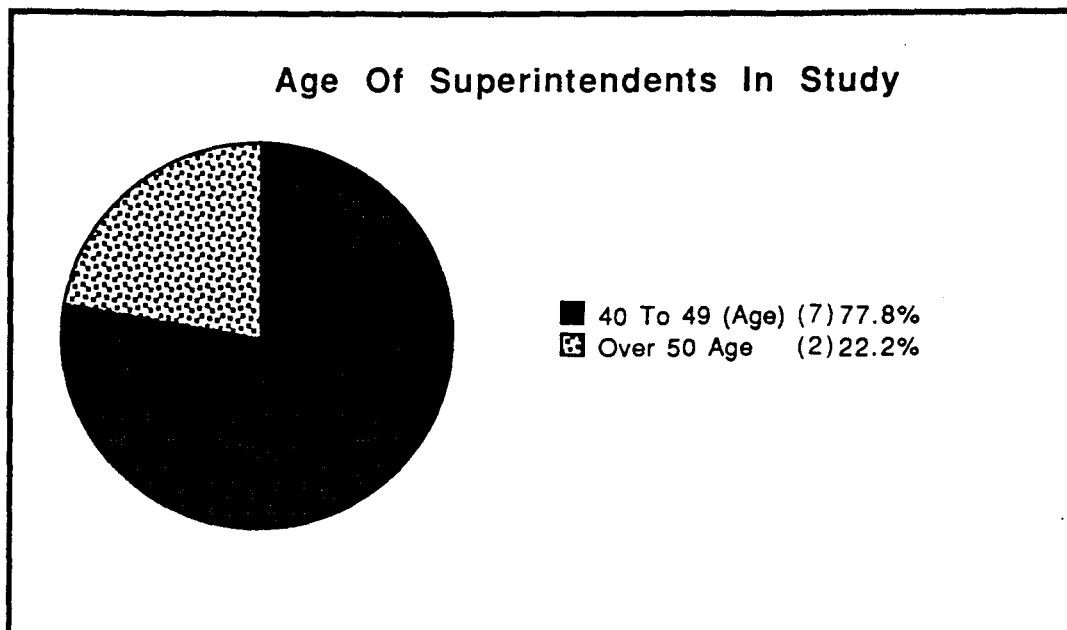


Figure 5

In terms of family structure, four women are currently married and raising children; two of this group have elementary-age children, and two have high-school-age children. Two women are widowed, one with grown up children, and one with no children. One woman is divorced with grown up children. One woman is married but has no children, while one woman is single and is caring for elderly parents (Figure 6).

Regarding their educational level, seven of the nine women possess a doctorate degree, one is currently completing her doctorate, and one has no intention of pursuing a doctorate as she plans to retire within the next few years from her current district. She admits that if she were pursuing a superintendency now, she would likely need a doctoral degree. This opinion is supported by her observation that most

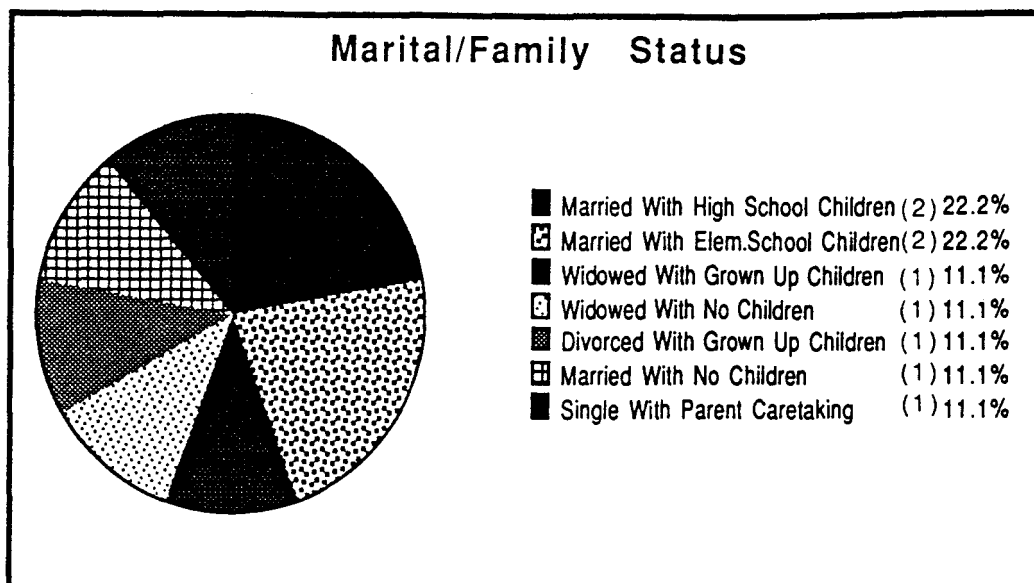


Figure 6

superintendents either hold the doctorate or are in the process of completing the doctoral degree.

The rationales for including these data and figures is to present a composite of the attribute characteristics of the nine women in the study. In analysis of the attribute data provided by the questionnaire the following qualities can be noted:

1. Women are more likely to superintend elementary districts.
2. Women superintend smaller districts ranging from one to three buildings.
3. Women are generally in their first superintendency.
4. Women superintendents are likely to have been principals previously.
5. Women superintendents are likely to have been elementary teachers.

6. Women are more likely to advance to a superintendency outside of the district where they served as a principal.
7. Women generally do not begin their career in education with the goal of being a superintendent.
8. Women generally achieve a superintendency in their early forties.
9. Women superintendents are generally married and mothers; however, many women do not enter the superintendency until their children were upper high school or college age.
10. Caucasian women superintendents are the majority.
11. Women superintendents are likely to hold a doctorate degree.

These characteristics remain consistent with previous research conducted as early as 1982 by Cunningham and Hentges.<sup>1</sup> Women are continuing to enter the superintendency, but they continue to pursue smaller elementary districts rather than large unit districts or high school districts. A continuing contributing factor may be that women still dominate the field of elementary teaching; therefore, their comfort and level of confidence may reside in this experience.

A differing factor from previous research is that this study found most of the women to be married rather than divorced or separated.<sup>2</sup> This investigation found that women in the position of chief school official have the support of their spouses. All of the married women stated that their husbands encouraged their pursuit of career

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<sup>1</sup>L. L. Cunningham and J. T. Hentges, The American School Superintendency, 1982. A Summary Report (Arlington, VA: American Association of School Administrators, 1982), 73-80.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.



success and accepted the demanding schedule of the superintendency. The one divorced superintendent stated that she had been divorced many years prior to her seeking of an administrative position. In fact, the divorce, and resulting responsibility of raising and supporting two children, caused her to career plan for the more financially rewarding role of administration, rather than discourage her pursuit.

It is clear that early career planning did not occur for these women, rather that they gained confidence and inspiration along the way. They took advantage of opportunities to do a job well and then pursued next level administrative positions. All of the women stated that they never had intended to be a school superintendent when they began their career in education. This finding also reinforced previous work by Williams and Willower who also found that most women in school leadership positions did not career plan early.<sup>3</sup> As they worked for and with other superintendents, generally male, they began to believe that they could do the job and perhaps do an even better job in their opinion and therefore pursued advanced degrees and needed experience to prepare for these career opportunities. It continues to be evident that women in the superintendency have much experience and education to offer the school districts in which they serve.

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<sup>3</sup>Rosemary Haydock Williams and Donald Willower, Female School Superintendents' Perceptions of Their Work (Montreal, Canada: Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, 1983), 1-24.

Presentation and Analysis of Interview  
Research Findings

Challenges in Professional Life

Hiring Practices/Discrimination

Seven of the nine women entered the education field as elementary teachers and then advanced to elementary principalships. With this background of experience on the elementary level they pursued elementary superintendencies. There was no evidence in the interview responses of discriminatory hiring practices regarding the predominance of emphasized service to elementary districts, but appears to be rather a self-imposed choice assumed by the women themselves. According to eight of the nine women interviewed, discrimination surfaces when there is the perception that it would be "unbalanced" if both superintendent and principals of a district are all women. One of the women stated this collective opinion clearly by remarking that

For years it has not been uncommon to have "all men" at the helm of school leadership, and this is still unlikely to be perceived as "un-healthy" to an organization. It's OK that leadership is all men, but not all women. Why?

Two of the women expressed a sense of serious discrimination when applying for superintendencies or previous positions. An additional four expressed that they felt that they had "lost out" to a job when there were either all men that they had to supervise and they were considered "not forceful enough" for the men to listen to them, or the situation was that all the people they had to supervise were women, and then it was perceived that it would be an "all female" organization. In either of these extreme situations, they felt that there was "hesitation" in hiring them. No discrimination was experienced when there was

clearly a balance of subordinates balanced with both men and women. In the case of a gender equitable organization, it appeared to these six women that the "best person for the job" was hired regardless of gender. Each of these women had interviewed as finalists for several superintendencies in male administrative dominated districts, and "lost out" to a male finalist. The districts they are currently affiliated with have a balance of both male and female administrators.

Being a female superintendent with all male principal subordinates has its challenges, as relayed by three of the women interviewed. One of these respondents said that she feels women are often viewed as "not tough enough," and are not to be taken seriously. She continued to state that the women who found themselves in this situation had to "educate" the men around that as to their abilities. Another woman superintendent feels that women chief school officials are "trailblazers." Eight of the nine women shared the belief that they had education the men they worked with that women can do the job they were hired for. They each believed that they had opened their male colleagues' or supervisors' eyes to considering women for future positions. It appears to these superintendents that women who are genuine and competent are survivors in the system, but not those who resort to using their "feminine wiles," as stated by one of the subject group. They each alluded to women being successful who are self-assured and not overly competitive with each other. They do not believe that women should be supportive of other women just because they are women. These views

reinforce the previous research by McGrath and Funk.<sup>4</sup>

While not a representative opinion of the subject group, one woman very strongly expressed that she feels women are not well represented by the gatekeeper superintendent search groups. She stated, "Headhunter organizations tend to categorize people based on their experience, with little vision as to the expansion of the individual's capabilities." This may also be true for the male candidates who have limited experience and may not be unique to women. While not mentioning a misrepresentation by superintendent search organization, several of the women who administer smaller elementary districts expressed that they feel that they are limited in their movement to a larger district because of the "type" of talent they represent as small school administrators. In these cases, particularly when dealing with a unit district, they often felt that they were presented to school boards as "token women." As the sole woman finalist they felt that they were not promoted as seriously as their male competitors who had larger district or high school experience. The irony is that through talking with these women who have assumed leadership in the "smaller" districts, they are obviously wearing many more "hats" than the superintendent of the large district who has broad central office support. The experience of the small district should be respected as multi-faceted comprehensive experience rather than a limitation, yet the small district experience does not appear to conjure a view of potential. However, it remains the

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<sup>4</sup>Sue Thrasher McGrath, "Here Come the Women," Educational Leadership, February 1992, 62-65; Carole Funk, Female Managers in Business and Education: Sacrifices, Stressors, and Support Systems (Arlington, TX: Annual Conference on Women and Work, 1986), 2-20.

norm that once one is in a "type" of district, it is difficult to move out of that stereotype, and they feel that this particularly true for women. This opinion when probed solicited the response that this limitation could also be true for men with similar small district experience and yet several of the women continued to express that men are promoted for their potential and women are held to their concrete successes more often.

