

**WHERE ARE WE NOW? CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS AND PERSPECTIVES OF WOMEN IN  
EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION**

by

**Aimmie Leigh Kellar**

**A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements  
for the degree of Masters of Arts  
Graduate Department of Theory and Policy Studies in Education  
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education  
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**WHERE ARE WE NOW? CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS AND PERSPECTIVES OF WOMEN IN  
EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION**

**Master of Arts, 2013  
Aimmie Leigh Kellar  
Department of Theory and Policy Studies in Education  
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**Abstract**

Women have been underrepresented in administrative roles in education, due to a wide variety of barriers. In the province of Ontario, women comprise approximately seventy one percent of teachers, yet occupy only sixty percent of school principal and vice principal roles. More recently, there has been an increase in the ranks of women working as principals and vice-principals; this study examines one Ontario School Board using quantitative and qualitative data. It finds that the percentage of women working as administrators has moved closer to a reflection of the provincial percentage of women in teaching. Interviews with active school administrators reveal the barriers and supports that are important. Their contributions reveal three distinct themes: the importance of mentorship and peer networks, the challenges of maintaining a work / family balance, and the continued importance of gender in educational administration.

To Nathan, Tess and Clark. My support and inspiration, always.

To my parents, for the encouragement, often in the form of childcare – an irony which is not lost on me, given the nature of this project.

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## Introduction

### Background and Significance

The role of women in the modern workforce has seen both evolutions and revolutions. Educational administration is no different. In the early days of education in Ontario, women dominated the one-room school house, responsible not only for teaching, but for maintaining student rosters and records and ensuring that all aspects of the education act were adhered to, accountable to their communities and school boards (Wallice 2002). Since the middle of the twentieth century however, education in this province, and indeed across Canada, became increasingly bureaucratic. Though World War II generated a spike in the numbers of women working in professional fields – educational administration included – it was short-lived as male soldiers returned home and reclaimed their traditional roles. At this point in the post-war era, it was difficult to find a woman in a leadership role in education at all (Wallice 2002). Indeed teaching itself was considered by some to be a ‘careerless profession’ – one where there is little to no hierarchy to worry about and where one can move in and out easily as life circumstances change; perfect for women planning on or raising children (Biklen 1986). A female principal or vice-principal would have been a rarity, if not an oddity. The ranks of teachers were large, occupied more by women than men, all remaining near the bottom of the policy-making hierarchy, “in brief, the general pattern in schools [was] that many women teach and a few men supervise, evaluate and manage” (



Ortiz and Marshall 1988, p. 123). The historical record shows that “as educational organizations became more and more bureaucratized in Ontario, women became increasingly over-represented in teaching positions and men became over represented in positions of authority in educational bureaucracies” (Wallace 2002, p. 6).

As the twentieth century moved on, teaching and administration had become separate but mutually dependent professions, and schools more hierarchical as well as professional places within the public arena (Ortiz and Marshall 1988). For much of the twentieth century and even into the twenty-first, “male principals controlled their subordinates through the greater status and power accorded men in the larger society, and the sexual division of labor meant that men obtained the better and higher-level positions and women were channeled into elementary school classrooms” (Glazer 1991, p 8). Eventually, women did begin to show up in the principal’s office as effective school leaders, however largely at a cost. For a woman to be a principal, sacrifices were usually required in terms of family and personal life. With the age of affirmative action, education - both teaching and administration - felt the effects of this movement, for both the good and the bad (Shakeshaft 1998). Indeed at all of these stations, educational researchers have looked at gender and what role it plays in terms of limiting or supporting advancement into administration. And so again, well into the new millennium those with an interest in educational administration must begin to wonder, where are we now?

From another perspective, education as a profession has endured countless upheavals in terms of the nature of the work itself. The role of the school administrator – be it principal or vice-principal – is no exception to these changes. In just the past two decades, school

administrators have undergone a radical redefinition of their roles, in terms of labor union affinities, ministry expectations, board responsibilities and public accountability. It is no surprise then that many boards of education in this province have echoed a well-documented sentiment that there is a dearth, if not drought, of talent willing to take on educational administration in the role of formal school based leaders – principals and vice-principals (Howley, Andrianaivo and Perry, 2005). “The need for effective leadership rotation/succession strategies has become more apparent because of the loss of experienced leaders to retirement in many school districts and the growing crisis in such districts for the recruitment and training of new leaders” (Reynolds, White, Brayman and Moore, 2008 p. 36). With many boards of education actively trying to recruit talent to fill these positions, the question of how to increase participation in the field arises.