A member of the sample stated that she felt that women had . . . to be good. As a superintendent, I think, really in any administrative position, if you are excellent, people don't mind that you're a woman. If there's a problem, then I think that's where people point to being a woman as being a reason for the problem. I do think that that is still discrimination. I think we still need to be better. I think we're still being tested and I also find, too, that the only times that I hear or read any type of sexist comment is when people disagree on an issue.

This assertive woman feels that the criticism she has experienced would not have been experienced if the decisions she has had to make had been made by a male superintendent. When people agree with your decisions, sexism does not surface; then people disagree with you, that is when they look for a "reason," and it can often be the person's sex or race that is cited as the reason for the varying viewpoint on an issue.

All of the women agreed that to some extent gender does enter into evaluation of their job performance and hiring decisions. Five expressed that there needs to be a mix of men and women within a school system and amongst the leadership. Each sex brings a different perspective, just as different ages, or cultural groups do. Research by

Bernard, Schmuck, and Paddock<sup>5</sup> concur with this view that we need the very best of each sex to administer schools. These previous researchers suggest that to ignore women for leadership roles is foolish indeed. They continue to offer that we need to encourage and utilize all the talent that both genders offer to meet the complex challenges of educating the children who are growing up in stressful communities and families. Perhaps as prior research suggested, earlier career planning may assist women in making career path choices that will allow for an easier transition into larger, unit, and high school districts. In discussion with these women who have entered the superintendent field and have met the challenges of the position, several expressed that they hope that more talented young women will set their sights high from the beginning of the educational career.

Only two women responded that they had experience with being sexually harassed. A unique scenario experienced by one of these women was that after she was hired in her own superintendency, she pursued a sexual harassment charge against her former superior, who was also a superintendent. She had discussed her pursuit of the suit with her current school board, and secured its support in her taking a stand. She felt that this situation was not stressful for her because she was doing the "right thing." She also had strong support from her spouse and her family. After more than a year, the case was settled in her behalf. She concluded this discussion by stating that the experience

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<sup>5</sup>J. Bernard, The Modern American College (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1981, 7-18; Patricia Schmuck, ed., Women Educators. Employees of Schools in Western Counties (New York: State University of New York Press, 1987), 75-93; Susan C. Paddock, Educational Policy and Management: Sex Differentials (New York: Charters & Carlson, 1977), 1-4.

has "made me a more sensitive superintendent to each individual's feelings and their [sic] dignity. . . ." The other interviewed superintendent who mentioned sexual harassment said that when she was hired as an assistant superintendent she was called into the office by the superintendent and told that "Of course, you know, my wife will be jealous of you. . . ." Remarks, and innuendoes continued from this superior which suggested a "relationship" between them that never existed. At the time she just "kind of took it," but now realizes that this was sexual harassment. She also believes that this experience has made her a more sensitive, aware superintendent. Both of these incidents were when the women were in subordinate roles, and not while they were superintendents. These anecdotes are included because they have contributed to the attitude and character of the women who experienced them, and affected their later behaviors as superintendents.

The near absence of discrimination in hiring practices and the lack of sexual harassment as superintendents is an improvement from previous research. Cunningham and Hentges as early as 1982 found that many women felt sexual discrimination in career advancement.<sup>6</sup> Funk, more recently in 1986, found elements of sexual discrimination as well.<sup>7</sup>

While the women superintendents in this study, in general, expressed that they need to work hard, be smart, and prove themselves to

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<sup>6</sup>Cunningham and Hentges, The American School Superintendency, 73-80.

<sup>7</sup>Funk, Female Managers in Business and Education, 2-20.

be as competent and as diligent as their male counterparts, they are not intimidated by the challenge.

### The Work Itself

All of the women superintendents interviewed were enthusiastic about their work. They were comfortable and most willing to discuss their role, often with enthusiasm and animation. None suggested any thoughts of leaving the superintendency at the present time, although two members of the sample indicated that they will probably make a career change to teaching at the higher education level within the next couple of years. Presently, three of the women superintendents are teaching at the college level part time.

One of the challenges of the work itself is lack of enough "time." The multi-faceted tasks and the lack of time to complete each would be overwhelming were they not able to delegate part of the work load. While those who superintend the larger districts have more responsibility, they also have more support staff. Four of the superintendents have business managers. Four others have bookkeepers. Three of the group with business managers, also have administrators for curriculum and instruction. Three of the superintendents have full-time principals to support them, with one superintendent having a part-time principal (one-half principal/one-half social worker) and the other being both full-time superintendent and principal. Since many of the women are from smaller districts, they tend to have minimum support staff. So while it appears that a small district may be more manageable to superintend, what is generally the case is that there are fewer people to assume certain tasks so that either the superintendent does



more, or some aspects of the work just does not get done, or at the very least does not get done as well as if the work responsibilities could be shared through delegation to support personnel. For instance, less than half of the sample group have business managers. Less than half have curriculum directors. One member of the group does not even have a principal. Therefore, these women are likely to be working on more varied tasks than their counterparts at the larger unit districts where associate superintendents take charge of many responsibilities. In analysis of these observations, this is an issue of district size rather than a uniquely female superintendent issue. It is reported only in that the women in the sample group are largely serving small districts.

Each of the married women and women who are in a family caretaking role have clearly set limits to their time commitments to work. One woman stated in reference to taking work home and jeopardizing family time, "Prioritize carefully and choose wisely. Few people who are facing death say they wish they had spent more time at work!" On the average the subjects indicated that they spend approximately two or three evenings a week at work-related events. None of the superintendents takes work home at night regularly, and it is rare that they spend one day of their weekend at their office. All of them did state that they try very hard to keep their weekends for themselves and their family. One statement summed up this attitude well: "On weekends, it's family first, then school; during the week, it's school first, and then family." These attitudes are a change from previous research of

Williams and Willower, Minick, and Heller<sup>8</sup> which still had elements of the "superwoman syndrome." These women superintendents of the nineties have recognized that one cannot have it all, and have made conscious decisions regarding their commitment to work and to family. These women superintendents expressed a much lower incidence of frustration regarding role conflict between professional and personal demands.

The research of Dopp and Sloan in 1986 suggests that women have the least confidence as administrators in the area of finance.<sup>9</sup> All of the women stated that they were asked about their financial background during the interview processes. Each of them had purposefully sought out opportunities during their previous administrative role to work with budgets and grants. Finance is a concern of superintendents in general in these times of tax caps, but this concern was not stated as being directly related to being women, but rather to all superintendents in Illinois. One woman mentioned that "Yes, there were comments about women being 'big spenders,' but I never let it bother me." This type of stereotypic remark was made at one time or another to all of the women. The women stated that a background strictly in curriculum and instruction is not enough for being successful at securing a superintendency; one does need experience with finance areas. Several stated that the

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<sup>8</sup>Willower, "Mystifications and Mysteries," paper presented at a UCEA Conference on Thought and Research in Educational Administration, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, 1983, 3-22; B. Minick, "A Study of Dysfunctional Stereotypes Regarding Women and Promotion: Implications for Educational Remedy" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1984), 20-72; Trudy Heller, Women and Men as Leaders (New York: J. F. Bergin Publishers, Inc., 1982), 1-45.

<sup>9</sup>Barbara K. Dopp and Charles A. Sloan, "Career Development and Succession of Women to the Superintendency," The Clearing House, November 1986, 120-25.

demonstration of competence in handling finances is more critical for women because of the stereotypical view of women as inefficient with money. Three of the women who currently do not have business managers mentioned that a future criterion when and if they pursued another superintendency would be that the district have a business manager. Two other women arrived at their post without a business manager and within two years created and filled that position with a full-time person.

Five of the interviewed superintendents specifically mentioned as a challenge the maintenance of buildings, particularly as it relates to finance. Each of them had a "furnace or finance" story to share, from a major flood in a building to working with roofers. They felt that they had proved their competency in both the building and grounds and financial arenas, even though only one of the women interviewed holds her business manager endorsement.

Another area of concern that several women talked about was personnel issues. Dealing with contracts, unions, and legal issues consumes much of their time. Two women have taken additional coursework in school law due to the increased emphasis on legal issues. Personnel issues were cited more often as grater concerns than building and grounds or finance.

The lone woman who runs a high school district described with some chagrin that she is, to her knowledge, only one of three women in the state of Illinois who are superintending a high school district. She stated that her job is no more complex than other superintendencies, but people take notice because secondary superintendencies are thought of as "a man's bastion." An advantage she cited in being a women

superintendent is the acceptance of her low level of attendance at sporting events. She felt that a man superintendent would be criticized for not attending athletic competitions. She maintains that her male principal has taken on this role. Another woman mentioned, in speaking about her athletic conference meetings, that it took a little while to feel comfortable at the meetings because of her being the only woman there. She said that there would always be this "dirty joke time," and now she just excuses herself when the joking begins, and casually says, "Let me know when you're through!" Sometimes the men go out after the meetings, too, and she joins them because she knows that this informal get-together is often where the "real ideas" occur. At other times, she does not go out after the meetings with the male administrators because she realizes that they really do not want her along, but this does not bother her, "It's just the way it is!" These women expanded their thoughts further on this very attitude of awareness, and then acceptance, of societal "good old boy" norms as part of their coping mechanism. One woman quoted the often-repeated prose of "Accept what you cannot change, and change what you can. Have the wisdom to know the difference."

#### School Board Relations

Composition of the school boards of these women superintendents vary from all men (1); all women (1); four women, three men (2); four men, three women (1); five men and two women (2); and six men and one woman (2). All of the women superintendents interviewed focus a great deal on their relationship with their school boards. In fact, several of the interviews were interrupted by calls from school board members.

While messages from other calls were taken by secretaries during the interviews, calls from school board members were put through to the superintendents. One school board member called the superintendent to discuss the plans for a special parent evening to review an AIDS curriculum plan, another called a second superintendent to discuss a previous evening's community meeting regarding possible consolidation, and another called a third superintendent to discuss a building remodeling concern.

While not unique to women, but likely to all superintendents, extensive effort in keeping their school boards informed is maintained by these women. Getting school board packets out early and several days ahead of school board meetings allows board members to call the superintendents regarding their own personal questions pertaining to any particular issue. Sending home information, or telephone calls to school board members between meetings also occurs if the superintendent feels there is information or a situation that her board of education should be aware of. Each superintendent would much rather apprise a school board member of a community issue or concern rather than a school board member hearing about the concern through the "grapevine." Equally important to all of the superintendents is their expectation that school board members will redirect a community member to the superintendent regarding an issue rather than responding decisively and independently to a concern. It is this mutual trust that takes time to establish with every board.

Of interest are two aspects of school board relationships that cause the most stress for superintendents. First, factions or "in-

fighting" amongst the board members themselves, and second, conscious efforts at relating positively with female board members. The most significant challenge to the women superintendents was that of factions or in-fighting among the board itself resulting in a split vote on almost every issue. Another woman with this same vote split on her board stated that it was not until there was an "outside enemy" that the board was able to pull together as a group. Unfortunately, this outside group was the teacher union and the impending confrontation of a teacher's strike. All of the superintendents agreed that they often need to have more informational meetings with individual board members to establish a level of understanding and trust so that factions are dispersed and rather each issue is considered on its own merits.

The second challenge was more subtle in emerging from the interviews and is unique to women superintendents. Five of the nine women interviewed stated that they have more difficulty with female school board members than with male board members. One superintendent offered a reason for this situation:

A woman on the board often is not employed outside the home and devotes a great deal of time and attention to board issues, almost to a fault of attention to detail . . . they tend to get overly involved in things that the administration should just take care of.

Two women mentioned that occasionally they remind their boards as to their function not as a personnel body, but as a policy-making body, to act as a group and not as individuals with special interests, and to leave the superintending to them. "If you share many personnel or curriculum decisions with them, you are asking the board to co-superintend with you," stated a superintendent. This type of board situation occurred for two women who were hired to replace superinten-

dents who allowed their boards, for one reason or another, to be involved in much more than policy issues. Both mentioned assistance from the IASB (Illinois Association of School Boards) in terms of training for their boards. Another superintendent shared that quite possibly a woman on the board often cannot handle that". . . the woman superintendent makes more money than her own husband does. . . ." This superintendent also said that,

other women on the board who do have a job outside the home or have established careers of their own are often single or do not have kids and cannot easily accept that a female superintendent who is married and a parent can balance both the demands of the job and the demands of the family.

The review of the literature included a report from the American School Board Association in 1990 that indicated that the increase of female school board membership is on the rise.<sup>10</sup> In analyzing the responses of these women superintendents regarding their relationship to women school board members it does not appear that increased female school board participation will be an advantage to women seeking the chief school officer position. Through this study, the relationship of women superintendents with female board members is strained rather than mutually supportive.

The five women superintendents who expressed these concerns with female board members state that while they are ever conscious of the tension, they attempt to "stick with the issues at hand" and demonstrate their competency. One woman stated that she never tried to "fit in" with the women in her upscale community, but rather kept reminding

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<sup>10</sup>American School Board Association, Annual Report, 1990, 2-3.

herself and her board that she was there to do a job and that she would do it well. She elaborated that her eleven year tenure as their superintendent gives credence to her attitude of not getting overly concerned with superficial agendas, such as how to fit in with the women in her school community. There was no evidence through any of the interview responses that women school board members are a specific advantage to women superintendents.

Clear establishment of school board goals with clear expectations for the superintendent, is also helpful in keeping positive relations with their school boards. One superintendent even meets for one-half hour with the school board president and vice president before each school board meeting to have their feedback and evaluation of her performance on the established goals. She stated that by doing this,

there are no surprises when the superintendent evaluation comes up. By meeting each month and reviewing my meeting of the goals, I have time to respond and redirect my energy and attention to an expectation . . . before it's too late!"

Several of these women suggested that whereas this level of communication is important for all superintendents, they also have had feedback from their boards of education that they communicate more frequently and effectively than their predecessors. All of their predecessors were male. This evidence suggests that higher levels of communication with school board members is promoted and valued by these women superintendents.

Anxiety over the renewal of their contract does not seem to cause much stress for the women questioned. Each of them seemed to feel that she would be aware if such a nonrenewal of their contracted service would occur. Most have multi-year contracts and therefore would have



adequate time to pursue other career avenues. Three of the women did mention some stress at the time of renewal as to the acceptance of the "terms" of renewal, most often salary, as they negotiate by themselves for themselves. One other woman superintendent mentioned, "I'm so good at looking out for everyone else, but I forget to look out for myself sometimes."

Each of the nine superintendents in this study shared her practice of making sound recommendations to the board based on research, investigation, and listening. One of the women shared that her "school board is supportive, but they always remind me that they are in charge and that they are in charge of terminating my job if I don't make them happy."

Another mentioned that she was told after she was hired that some of the board members had stated that they would never hire a woman, but then changed their minds when they determined that she was the best candidate for the position. Previous to her acceptance of her current position, she was told by another board member of a school district that she applied for that they could not believe that any married woman could balance the job along with being a wife and mother. All of the members of the study recognized the element of trust built over time within the boards themselves and in their relationship with the boards.

### Community Relations

This area was challenging to all of the sample group. Acceptance by the community that a woman could do the job was cited by all of the women as an obstacle to overcome. From the six women superintendents who live in their school community, all commented that while they

are not experiencing any unbearable difficulty, they would not live within the school community given the option again. Two of these women said that this reflective attitude was arrived at partially because they have felt that at times it has been difficult for their children, who attend the same district schools. One other superintendent stated that "it is simply that you are constantly besieged by questions while shopping or walking through town." She expanded this view by stating that she has taken to shopping outside of her community, or she sends her husband on the errands. All of these women stated that they have kept up the majority of their "social identity" through former friends and associates.

Of the three superintendents who live outside of their school community, they are content with their commuting distances. None of this group suggested that if they were to take on another superintendency that they would live within the district. One of them cited that the distancing from their school district was "healthy for them, their spouses, and their families." One divorced woman with grown children even suggested that she is somewhat of a "hermit on the weekends" and would not have it any other way!

The actual relationship within the school community seems to be directly related to the size of the school district. The three superintendents from the smaller one school districts where the school is the community center are more involved in events than the others. The six superintendents from multi-school districts are more selective as to what they attend and often delegate to their principals the role of high profile in the individual schools. All of the women attend all musical

and dramatic events and some athletic events, especially conference or championship matches. Three of the women mentioned that they thought that male superintendents attend more athletic events than the women do. One woman even stated that

in the case of athletic competitions, it's an advantage being a woman . . . they [the community] really don't expect you to be at all of them . . . a man [superintendent] . . . I don't think could get away with that!

Four of the interviewees mentioned that it took a few years before they were involved in Rotary or community advisory boards. One woman specifically expressed that she wished she had sought out those roles earlier in her superintendency, and would recommend that level of community involvement earlier in a new woman superintendent's tenure. All of the women are involved with academic or female career-oriented groups such as the American Association of University Women, chapters of Phi Delta Kappa, or the IWA (Illinois Women Administrators). There is no evidence of specifically non-career-oriented female support groups playing a role in their lives.

All of the women stated that understanding their community beyond the immediate school community is becoming increasingly important to the superintendency. All of the nine superintendents send out a school district newsletter to their community-at-large and five sponsor "coffees" or "breakfasts" for the encouragement of community-at-large dialogue. Seven cited the importance of having the community involved in decisions and the change process. All of them have some community/parent participation through district or parent advisory councils. One woman stated:

My general approach is to try to bring people in to study a difficult issue; to look at alternatives; to give people lots of opportunity for involvement in terms of making the decision, so that there's a readiness created for change.

Giving people an opportunity to be listened to and trying to accommodate their concerns, while still knowing that you can "never make everyone happy" was of significant importance to all of these superintendents.

It is important to these women in school leadership that their community feel that they, and their board of education, are sincere listeners.

Whether the individual community members personally agree with me and my board's decision is not as important to me as that they, the community, perceive that we have tried our best, that we have explored all options, and have attempted to respond in the most effective manner . . . they need to know how the process went . . . how much time was taken to study an issue. . . .

stated one woman who is in the process of a major reorganization within her school district in order to arrive at a balanced budget. A different woman superintendent said that "studying the demographics of one's community and understanding the tax burden to your constituency is increasingly important to passing tax referendums."

A person only needs to watch the news at voting time to know that referendum is increasingly a necessity for school districts. A third woman, whose community is socioeconomically diverse, with established farm families who feel that the school does not need any improvements beyond what they had when they were in school, offset by the "new members of the community" who are high level executive commuters who want their children to have the best possible educational advantage, often finds financial issues difficult to reconcile. She sometimes finds herself criticized by the "farm community" for not understanding their perspective, because as she said, "I'm not only a newcomer to the

community, even though I've been here six years already, I'm a woman to boot!" This understanding and sensitivity to community factions and needs, as well as providing opportunities for individuals to find their common ground, can be a challenge to a woman superintendent, but can also provide a tremendous sense of accomplishment when initiatives can be launched which prove to be successful.

### Collegial/Organizational Relationships

All of the female superintendents in this study, exuded confidence. None of them felt any level of discomfort in being one of only a few women at superintendent meetings. Often they themselves break the possible tension of being the only woman at a gathering by making some type of joke about being the "lone woman" at a meeting. Each of these women expressed that they never felt anything but mutual respect from the men they met and worked with who were also school district superintendents. One woman mentioned that when she and her male school board president attend various functions, they have laughed over how often others perceive their roles to be reversed, he as the superintendent and she as the board member. Another member of the sample mentioned that the men are not really as close as others may think. This perception was mentioned in the study by Williams and Willower.<sup>11</sup> The giving of the impression to one's colleagues that everything is fine is common practice, because to admit that all is not going well would be to admit to a lack of control of the situation. One woman made the remark that "there's a common joke among the women superintendents when attending a

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<sup>11</sup>Williams and Willower, Female School Superintendents, 1-24.

meeting [of superintendents], and that is that at least there's no waiting line for the bathroom!" She said that a woman needs to have a sense of humor and not take being in the minority as a woman superintendent so seriously. "If you are uncomfortable, you make others uncomfortable, and then you can isolate yourself unknowingly," she continued. Another woman stated that the superintendency can be a lonely position regardless of gender.

Two of the women mentioned that there is sometimes this "joking" that has sexual overtones. They do not let this bother them. One woman even mentioned that she excuses herself pleasantly and asks that the men let her know when they are through, they do, and everything is fine! This "joking relationship" was cited in the research conducted by Spradley and Mann as far back as 1975 and it appears that this behavior is still alive and well today!<sup>12</sup>

Another shared perception from one of the interviewed women was that involvement in professional organizations and leadership within these organizations is extremely important for visibility. She stated that: "If a woman wants to be recognized and included in superintendent searches for the 'rich and famous' districts, she had better have served in some leadership capacity in one of the professional groups." Demonstrating competency, organizational skills, and effective communication attributes would put a woman with particular superintendency goals in mind "in good stead" for competing for desirable superintendent positions. She added, ". . . get known, get your name associated with

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<sup>12</sup>J. P. Spradley and B. J. Mann, The Cocktail Waitress (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1975), 5-20.

successful chairmanship . . . meet people . . . network!" While this is good advice for anyone seeking a superintendency, several of the interviewed group did state that women particularly need to publicly demonstrate competency and suggest involvement in educational groups as a means to do this. They add that men have always recognized the importance of being known outside their district and that women need to increase their involvement in the bigger picture of school administration particularly if they want to continue to advance, or desire to be mobile.