As of the 2010-2011 school year, over seventy percent of the teaching population in Ontario is comprised of women (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2011). It makes sense to assume that this would produce a large pool of talented and dynamic women from which to draw into roles as principals and vice-principals. Yet, is that indeed the case? In fact, it is not. Using the same data from the Ministry of Education, in Ontario in 2011, though a full seventy-one percent of the teaching force was women, this translated into only sixty percent of the administration pool being women (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2011). Though males comprise thirty percent of the teaching population in Ontario, they represent forty percent of the administrators in the province. Still today, women are underrepresented in school administration while men remain over represented. As it is becoming increasingly difficult to attract talented candidates to this role, an important question is, why? With today’s scarcity of

willingness and capability in leadership, succession planners need to be able to draw upon as many prospective leaders as they can. Eliminating gender barriers and biases is a key step towards ensuring the most talented leaders - whether male or female - make their way to the principal's office.

And so, with an eye on the past and the legacies of all of the changes in educational professions, the effects of feminism and changes in broader society, and with an interest in the future towards filling administrative jobs in schools with the best and most capable people, my research question emerges: *Does current data reveal an increase in women entering principal and vice-principal roles? What conditions contribute to these changes?*

## Review of Literature on Women and Educational Administration

### Literature to Inform Quantitative Data

In terms of demographics, “the woman administrator is likely to be in her mid-to-late forties and have fifteen years of teaching experience...The typical male administrator is likely to only have taught for five years and is considerably younger than his female counterpart” (Pigford and Tonnsen, 1993, p.2-3). This highlights two key demographic features in the study of women administrators – those of age and experience. In terms of experience, “Women administrators are likely to have spent more years in the classroom before becoming administrators (12.3 years compared to 9 years for men) and, on average, to have fewer years of experience as principals (6.1 years compared to 11.2 years for men)” (Hammer & Gerald, 1990, as cited in Glazer, 1991, p. 13). To view this data in its most positive light, “women tend to be experienced educators at the time of their first administrative appointment (e.g., Johnston, Yeakey, & Moore, 1980; Ortiz, 1982; Paddock, 1978; Spencer & Kochan, 2000)” (Young and McLeod, 2001, p. 471). Furthermore, according to Ortiz and Marshall (1988), because “women’s experience in teaching is much lengthier than men’s...The additional experience may also contribute to women’s greater facility in instruction [as administrators] and in dealing with supervision of matters related to instruction” (p. 133). On the other hand, this lengthier time in the classroom, reflected in less time in administrative roles also suggests barriers to professional promotion for women. According to Tabin (1986), although men are now assuming a much greater role in childcare, the decision to parent at home, for whatever length of time, is one that continues to affect primarily the careers of women. The higher

average age of women principals and their longer pre-administrative teaching careers reflect the choice of many women to devote some time to child rearing before obtaining administrative positions. Indeed, in her study of Australian teachers holding administrative qualifications of both genders, Shirley Sampson (1987) found that only 9% were completely uninterested in promotion into administration, but 46% of males versus 24% of females had actually applied in the past five years for such positions, partially because of responsibilities relating to the 'second shift' (as cited in Jayne, 1989). Ortiz and Marshall (1988) explain the longer teaching careers of women administrators as largely because "leaving teaching for administration is more traumatic for women than for men...Persistence in teaching represents satisfaction. Women value instruction and accept membership in the teacher work group that tends to resist male and administrator norms and to work divorced from instructional goals...women's socialization for administration requires not only redefining administrative roles but also redefining self" (p. 131). Finally, Pigford and Tonnsen (1993) point out that in addition to women typically spending more time in the classroom before entering administration as compared to their male counterparts, "ironically, the one criterion on which women would have an advantage – years of teaching experience – is devalued in the administrative process" (p. 15). With all of these factors in mind, the quantitative data relating to age and experience helps to answer the question of where women currently stand as administrators.

### **Literature to Inform Central Ideas**

What becomes clear in recent qualitative research into gender divisions in school administration is that declaring progress with regard to women's participation in leadership roles is a simplistic response to a complex issue. Women's participation rates vary over time and by context, and participation rates are slow to change. Race, ethnicity, age, and sexual orientation can be factors that often interact with gender (Collard and Reynolds, 2005; Reynolds, White, Brayman and Moore, 2008). In their study of directors, superintendents and administrators in rural and urban boards, Reynolds, White, Brayman and Moore (2008) found two key items in terms of gender considerations to succession planning: one is that the needs of the overall system always trumped those of the individual, whether male or female. The second is that "fit was most important when considering rotation or succession. And again, what is the best fit for a school could ultimately be dictated by gender constructs" (p. 45). In essence, gender constructs may not initially appear to be the main impetus for decisions about who becomes a principal and who does not, but a closer look reveals that gender is still a force underlying much of what decision-makers value about responding to the needs of their schools.