#### Subordinate Relationships

All of the women shared that there is a great deal of challenge related to their being in a supervisory position. One woman indicated that shortly after becoming a superintendent, a male teacher came to her who also happened to be the union president, and stated "I'd rather work for the worst man than the best women." She elaborated that she just "didn't believe him" and thought perhaps he just had never worked for a competent woman. She assumed that his attitude would "fade" as time proved him wrong and as she focused on doing a good job. As she expected, they began to develop a mutual professional respect for each other. All of the remaining women interviewed, in their own way, expressed that the ability to be personable, and to develop relationships with principals, teachers, custodians, and all staff is crucial to their success. They mention spending a lot of time in their building talking with people, and asking questions. One woman mentioned that she sees that the experienced woman administrator behaves in this relaxed, informal manner, but that many aspiring or newly appointed women act

almost the opposite for fear of not appearing professional. She advises that instead of trying to emulate the typical male authoritarian style, use rather their own learned female socialization pattern of strong interpersonal skills. This pattern of behavior by women in leadership support the early research of Bernard, and Abrams, as well as the more recent study by Shakeshaft.<sup>13</sup> All of these researchers found that women have a more friendly style of leadership, one that takes time to build collegial social structures. In specific terms of their leadership style, all of the women stated that they saw themselves as using a variety of styles to meet each situation appropriately. In general, they indicated that they are more supportive, collaborative, and encourage site-based management decisions rather than exert an authoritative style. One woman felt that she continually pushes decisions that should be made by teachers back to the teachers. Most are supportive of initiative and innovation; in fact, they see themselves as more innovative than their staff is. One superintendent stated that whereas traditionally a superintendent may be perceived as a block to change, she is "stressed" that the teachers do not move as quickly on change as she would like them to. Overall, none of these women perceive that "management" or administration is a block to change, but rather they believe that they are the initiators of change and growth.

Women in this study, in general, recognize their collegial manner as a more natural style for women, and yet not necessarily

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<sup>13</sup>Bernard, The Modern American College, 7-18; M. Abrams in Patricia Schmuck, ed., Women Educators: Employees of Schools in Western Countries (New York: State University of New York Press, 1987), 75-93; C. Shakeshaft, Women in Educational Administration (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1987), 5-32.



uniquely female. As stated previously, when the stereotypic behavior of women changes, so too, does the stereotypic behavior of the men change. This study indicates that an androgynous blend of leadership is emerging in school superintendencies.

Androgyny provides an answer demonstrating the value of masculine and feminine traits working in tandem. As more and more people embrace the concept of androgyny, characteristics from both ends of the sex-role spectrum will become respected management capacities, and women will no longer find it necessary to give up their "feminine" behaviors as they acquire characteristics more typical of men.<sup>14</sup>

Stress from subordinates is very real for all nine of the women superintendents. One woman stated that a major aggravation for her is staff who "slough off the research of how kids learn (and say) it's just the pendulum swing of education . . . and refuse to grow. . . ." Getting people to act on the research and get out of their complacency is a stress. Three mentioned that the "unions" were stressors at times. One, in particular, just recently experienced a teacher's strike. Another superintendent mentioned "cleaning house" was necessary within the district under her direction. She continued that: ". . . well . . . it's hard to put people on notice, but when faced with the choice [of continuing the status quo] . . . there's no question . . . it just has to happen. . . ." Three more women supported this view. They also admit that it was very stressful when in their first year they made the decision to not grant tenure to certain staff, to put other staff on remediation, or to reassign staff, yet each of them mentioned that the alternative of going a second year with a nonproductive situation was an

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<sup>14</sup>Alice G. Sargent, The Androgynous Manager (New York: American Management Association, 1983), 57.

even more stressful thought! An opposing view was expressed by another superintendent:

Treading lightly because one is the new kid on the block, regardless of position, is important. She continues that many teachers have established a revered position in the district and when they are viewed by the "new" superintendent as not doing their job well enough there can be friction.

This superintendent explained, "The superintendent can be quickly criticized for not seeing how wonderful this experienced teacher is."

Since all but one of the women in the interview group assumed the superintendency on the heels of retiring men, they often faced obstacles in establishing themselves as the leader. As Shakeshaft cited in her work in 1987, women's leadership style is often one in which a woman builds a sense of community amongst her staff.<sup>15</sup> These women school leaders did much the same thing. They spent a great deal of time just talking with people, listening to them, and responding when appropriate to their ideas. In this way the trust was built which, in turn, grew into a sense of community and loyalty to the leader. While all of the sample reflected that their leadership style is situational, they admit that they are more collegial than authoritative. Shakeshaft, Nowell and Perry concur with this appraisal of women leaders.<sup>16</sup> According to their research women promote cooperation, collaboration and are generally more empathetic than most male leaders.

#### Goals and Aspirations

In terms of the immediate present, all of the members of this

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<sup>15</sup>Shakeshaft, Women in Educational Administration, 5-32.

<sup>16</sup>Carole Shakeshaft, Irene Nowell, and Andy Perry, "Gender and Supervision in School Personnel," The Education Digest, 1992, 14-17.

research group were satisfied with their level of achievement and their current positions. While none of the women appeared anxious about needing a career change, several expressed a desire to do one of three things: (1) retire, (2) semi-retire and teach at an institution of higher education, or (3) move into a superintendency of a larger district. These goals were commensurate with the respective ages of the women interviewed with the more mature women seeking the first or second goal. Two of this group of more experienced women superintendents indicated a desire to teach at an institution of higher education. One of these women very clearly had a career plan which included the superintendency as a means to achieve the level of college professor. Three of the less experienced superintendents expressed a desire to move into a superintendency of a larger school district, while four were content, at the moment, to remain in their current position with no particular aspiration beyond it. One of the women who currently serves an average size district (five schools), felt strongly about not applying to the small one-school-district superintendencies because then the perception is that "one cannot possibly understand or be competent to administer the larger districts." She shared that by superintending a multi-school site, she believes that she has a much greater opportunity to be successful in obtaining a superintendency in a larger district.

None of the women expressed any interest in going back to the principalship or to teaching at an elementary or high school level. Each of the superintendents exhibited strong self-esteem as evidenced by their confident attitude about their role as chief school district officer.

Challenges in Personal Life--As  
Related to Professional Life

Family Responsibilities

Aspects of this section of the interviews were unique to each superintendent. The personal challenge of balancing the responsibilities of the superintendency with responsibilities associated with the family, moreso than any other area, depended upon many familial structure variables. One superintendent stated that she tries to "not be overly compulsive about either" the role of mom or that of superintendent. Another stated that she has had "to be mindful of my time to make sure that I am not serving on too many boards or speaking engagements so that I can spend time with my family." Yet another stated that "the balancing itself is a challenge for me. Unfortunately, home/family life usually loses to work responsibility." All of the women indicated that there are times when spouse or family responsibilities create challenge for them. At the same time, all of the subjects shared that they have always felt a tremendous amount of support from their family. None felt any strong sense of guilt over the demands of the job and these demands occasionally interfering with family life.

Five of the nine women interviewed have college age or adult children, or no children, and, therefore, are not experiencing much conflict in their day-to-day personal family life at this time. All of these superintendents did add that they purposely did not have children, or waited to pursue advancement until their children were older, because they knew that there would be "trade offs" to trying to do both. The superwoman image of being both perfect wife/mother and achieving a high level of career success appears to have waned. Rather women are making

the difficult choice of career or family or career after family. This comfort level for women with high-powered careers such as chief school district official is consistent with previous research which suggests that women need to make a choice between roles rather than experience frustration and guilt from trying to do everything.<sup>17</sup> Role overload cited in Minick's research may be present at times, but was minimally apparent and understated in the interviews of the women superintendents in this study.<sup>18</sup> Anxiety, as referred to by Heller as early as 1981, over women's lack of attention to their husbands or families appears to be virtually nonexistent for these women.<sup>19</sup> The expectation for equal attention and involvement in home and family life for the male half of the marriage is clearly established in today's generation of career-minded women, if these women superintendents are any example of just such a group.

Of the two women with younger elementary-age children, both responded that they count a great deal upon their spouses, as well as outside hired help. They elaborated that the stress is generally over "meeting the logistics" of every family member's interests and involvements. "Planning the driving [for children's activities] and which of us [parents] will do what is of critical importance . . . ," said one of the superintendents with young children. Both of these women with young children have spouses with full-time careers, but they explained that they never would want their children to miss out on any of their

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<sup>17</sup>Minick, "A Study of Dysfunctional Stereotypes", 20-72.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Heller, Women and Men as Leaders, 1-45.

interests or activities because of this fact. All said that their husbands help with parenting responsibilities and that this has been invaluable to their being able to be a school superintendent. They do feel conflict and a pulling in opposing directions at times, but not to such an extent that they are wanting or willing to give up their superintendency. One of these women expressed that the irony of this infrequent conflict is that while children may feel the effects of mom not being able to attend certain events in their lives, the children are often their mother's greatest supporters as well. Both of these women said that overall they feel that their children are very proud of "their mom" and their career achievement rather than resentful. Likely this positive supportive attitude from children is also due to the pride and devotion each of these women has for her children as well. One woman stated that "I am not going to allow my own children to be a casualty of my choosing to have a career." Great efforts are made by each of these women to consistently try to be an interested, supportive, effective parent along with being a competent superintendent.

All of the five married superintendents felt support from their spouses. They did express, however, that their spouses do not attend events with them nearly as frequently as they feel they spend supporting their spouses' careers. Social functions related to work more often evolve from the husband's work rather than from the superintendent's functions. These women did not appear resentful or uncomfortable in their attendance at events alone, however. Attending career events without one's spouse reflects a change in societal expectations as cited

by the research of Dopp and Sloan in 1986.<sup>20</sup> This research indicated that women are often socially "unconnected" and have a lack of aggressiveness, low self-image, a lack of self-confidence, and a lack of social connections. The women interviewed had anything but these qualities! They are self-assured, confident, aggressive, and give the impression that they would be relaxed in any social setting whether alone or with their spouse. They are excellent communicators and listeners; they are women who seem to be able to be comfortable in any group.

Previous research also cited geographic mobility as a deterrent for women's advancement.<sup>21</sup> Geographic mobility did not appear to hamper their seeking of the superintendency. All of the women did change districts to assume their superintendency, which is indicative of their willingness either to move or to commute. None of them was advanced to a superintendency within a district where she was serving in another capacity. This flexibility of location is supported by previous research, in which it was suggested that women need to be willing to relocate in order to advance in school leadership.<sup>22</sup> Of the five women with spouses there was thought given to mutual benefit to the careers of both members. Either their spouse also changed jobs, or one or the other member decided that commuting was feasible or even desirable. Elements of being place bound were a reality for two of the

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<sup>20</sup>Dopp and Sloan, "Career Development," 120-26.

<sup>21</sup>American Association of School Administrators, Climbing the Career Ladder: A Research Study of Women in School Administration (Arlington, VA: AASB, 1982), 1-20.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

women. Consideration for their spouses' careers and looking for locations that had advantages to both careers seemed important to both of these women. One woman did consider a commuting situation, while another did commute for the better part of a year until her husband was able to relocate. One of these women stated that:

My husband had to give up his job so that I could take this position--85 miles away. My daughter had to adjust to the first move in her life just as she was beginning high school and missing her friends--what a challenge! We always tried to think positive and things worked out great eventually!

Another woman shared that her husband also left a job to move for her advancement. She said that her husband "has a great sense of adventure," and adjusted his own career goals, went back to school and now is currently a teacher. In probing whether the nontraditional role of her being a superintendent and her husband being a teacher may cause stress, she stated that: "No, we just like different things, and have different goals. In fact, my staff thinks it's pretty neat! It validates the importance of the teacher."

The dual role for women is not only that of spouse or mother, but can also be demanding in the role of "daughter." Often called "the sandwich generation" because of delayed parenting and extended longevity of parents, many women find themselves caring for family on both ends of the spectrum. One woman interviewed is not married or a parent herself, but finds herself commuting a long distance many weekends to care for elderly parents. She did not appear to be particularly "stressed" about this responsibility because she stated that her parents understood her need to relocate to accept a superintendency and that they have always been very supportive of her career. She did mention that she has been



encouraging her parents to relocate nearer to her so that she can attend to their needs more frequently. Acceptance of change by all family seems to be pivotal to women assuming and maintaining leadership roles. Elderly parents may need to be more flexible in the future and might need to make a geographical change if they expect or need a child to care for them.

Two of the women superintendents with children shared that they had completed their graduate and doctoral work before they had children; one did not even begin graduate school until her youngest child was almost out of high school, so as to not have either aspect of her life, that of adult student and parent, interfere with the other. These women shared that there are trade-offs to the choice of sequence of pursuing an advanced degree to raising a family, and that trying to do both at the same time would be at great risk to either graduate school or family. Each of these women, when asked, did not believe in a "super-woman syndrome," but rather believed that she had made conscious, calculated choices and were aware of the consequences of their decisions.

In final reflection of the conversations with these women superintendents it is found that all are women who are willing to live with their decisions. They are confident, self-assured ladies who are content to do the best they can at whatever they have chosen to do. They do not appear to be women with regrets, guilt or extreme frustration over role demands. All of them have a strong sense of achievement and accomplishment whether they are married, childless, divorced, widowed, or unmarried. The superintendency and their personal compe-

tence to lead a school district was born out of high self-esteem and the cyclical effect is that the role itself reinforces a great deal of self-worth for these women. Positive support and understanding by family members were universal within the subject group.

#### Community/Organizations

Community/Organization involvement is varied among the interview respondents. The three women with children who are attending same district schools are obviously more involved in their community because of their children's involvement than the other six superintendents. Two of the women maintain a high level of church involvement by serving on various church-related committees and in teaching Sunday school.

Five of the women superintendents particularly advocated for the IWA (Illinois Women Administrators) organization, with two of them involved at the officer level at one point, and all of them serving on some committee. Four of the women had more private involvements in organizations, one at a local college, one with a local women's book review group, three with their church, and the one with art and music groups in the Chicago area. While each person interviewed spoke of her outside organizational or community involvements it appeared not to be further "challenge" but rather support. All did indicate their care of choosing which groups to get involved with and shared that they are conscious of their time and protective of it. One women mentioned that she has occasionally found herself in the position of being "overextended" with teaching graduate classes, accepting speaking engagements, and the running of the district. She pushes herself to take on these extra tasks because ". . . I love doing them, even though I'm stressed about

doing a good job, and it keeps me extremely current with the research. . . ." The one woman superintendent who teaches at a local college at night is involved in attending and supporting some of the college events. All of the women are actively involved in women's professional groups, as stated earlier in this dissertation, such as the Illinois Women Administrators group (IWA), the American Association of University Women (AAUW), or chapters of Phi Delta Kappa. All of the superintendents emphatically mentioned that they enjoy their alone and quiet time. They consciously limit their community involvement. Overall, it appears that each of these women has defined her own personal level of comfort in community and organizational involvement. A clearly defined pattern was not established other than the emphasis on strong professional group involvement taking precedence over local community organizations.

#### Academic Pursuits, Goals and Aspirations

All but one of the women interviewed either have or are pursuing a doctoral degree. It was expressed as their opinion that a doctorate is becoming almost a "requirement" for a superintendency. Two of the women mentioned that if they could "do it over" they would have pursued their advanced degree before having children. One woman did this and now has younger children than those who had children and have recently completed a doctorate. One of the interview group stated that:

There are always trade-offs and either way you prioritize the sequence of events in your life doesn't matter . . . eventually pursuing an advanced degree remains fulfilling albeit challenging, whether with family responsibilities or not.

The one woman who does not hold a doctoral degree and is not pursuing one became a superintendent/principal twenty years ago in a

small rural area. Based upon her success in this position, she was able to pursue and accept a position in a small Chicago district. Her title in her current district is superintendent, but she has no principal for her small one school district. She has expressed no desire to pursue a doctoral degree, but agreed that if she applied for a superintendency in any of the larger or more suburban districts, not having the doctoral degree would be a hindrance. She plans to retire from her current district within the next few years.

While previous research indicated that women who are advanced often have more education than their male counterparts, it remains difficult to perceive whether the advanced degree is required more often of women than men. Further research on the hiring practices of school boards may shed light on this point.

On a personal level, all of these women's goals and aspirations are similar to all spouses and parents. To see one's children grow up and be successful, to enjoy life and retirement with their spouses, and to enjoy grandchildren is relatively universal. For those women who are single, travel and teaching at a college level appear to be a main objective. Overall, all of the subject group expressed satisfaction with their personal lives in relationship to their working life.

### Coping Responses

Several of the women responded on the entry questionnaire that they use coping strategies to maintain their success as a district superintendent. One relayed a personal distancing when dealing with a professional crisis:

In situations where there is a high degree of conflict--especially in dealing with emotionally charged situations--I attempt to mentally distance myself from the intensity so that I may more objectively listen and "observe." This strategy helps me to avoid becoming embroiled in the situation and permits more rational reasoned responses and decisions.

Another felt that her coping strategies were more common sense, rather than any conscious plan. An insight shared by one woman was that

. . . when sometimes I feel that I've really fouled something up, and I feel that stress coming because I've done a poor job at something, and maybe it wasn't even my fault, maybe it was, it doesn't matter. . . . If you feel that something messed up, it's a terrible feeling. . . . Then I really try to go into my stress mode that says you know, by the end of this year, this particular thing really isn't going to matter . . . you know the fact that this board member is mad at me because I didn't do something to his liking, is not going to matter by the end of the year. . . . I really try to put perspective on [the situation]. I look at the worst things that have happened to me as an administrator, and I look at what time has done to those things, and they just aren't a "big deal" any more. Even the worst things that I've done. I figure if my biggest, biggest mistakes are not a big deal any more, than I'm not going to fret too much over the little ones which I know time will really eradicate. . . .

She added that she felt all you can do is try to do a better job, take a proactive stance, and move forward.

#### Networking/Mentor Relationships/ Collegial Support

Networking, mentor relationship and collegial support while important to all managers in any business, were often cited by these women superintendents as particularly important strategies employed to cope with the professional challenges they face.

Six of the women interviewed expressed that they have been on the receiving end of mentoring, as well as now serving on the giving end of mentoring. Former bosses most often are mentors. Most often these former bosses were male superintendents while the women were principals,

department chairs, or central office staff. These supervisors encouraged these women to pursue degrees and career advancement. One superintendent relayed that her mentor, a former associate superintendent while she was a principal, continues to be "invaluable" to her. He encouraged her and supported her while she was a high school principal even when there were "crank phone calls from the community about how a woman couldn't do the job." She felt a tremendous amount of pressure because at the time the superintendent came to her and said "don't screw up." She felt that having gone through this experience has made her a stronger, more confident superintendent.

While each of these women superintendents had male superiors in their administrative positions previous to her own superintendency, due to the absence of women in these roles, they now feel a responsibility to encourage competent aspirants to school leadership whether male or female. The perception from the interviews was that these superintendents continue to see school leadership as increasingly challenging and that they want to support "good people" regardless of gender to run the schools of the future. They do not feel a particular responsibility to support aspiring women any more than aspiring men. These women did not give the impression of being exclusionary feminists, but rather were truly caring, committed people who support and encourage the best people for school leadership who will provide positive scenarios for children.

Belonging to and attending local, regional and even national superintendent groups is important to all of the women interviewed. As the superintendency can be isolating for anyone, they recognize this and attend meetings and functions that promote collegial support. Having

one or two good friends in school administration appeared also to be beneficial. Most often these friends were former superiors or colleagues who were a distance away from their own districts. This "distance" gave the impression of a safety valve to possible neighboring district competitiveness. One woman shared the view that the superintendents who gather locally would never admit to one another that they were having problems in their district or with their superintending. Even if the media points out problems or shortcomings, while the superintendents are together the attitude of having the situation under control is always expressed. She stated that the "good old boys" are not really as close as might have been originally perceived.

#### Home Caretaking/ Housework Responsibilities

In terms of home caretaking and housework responsibilities all of the interviewed women did agree that the majority of this demand still rests with them. However, they suggest one of three ways to cope with the demands of housekeeping. One is to either relax on the level of expectation and allow other family members to assume responsibility and then be content with their level of task accomplishment or the other is to hire outside help to accomplish the tasks. For the five women who have spouses, traditional roles seem to continue to exist. The men take care of the outside of the house, major repairs, and car maintenance; the women take care of the shopping for and preparing of food, laundry and general interior home maintenance. Each member of this subject group indicated that their husbands "think they do 50 percent of the work" of the home, but they themselves perceive that they still maintain

the "lion's share." Most of them enjoy entertaining and preparing foods, yet they admit that on a daily basis they are not very involved in meal preparation, and resort to quick menus, microwave items, or eating out. They maintain that they do the majority of the shopping, cooking, entertaining planning, and arranging of holiday, birthday or various family events. All of the married women or women with children admitted that they do more "straightening" or cleaning than their spouses or children because they have a "lower tolerance level" for clutter!

There were only two exceptions to this pattern, with one woman having a husband who gets home earlier than she does and he loves to cook, so has assumed this role, and another who has delegated all laundry responsibilities to her teenagers. Overall, in the five dual professional families, the hiring of child care professionals, cleaning services, and paying for home/car maintenance appears to be the trend. One woman shared that she consciously decided that her being with her children along with her job responsibilities were more important than housework, and having someone come in to clean has allowed her to focus on these aspects of her life. Another woman said: "Well taking care of the house is pretty much my job . . . so I pay for someone to do it for me!" One of the women with younger children has a "live-in nanny" for them, and to do the cleaning and cooking. She admitted that without this live-in help she would not be able to balance motherhood and the superintendency. She stated that live-in help is necessary because her husband's career has just as erratic hours as hers does.

Through either this delegation of responsibilities, sharing of



responsibilities, or paying for services to care for these responsibilities, the women who run our schools are coping quite well with home caretaking and housework responsibilities.

#### Professional/Feminist Organizations

Talking with and listening to other women and professionals helps these women cope with their demanding role, according to all of them. Being "lonely at the top" and socially isolating oneself can happen in a superintendency. Recognizing this possibility, the women interviewed do get out of their office and interact within their school buildings and out of their school environments. Membership in organizations provides opportunities for the exchange of ideas. Attending meetings, luncheons, conventions or just socializing helps to validate the decisions and directions that a superintendent may be making for her district. One woman relayed a humorous story about a local superintendent's meeting where Nordstrom's department store presented a "dress for success" workshop. Half of the clothes were for women, but she was the only woman there! So it ended up being a one-to-one conversation, much to the gentlemen's chagrin and her embarrassment! She quickly added, however, that all of the male superintendents are very accepting, supportive, and friendly professionals.

Publications of a professional nature are also extremely important to all of the women in this study. Reading educational journals and publications regularly keeps them abreast of current research. This research promotes their ability to motivate change within their organization. When change is research based commented one woman, "it is much easier to get folks going on an idea. . . ."

Another woman commented on her selectivity of organizational involvement,

Involvement in organizations is dual edged. To benefit from the membership, one must give up some of her time. With time to accomplish tasks at a premium, the benefits need to outweigh the loss of time.

Collegial support, exposure to a broad range of influential people, and publicly promoting their own competence through organizational leadership is a means to an end for their career establishment and advancement. Smith, Kalvelage and Schmuck cited this need for support and it continues to be important.<sup>23</sup>

#### Family/Spouse Support

Family and spouse support in this analysis is likely to be the most significant factor in a woman's pursuit of leadership roles. All of the women interviewed spoke enthusiastically about the family support they receive, whether from parents, spouses or children. In some form this support exists and they each stated that without such support they would likely not be in the career role that they are today. Funk and Rogers and Davis<sup>24</sup> both cited family support as a significant factor in determining a woman's aspirations and attainment of her career objectives. This attribute is reinforced by this study. Encouragement and reassurance from their immediate family often is the difference between

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<sup>23</sup>M. A. Smith, J. Kalvelage and P. A. Schmuck, Women Getting Together and Getting Ahead (Eugene: University of Oregon, Center for Educational Policy and Management), 61-86.

<sup>24</sup>Funk, The Female Executive in School Administration, 2-21; Martha Rogers and Joan Davis, Women of Substance (New Orleans, LA: Annual meeting of the American Association of School Administrators, 1991), 16-20.

settling for less and rising to a challenge for the woman superintendent. One woman mentioned that it is the recognition of the "level of income" that is appreciated by her family. One woman shared that occasionally her family complains that she is not home enough and she stated that: "I always remind them of the trade-offs. For instance, we go on a ski trip every year. I always remind that we can do things like this because I make enough money in my job to afford it!"

Without the salary that accompanies the responsibilities of her job, her family would not have the material goods, vacations, or educational opportunities afforded. Clearly, career and financial success after the attainment of the superintendency allows the family to be more tolerable of the professional demands of their spouse/mother.

Another superintendent who is also the mother of now-adult daughters shared an interesting insight while observing the development of her own children and their attitudes about women and work. When the girls were adolescents, they told their mother that they were "never going to work as hard as she," that they intended to be housewives. Now that they are grown, and both teaching, they realize that they want and can do more than be housewives, and now understand and even emulate their mother's career aspiration behavior. Another woman concurred that her "role modeling may be backfiring" as her adolescent daughter similarly expresses that "her mom works too hard." Only one woman mentioned extended family help as well as a close friend helping with her children. The others mentioned that their extended families are supportive of them verbally, but not necessarily in the physical sense. In other words the extended family encourages, praises and expresses

empathy rather than actually babysitting, doing housework or providing monetary assistance. While examples of family support are limited, the depth of expression of recognition of family support was overwhelming. All members of the subject group emphatically emphasized the importance of their families support to achieving professional success.

Personal Activities: Exercise,  
Recreation, Hobbies

Recreational activities of these women include downhill skiing, traveling, reading mysteries and romantic novels and professional or self-help type books, working on craft projects particularly stitchery or needlepoint, going out to dinner with friends, going to plays, concerts, social activities for a spouse's career, quiet coffee in the morning to think about the day ahead, walking, attending or renting movies, television (particularly news programs), YMCA Health Club, or exercise at home, church affiliations, non-school-related interest groups and a lone woman who firmly contends that she is "too exhausted to do anything for herself other than the quiet drive to and from work."

In any area is perceived to be more in the debit column than the credit column it is the time for personal activities. Each of the women commented that they are aware that this is the part of their life that receives the least amount of attention. When the research from Giammatteo and Giammatteo<sup>25</sup> was referred to with the myriad of suggestions of personal ways to reduce stress and enjoy life more, each of the women "chuckled" and said that it sounded like a good plan and that they did

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<sup>25</sup>Michael C. Giammatteo and Dolores M. Giammatteo, Executive Well Being: Stress and Administrators (Reston, VA: National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1980), 66-68.

do some of these personal stress reduction things some of the time, but not necessarily on a regimented basis. For instance, a regular exercise plan while recognized as important by these women often fell to the bottom of the list when professional or other personal demands took precedence. Setting special time aside to relax, read nonprofessional books, and engage in hobbies such as craft work, gardening, or escapism (movies and television) also occur incidentally rather than as a highly planned and structured time. All of the women superintendents mentioned in some way that they did not need elaborate recreational activities to find calm and opportunity to relax. Often this special coping time was found in a few minutes to enjoy a cup of coffee in the morning, or a quiet time to read for pleasure in the evening, or in informal gatherings with friends. The analysis of their responses recognized that there is limited time for personal pleasures, but also that each of these women did not appear overly frustrated or concerned about it either. As one woman stated, ". . . that's what retirement is for!"

#### Time Management

This area of coping strategies is widely used by all the women superintendents in this study, in some form. As Funk stated<sup>26</sup> that the planning book is often the bible of the managerial woman; this plan book strategy appears to be true also for the female chief school officer. This dissertation also found the use of the planning book important to women superintendents. A variety of calendars or appointment books are used, but each of the women use some technique of this

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<sup>26</sup>Funk, Female Managers in Business and Education, 2-13.

nature. While one of the women mentioned that she has tried to "block out" certain times of the day for various activities as suggested by time management workshops she has attended, she humorously responded that "this type of activity often lasted at best about a month!" One schedule that all of the superintendents did try to stick to was that of visiting all of their buildings. Being visible and interested in each building and taking the time to talk with principals and staff members was very important to all of them.

One woman mentioned that her organizational method was "piles" of projects and she tried to tackle one "pile" at a time based upon urgency for completion. Another woman concurred that she, too, finds her time most effectively spent when she tackles one project at a time from beginning to end. Effective use of one's secretary, and a great appreciation for one's secretary was also mentioned by seven of the women. Two have the secretaries keep their calendar, all have their secretaries streamline the "paper" that comes onto their desks, and all have their secretaries screen their telephone interruptions.

Delegation of tasks was also cited as critical to success in the superintendency. One woman stated that if she ever did seek a different superintendency, it would definitely have to be one that had a business manager. Two of the women interviewed stated that whereas there was no business manager when they arrived, within their first two years, this job had been created and filled.

Capitalizing on their skills and tasks that they enjoy and delegating some of the other important, but less interesting and fulfilling aspects of superintending, is what likely keeps these women

effective, and satisfied in their roles. For instance, while all of the women feel they have the adequate skills to handle the financial record keeping, they are more energized by dealing with curricular and personnel aspects. Hiring and delegating the more laborious tasks to others who are competent and interested in completing these tasks have contributed to their personal level of coping and job satisfaction.

Besides calendars and planning books, the other most frequent method of time management is "lists." One member of the subject group who writes weekly or daily lists, commented that she takes great pride in crossing off items from her list. Another woman superintendent stated that she will not go home until the list of daily items is completed! Along with this attitude she also stated that she carefully makes choices of what goes on the list and what is manageable and realistic to accomplish.

Another superintendent mentioned using little yellow "stickers" to set precedence within the weekly "long list" of things that need attention. "Don't put things off . . . get at it" are words of wisdom from her. One woman, with family at home, shared that she takes things home during the week, but rather than working in the evening, she chose to get up at four o'clock in the morning to work. She feels that by rising very early, she does not disturb any other family member and her working at home does not take time away from "family time." Another woman mentioned that she uses little bits of time for mini-relaxing, such as when taking one of her children somewhere, perhaps waiting for a music lesson to be concluded, she seizes the opportunity to read and relax. Many of these time management techniques are not unlike the list

of ten items generated from the Smith, Kalvelage and Schmuck study.<sup>27</sup>

Further Thoughts from the Ladies at the Top

One of the interviewed respondents shared her opinion that the quality of leadership coming from the ranks of women being higher than that of men is due to the fact that women have been the untapped resource for so long. The best women historically remained in the classroom with their leadership underutilized. According to this one superintendent, today the best women are moving up to school administrations, and some of our best men are moving into private sector work. This same woman encourages aspiring women administrators to be a little more daring, and not so cautious. She summarizes that the best school management teams are those that are balanced with both men and women. Also encouraging women to "be themselves," one superintendent shared her thoughts that:

women are either perceived as being too easy, not tough enough or else they're so aggressive that they scare people away, it's real hard just to be yourself. Relax . . . remember, you know as much as any other new superintendent does. Don't have a chip on your shoulder about being a woman . . . just get in there and do the job!

One woman mentioned that she felt that the women she has known who have had difficulty with the role of a woman as an administrator, were those very ones who were constantly worried about what others thought of them as women, and felt a need to prove themselves as women. She suggests:

Don't even let that be part of your thinking! Get a grip on your role, and don't get defensive or keep your being a woman on your sleeve. Don't be petty. Get a life. It's not such a big deal.

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<sup>27</sup>Smith, Kalvelage and Schmuck, Women Getting Together, 61-86.



Get over the woman thing. Don't get wrapped up into being threatened or intimidated, mellow out!

Advice also centered on the mobility factor; one woman stated:

I think the one mistake that many women make is that they hesitate when considering relocation. They will not move to get an advancement. I think many men resent that in women. Men traditionally are more mobile in terms of their advancement on the job and women sometimes restrict themselves by being unwilling to move. I just decided that if I wanted the opportunity to advance to a superintendency, I couldn't be too fussy about where it was.

Willingness to relocate was mentioned by several of the women, yet many also added that one should only apply to those districts one would seriously consider. Also, one other woman added: "Don't limit your thinking to small districts, go after the bigger district positions too."

Several of the women superintendents cited their style as participatory and supportive, yet admitted that they occasionally assume an authoritarian style if necessary. A characteristic of a woman superintendent is also one who is confident and "stands tall," said another. She continued:

Remember when you go to a state superintendent meeting of 950 superintendents at a Hilton in Springfield, there are only about 50 women. If you think you're going to sit at a table of women, I got news for you. So you just have to sit down, introduce yourself, and know "I'm OK."

All of the women were positive that within the next decade many qualified women will achieve the superintendency. They also shared the opinion that they believe that more men will enter teaching again because salaries have increased. With the attraction of higher salaries, both men and women who may have chosen to enter the business world will now utilize their talent in the field of education. The women superintendents agreed that the future will find a highly-talented pool

of teachers, both male and female, on which school leadership can draw upon. Most did not feel strongly that women were necessarily more "caring" or "nurturing." They did agree that today's school leaders do need to be "people" oriented which has been a socially conditioned strength for many women. Schools today need strong collaborative styles from their superintendents, several of the respondents stated. They further agreed that all leaders of both sexes need to "have heart." All of the women interviewed agreed that traditional leadership perceptions of men as "authoritative" and women as more "participative" are changing.

Women's organizations are recommended for support and assistance. The IWA (Illinois Women Administrators) was often cited as a "great group of people." Many of the women mentioned that this is a good organization to belong to in order to be noticed by other women who can promote and support one's advancement. Men have used professional organizations for a long time to establish their "good old boys network," women need to help each other more. Several of the women mentioned not only joining professional organization, but recommended getting involved as a great boost for job potential. Advice is to start with committee membership, progress to chairman of events, and perhaps move on to an office of the organization. This kind of recognition and "name awareness" helps one to be included in the superintendent search committee's hired headhunters.

Purposeful planning after entry into their initial leadership position caused each of the women to reflect on their areas of self-perceived need. One woman stated: "Once I set my goal, I went after

those experiences that would fill those gaps." Another shared, "Take on those tasks that you don't feel you could do, that way you get the experience." Those that perceived that they had a need in the financial arena, for instance, took on the writing of grants, worked on budgets, or took additional coursework in school finance. They did this to gain confidence and experience in areas they felt weak in.

In summary, these women describe a woman superintendent as energetic and willing to maintain the balance of their life. One woman stated that being a superintendent is difficult, but knew the job would be. A woman pursuing the superintendency needs to be very "self-motivated." "You need to set your goals, sacrifice, and just go after it," one woman shared. Another stated, "You have to internally decide that you're up to the challenge. Don't use being a woman as an excuse. You can do it if you want to and you believe in yourself." Yet another woman shared, "You come to understand that no one ever feels fully prepared for their first superintendency . . . you have to be willing to take the plunge!" They advise that one needs to recognize the time commitments, the level of dedication, the criticisms and the challenges that come with the job. "Always remember that you chose to be a superintendent, and just handle the demands," one woman stated. Yet another woman expressed that she expects her tombstone someday to read, "She cared too much!"

## CHAPTER IV

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Take your life in your own hands,  
and what happens? A terrible thing:  
no one to blame.

--Erica Jong

#### Summary

This investigation focused upon women superintendents from selected school districts in Illinois and identified their perceived professional challenges and their coping strategies which have led to their satisfaction in both their professional and personal lives.

Data were gathered from nine identified women superintendents through an entry questionnaire and a personal interview. The sample group was identified through the 1992-1993 Illinois Directory of Administrators. Following telephone contact with each woman to explain the project and to solicit their participation an entry questionnaire was mailed. This questionnaire identified a variety of factors, such as: type/size of district, length of service to the district in role of superintendent, service to schools in other roles such as principal/teacher (employment history), age, marital status, and parental/caretaker role. Following receipt of the questionnaire, interviews were arranged with each participant. The interviews were approximately one

to two hours in duration and probed the challenges of their professional lives, the challenges of their personal lives (as related to professional life), and their coping responses to their superintendent role and/or to their dual role of parent/child/spouse supporter. The three major questions were:

1. What are the significant challenges of the superintendency for women?
2. What are the personal challenges in relationship to their professional life for women superintendents?
3. What are the coping strategies utilized by women superintendents to respond to the professional and personal challenges?

Areas that were probed by specific questions (see Appendix) included the following categories:

- What are the significant challenges of the superintendency for women?

Hiring Practices/Discrimination

The Work Itself

School Board Relations

Community Relations

Collegial/Organization Relationships

Subordinate Relationships

Goals and Aspirations

- What are the personal challenges in relationship to their professional life for women superintendents?

Family Responsibilities

Community/Organization Demands

Academic Pursuits

Goals and Aspirations

- What are the coping strategies utilized by women superintendents to respond to the professional and personal challenges?

Networking/Mentors/Collegial Support

Home Caretaking/Housework Responsibilities

Professional/Feminist Organizations

Family/Spouse Support

Personal Activities: Exercise, Recreation, Hobbies

Time Management Techniques

Questions probed each participating woman superintendent to the extent of their comfort level and willingness to respond. The research was exploratory and qualitative in nature.

Analysis of the questionnaire was reportive in nature. Analysis of the interview responses included identifying isolated or collective views of the women superintendent group from the tape-recorded interviews. Through common answers by the respondents, challenge and coping strategy elements by women superintendents were established. Analysis also focused on the personal demands and balancing of the personal lives of these women in their roles as wife, mother, or family member/home caretaker, as it impacted their professional life. Analysis further identified commonalities and differences of methods of coping, such as exercise, personal interests, and recreational activities. Identifying the coping response of support from professional or nonprofessional organizations was also explored.

The analysis provided an understanding of what women in the role

of chief school official face as challenges and what strategies they employ to cope with these pressures. Comparison with prior research to determine the nature of change for women administrators in this 1993 sample was established.

#### Findings from Questionnaire

The questionnaire provided attribute data of the nine participating women superintendents. When this sample group is used as a composite profile of the female superintendent in 1993, the following findings can be noted:

- Women superintend elementary districts, rather than high school or unit districts.
- Women superintend smaller districts ranging from one to three buildings.
- Women superintendents have been elementary principals previous to their superintendency.
- Women superintendents have been elementary teachers.
- Women advance to the superintendency outside of the district where they served as a principal.
- Women generally do not begin their career in education with the goal of achieving a superintendency.
- Women achieve the superintendency in their early forties.
- Current women in the superintendency are in their first superintendency and have a tenure of under five years.
- Women superintendents are generally married and mothers, often

beginning their superintendency when children are out of high school.

- Women superintendents have the doctorate degree.
- The majority of women superintendents are Caucasian.

#### Conclusions from Findings of Questionnaire

Women are continuing to enter the superintendency and they continue to pursue smaller elementary districts rather than large unit districts or high school districts. A continuing contributing factor to their self-imposed limitation to small elementary districts is that women still dominate the field of elementary teaching, therefore the comfort and level of confidence resides in this experience. Evidence, by the sample group in this study, supported this characteristic because only two of the nine women were inconsistent with this finding. One woman pursued and is currently serving a large urban elementary district and one other woman pursued and is presently superintending a one school suburban high school district. These conclusions are generally consistent with previous research done in the 1980s by Cunningham and Hentges.<sup>1</sup>

A differing factor from previous research is that this study found most of the women to be married rather than divorced or separated. All of the married women expressed that their spouses are supportive of their career and role as chief school official. The one woman who is divorced shared that her divorce occurred many years previous to her

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<sup>1</sup>L. L. Cunningham and J. T. Hentges, The American School Superintendency, 1982: A Summary Report (Arlington, VA: American Association of School Administrators, 1982), 73-80.



pursuit of school administration and was not related to career demands.

It is clear that early career planning did not occur for these women; they gained confidence and inspiration along the way. They took advantage of opportunities to do a job well and then pursued next level administrative positions. Each of the women stated that they had never intended to be a school superintendent. This finding also reinforced previous work by Williams and Willower who also found that most women in school leadership positions did not career plan early.<sup>2</sup> As they worked for and with other superintendents, generally male, they began to believe that they could do the job and perhaps do an even better job, in their opinion, and therefore pursued advanced degrees to prepare for these career opportunities. It continues to be evident that women in the superintendency have much experience and education to offer the school districts in which they serve.

#### Conclusions from Interviews

The major challenging issues and coping strategies of women superintendents can be summarized by the following:

1. Generally, women superintendents are not particularly challenged by the experience of discrimination or sexual harassment.
2. Women superintendent candidates are challenged by the existing perception of not having "all women" in leadership roles of a district which is in contrast to the acceptance of "all men" in leadership roles of a district.

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<sup>2</sup>Rosemary Haydock Williams and Donald Willower, Female School Superintendents' Perceptions of Their work (Montreal, Canada: Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, 1983), 1-24.

3. Women candidates for superintendencies are challenged by not being as well represented as men by the gatekeeper/headhunter organizations, particularly for the larger unit districts. Women superintendents hold the opinion that they need to prove their competency rather than being recognized as having potential as a man of a smaller district may have.

4. Women superintendents are challenged by the aspect of gender entering into the evaluation of their performance. When a decision is not agreed with often the criticism reflects sexist attitudes.

5. Women who aspire to the superintendency are challenged by the stereotypic view of women being "big spenders" in the area of finance. The women superintendents in this study purposely sought out opportunities in the area of finance to prepare for the superintendency to cope with this challenge.

6. Women school board members present a unique challenge to women superintendents. To cope with this challenge, women superintendents focus on the issues and on doing their job, rather than encouraging personal agendas to take precedence.

7. Women superintendents find it a challenge to reside within their own school district. To cope with this challenge many women live outside of their school district; those who do live in their own district would not do so again.

8. Women superintendents are challenged by subordinate relationships particularly by male staff. To cope with and assist subordinates in acceptance of a woman as a boss, the women superintendents have developed the coping strategy of high visibility, effective listening

skills, and the development of a leadership style which is collegial, cooperative, and grounded in site-based management.

9. Women face career advancement challenge because they generally do not career plan early in their education career for the superintendency. (All of the sample group realized that earlier career planning as a coping strategy for future administrative aspirants is necessary.)

10. Flexibility in geographic location appears to have increased, and is no longer a challenge for women superintendents.

11. Women superintendents are involved in professional organizations and community civic organizations as a means of support to coping with the challenges of isolation as chief school official. While challenged by often being in the minority at these groups, the women in this study coped by having a sense of humor and not becoming overly sensitive to being a woman in a dominantly male organization.

12. Women who chose to have a career in school administration as well as have a family are challenged by when to choose to pursue an advanced degree. Most of the sample group coped with this challenge in one of two ways; to either pursue an advanced degree before having a family, or to delay the pursuit of the advanced degree until their children are out of high school.

13. Home caretaking responsibilities continue to challenge women superintendents. Women superintendents have coped with this challenge through family member delegation of tasks, lowering of expectations, or the hiring of outside help. Women superintendents set

clear guidelines to maintain a balance between their work and their personal lives as a coping skill.

14. Many of the coping skills identified are not gender specific. Task delegation, calendar appointment books, exercise, reading, socializing with family and friends are the most frequent coping responses.

### Recommendations

As a result of knowledge gained during this study, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Women in the field of education must career plan earlier for administration, particularly for the superintendency. Through career counseling at the high school or college level, it is important for women to become aware of the options within the field of education and to plan for a long-term career.

2. Women must not limit their superintendent aspirations to small or elementary districts. Women must utilize their experience at the high school or unit district level to pursue leadership in these types of districts.

3. Women must recognize the challenge of working for and with female school board members. Women superintendents must focus on the tasks and skills of being a superintendent and develop a positive, trust-based relationship with their female board members.

4. Women seeking a superintendency must seek out opportunities to establish their competency in any area of perceived need. Often these opportunities are in the areas of finance and building and grounds.

5. Women superintendents and superintendent aspirants must

become actively involved in professional organizations for the purpose of mentoring, networking and collegial support as well as personal exposure to the headhunter organizations.

6. Women superintendents who are also in the dual role of family caretaker must lower domestic expectations, delegate task to family members or hire outside domestic help in order to cope with personal challenges.

7. Women superintendents and superintendent aspirants must be geographically flexible rather than placeboard in order to secure desirable school leadership positions.

8. Women superintendents must have the advanced degree of the doctorate. It is recommended that the degree be achieved before having a family or delayed until children are out of high school.

#### Suggestions for Further Study

1. Conduct a study involving male superintendents regarding the challenges they face and the coping skills they utilize to balance their professional and personal lives.

2. Conduct a study which focuses on the relationship of a female superintendent with her male and female board members.

3. Conduct a study which examines minority women superintendents and their specific challenges.

4. Conduct a study which investigates the male responses to female superintendent membership and involvement in professional organizations.

5. Conduct a study which investigates the level of representa

tion of women superintendent candidates by the superintendent search firms.

6. Conduct a study which investigates the long-term effects of a woman superintendent's career responsibilities as it affects her children.

APPENDIX

**APPENDIX A****SCRIPT FOR INTRODUCTORY TELEPHONE CALL**

Hi, I'm Cynthia Boudreau, a doctoral candidate in Educational Administration at Loyola University. Thank you for taking a few minutes out of your busy day to speak to me.

I would like to ask you if you would be willing to participate in a dissertation study that is focusing on women superintendents from selected school districts in Illinois. This is a qualitative study and involves your participation in two activities.

First, I'd like to send you an entry questionnaire that should take about 15-20 minutes to complete. There are three questions asked that relate to challenges of the superintendency, challenges of your personal life in relation to meeting the demands of the superintendency, and if you recognize yourself as one who uses coping strategies to maintain satisfaction and success both at work and at home.

The second activity involves a direct interview with me at a time and location convenient and comfortable for you. The interview should take between 1 to 1/2 hours, so your total time commitment to the project should not be more than 2 hours. The interview will continue to focus on challenges of professional life and personal life (related to career), with both external and internal barriers and coping techniques explored.

Since there are few women superintendents I am hoping that you will be willing to participate in the project. Thank you for your time and I will be sending you an entry questionnaire; following its return, I will be contacting you for an interview.



## LETTER FOR PARTICIPATION

Superintendent  
School District  
Address  
City, Illinois 60000

January \_\_, 1993

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for your time to speak to me by telephone on January \_\_, 1993. As I mentioned to you, I am conducting a qualitative study of challenges and coping strategies of women superintendents in selected school districts of Illinois to partially fulfill the requirements of the Doctorate in Educational Administration Degree at Loyola University.

I appreciate your taking a few minutes from your busy schedule to complete and return the enclosed Entry Questionnaire , and Consent To Participate ? I anticipate that doing so should take no more than 10-15 minutes of your time. For your convenience a self-addressed stamped envelope has been provided . If at all possible I would appreciate your returning the questionnaire and consent to participate by February \_\_, 1993. After receiving and reviewing the questionnaires, I will be contacting those willing to participate in an interview (not to exceed 1 hour) for a convenient time and place to do so.

Thank you for your time and assistance in this dissertation project. The information you share will help aspiring women to seek school leadership positions. If I can be of any help to clarify anything regarding the questionnaire or consent to participate, please call me at the above number. I look forward to receiving your questionnaire and to meeting you at the time of the interview if you are willing to participate.

Sincerely,

Cynthia A. Boudreau

Enclosed:  
Summary Description of Project  
Entry Questionnaire  
Consent To Participate

## APPENDIX C

### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

I agree to participate in the study entitled:  
PROFESSIONAL CHALLENGES AND COPING STRATEGIES OF  
 WOMEN SUPERINTENDENTS FROM SELECTED SCHOOL  
 DISTRICTS IN ILLINOIS.

This study will be conducted by Cynthia A. Boudreau, a doctoral student at Loyola University of Chicago.

I understand that the procedures used to collect and analyze the data for this research study will under no circumstances identify me as an individual; I will be part of my identified group only. In addition, I understand that there will be no cost to me and that total time for participation should be limited to two hours.

I am willing to allow the interview to be taped so that the investigator can focus on the conversation and not transcription ?  
 Please circle:    YES        NO

NAME (Print) \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_

WITNESS \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

*Thank you again for your willingness to participate, and your assistance with this project.*

## APPENDIX D

### SUMMARY DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT

Investigator: Cynthia A. Boudreau

Project Title: Professional Challenges and Coping Strategies of Women Superintendents From Selected School Districts in Illinois.

Purpose: The intention of the study is to discover the unique challenges that women superintendents face and the coping methods that they utilize to withstand the demands/challenges (stressors) of balancing career and home/family caretaking.

Procedures: (1) All female superintendents in the selected school districts of Illinois will be contacted by telephone to explain the project and to solicit their willingness to participate in the project. (2) The Consent to Participate form and the Entry Questionnaire will be sent. (3) After reviewing the Entry Questionnaire, selected women superintendents will be contacted by telephone to arrange for a personal interview. The selection will be based upon their indication on the Entry Questionnaire as to their current role of superintendent being fulfilled while maintaining a significant role as family/home caretaker and/or nurturer. (4) Interviews will take place at no more than 1 to 1 1/2 hour of length. If the superintendent is willing, the interview will be audio taped so as to allow the interviewer to interact more naturally with the interviewee.

Conclusion: Analysis of the interview responses will include identifying consistencies, or differences among the responses to the interview questions by participating women superintendents. Interview response analysis will also determine through repetitive answers which superintendent challenges/stressors of their professional life in terms of the work itself, school board relationships, community relationships, collegial relationships, and personal-professional aspirations/ethics are possibly uniquely female. Analysis will also focus upon the demands, and balancing of the personal lives of these women in their roles as wife, mother, or family member/home caretaker, as related to their professional demands. Analysis will also identify commonalities and differences of methods of coping, such as recreational activities, time management techniques, support groups, organization membership, or any other coping strategies utilized by these successful women. It is the intent of the investigator that the information obtained from this study will give insights into women superintendents challenges and coping techniques. As the ranks of female superintendent aspirants grow, this information could be useful to those seeking the superintendency. The information could also be useful for a better understanding of how women superintendents dual roles may change in the future as societal roles alter. There is no risk to participants in this study. Confidentiality agreement assures anonymity, and only identification within the group will be reported.

## APPENDIX E

### ENTRY QUESTIONNAIRE

Title of Study:            **PROFESSIONAL CHALLENGES AND COPING STRATEGIES OF WOMEN SUPERINTENDENTS FROM SELECTED SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN ILLINOIS.**

Researcher: Cynthia A. Boudreau, Loyola University Doctoral Candidate

Purpose: Information provided in this questionnaire will be used to assist the researcher in preparing for the direct interview.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Position: \_\_\_\_\_ Years in position: \_\_\_\_\_ Years in District: \_\_\_\_\_

School District Name: \_\_\_\_\_

School District Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number(s) : (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ / (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

Most convenient time to receive calls: \_\_\_\_\_

**This study will examine the following two areas of the professional/personal life that confront women superintendents.**

• **Professional Life** - Challenges of, and Coping techniques employed in dealing with:

The Work Itself  
School Board Relations  
Community Relations  
Collegial Relationships  
Goals and Aspirations

• **Personal Life (as related to Professional)** - Challenges of, and Coping Techniques employed in dealing with:

Family Responsibilities/Challenges  
Community/Organization Challenges  
Academic Pursuits  
Goals and Aspirations

**Please answer the following three questions (use back in needed):**

(1) What is one "challenge" that you have encountered as a "woman" superintendent ?

\_\_\_\_\_

(2) What is one "challenge" that you have overcome in balancing your home/family life with the demands of the superintendency ?

\_\_\_\_\_

(3) Do you recognize yourself as one who has used "coping strategies" to maintain your success as school district superintendent ? Please circle: YES NO

Additional Comments? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you for your time in completing this questionnaire. Please return it in the envelope provided by November 15, 1992.**

**APPENDIX F****INTERVIEW GUIDE****PROFESSIONAL CHALLENGES AND COPING STRATEGIES OF  
WOMEN SUPERINTENDENTS FROM SELECTED SCHOOL  
DISTRICTS IN ILLINOIS.**

Respondent: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_  
School District: \_\_\_\_\_  
Interview Site: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Opening Interview Questions:**

(1) Can you elaborate on the "challenge" that you listed on the questionnaire by explaining how it did/did not interfere with your role as a woman superintendent?

(2) Can you elaborate on the "challenge" you cited on the questionnaire that may have been a potential conflict between your professional role of superintendent and your role as family/home caretaker?

**APPENDIX G****WOMEN SUPERINTENDENTS AND THE CHALLENGING / COPING ISSUES  
INTERVIEW QUESTION AREAS AND POSSIBLE PROBES****Challenges of Professional Life:**Hiring Practices / Discrimination

- When did you decide to pursue a superintendency?
- How did you obtain your present position?
- Did you experience any discrimination in your pursuit of advanced leadership positions?
- Do you feel that hiring practices for school leadership positions are changing for women?

The Work Itself

- What is your greatest cause of stress in the superintendency?
- What are your greatest contributors to job satisfaction?
- Do you feel women bring different leadership characteristics to the superintendency?

School Board Relations

- How would you describe your relationship with your school board?
- What were and how have you handled stressful situations with or within your school boards (past or present)?
- What are your perceptions of male and female board members?
  
- Have you overcome stereotypic perceptions (emotionality; lack of finance and building expertise) of women in leadership from school board members?

### Community Relations

- How would you describe your relationship with the community?
- What has caused stress for you from the community?
- Have you overcome stereotypic perceptions (emotionality; lack of finance and building expertise) of women in leadership from the community?

### Collegial / Organization Relationships

- Have you always felt acceptance from other superintendents?
- Have you experienced stress or discrimination from any colleagues or organizations, either school or community groups?

### Subordinate Relationships

- Have you always felt acceptance from subordinates?
- What have been the major stressors in your relationship with those under your leadership?
- Do you perceive differences in your relationship with men and women subordinates?

### Goals and Aspirations

- Do you have other professional goals or aspirations?

## **Challenges of Personal Life (as related to Professional):**

### Family Responsibilities

- What are your major family responsibilities?
- Have you ever experienced stress from role conflict between personal demands and professional demands?

### Community/Organization

- What are your non-professional community or organization affiliations?
- What responsibilities do you have for these organizations?
- Have you experienced any stress from role conflict between personal and professional organizational demands?

### Academic Pursuits

- When or are you presently involved in an academic pursuit?
- Have you experienced stress from the academic pursuit in relationship to your professional or family challenges?

### Goals and Aspirations

- What are some of your personal goals and aspirations as they relate to your professional goals and aspirations?

## **Coping Responses to Professional and Personal Challenges:**

### Networking / Mentor Relationships / Collegial Support

- What are your major group or individual support systems?
- To whom or where do you turn for answers to or support for challenging decisions you may be called upon to make?

### Home Caretaking / Housework Responsibilities

- What are your major home responsibilities?
- How do other family members share in the home responsibilities?
- Do you hire outside help to meet the home responsibilities?
- Are you satisfied with your level of balance between professional and home/family responsibilities?



### Professional / Feminist Organizations

- Do you have a female support group?
- What are your major professional support groups?
- What are your major personal support groups?

### Family / Spouse Support

- Do you find your family to be supportive of your professional responsibilities and goals?

### Personal Activities: Exercise, Recreation, Hobbies

- What are some of your personal methods for relieving stress?
- Do you have an exercise program that you follow?
- What are your personal hobbies or interests?
- How do you enjoy life beyond your work and your family -  
What do you do for you?

### Time Management

- Do you utilize any time management techniques?
- How do you set your short and long term goals?
- How do you set your priorities - professional balanced to personal?

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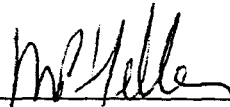
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The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given final approval by the Committee with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

November 23, 1993

Date



Director's Signature