### **Leadership Style**

Though this study does not capture the motivations of men in education, it can explore the experiences of a new breed of women educators who have a genuine interest and passion for the administrative roles that are available in a school. Looking at recent notions of leadership style that have come into fashion in schools helps to understand something about today's female administrator. For example, without any discussion of gender, Leithwood and

Mascall (2008) discuss the idea of distributed leadership as a preferred style in today's schools. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) state that "Women do not want to lead the way their male role models have lead. Typically this has depicted heroic ideals of leadership, but women seem more interested in collective leadership, promoting shared decision making and grappling with issues of equity and diversity" (p. 41). This is distributed leadership. An evolving style of school leadership appears to be more in keeping with traditional notions of female leadership behaviour. In earlier literature, Ortiz and Marshall (1988) found that, "the studies that have contrasted the effectiveness of men and women school administrators have consistently reported several areas in which women do as well or better than men...Women school administrators contribute to higher teacher performance and student achievement...take a more active stance toward instructional leadership...more desirable supervisory practices that yields higher ratings for teachers in schools with women principals...women principals were more concerned than men with students' individual differences. Women principals have also demonstrated superior knowledge of teaching methods and have exhibited more concern with the objectives of teaching" (133). This is not to say definitively that women make better school leaders than men – that is far beyond the scope of this study. Rather, it is to say that despite what the research may show about women being reluctant to take on the role of the principal or vice-principal, or viewed as less desirable candidates, typical female leadership models demonstrate that women are certainly up to the task. Regardless of which gender – if either – can be empirically proven better suited to administration, these tendencies seemingly tied to gender may be a factor to explaining any trends that may be uncovered in terms of the female

administrators' perceived barriers and supports in becoming and working as school based administrators.

### **Entering Into Administration**

There is a wealth of literature available around philosophical implications involved in looking at gender issues in educational administration. In terms of the big ideas surrounding the fundamental differences between women and men working in education and in particular, administration, Carol Shakeshaft (1989) says that "Most women enter teaching to teach but most men enter teaching to administer" (p. 87). Or, to put it even more plainly, Pigford and Tonnsen (1993) posit that "Women nurture learners; men run schools" (p. 1). Though my research does not intend to explore explicitly the difference in motivations between the sexes, this idea helps to inform some of the conditions surrounding women's willingness, or reticence, to become a part of school administration, and possibly speak to some of the barriers underpinning these decisions.

In terms of perceptions Shakeshaft (1989) continues, "Women perceived many administrative positions as entailing too much paperwork and not enough educational content and, therefore, these jobs were not of interest to them. These same women don't value administration and the role of administrators; neither do they desire a position that separates them from students. To translate this into lack of motivation or aspiration is to misunderstand or ignore the reasons women chose to enter teaching in the first place" (p. 88). Women do achieve and they do have aspirations, but what has traditionally been viewed as aspirational behaviour is typically measured against typical achievement behaviours of men. Grogan and



Shakeshaft (2011) further discuss this idea of perspective in that “Barrier research opened the question of female approaches to leadership and to seeing the world from a female lens, as opposed to comparing male and female behaviours within a previously identified male paradigm” (p. 33). In order to make any kind of conclusions about women as effective administrators, it is then necessary to learn about women from women rather than measuring them against male experiences and standards.

Shakeshaft’s ideas are compelling, extremely well argued and grounded in research, but at the same time, I also wonder if these attitudes about women entering into education to teach and men entering into education to administer have changed somewhat in the two decades that have since elapsed. To this end, Smith’s (2011) life-history study of forty women in educational administration attempts to categorize women into three broad categories as planners, protégées or pragmatists, based on their path into administration. The table below summarizes Smith’s conclusions about the characteristics that each group of women administrators exhibited as they approached a career in school administration.

Planners	Protégées	Pragmatists
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- attach a great deal of importance to career, and that take a strategic approach to their career progression</li> <li>- have clear aspirations from an early stage of their careers and a clear view of the steps they need to take in order to achieve their career goals</li> <li>- take responsibility themselves for their own career development</li> <li>- highly motivated, and have a very positive attitude to their</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- rather than taking full responsibility for their own career development, they depend on the support of others, usually senior colleagues, in the professional domain</li> <li>- avoid making conscious career decisions or planning career moves alone and are reluctant to apply for promotions unless actively encouraged to do so by a respected mentor, often a senior manager</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- are willing to seek promotion and take on additional responsibility at work but only if the resulting workload is manageable, and does not detract from other responsibilities, such as caring for children</li> <li>- see career decisions framed largely by factors external to themselves (usually motherhood)</li> <li>- nonetheless exert their agency by negotiating their</li> </ul>

<p>job</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- approach is characterized by a high level of personal agency, manifested in a tendency to be self-driven and self-motivated</li> <li>- demonstrate a belief in themselves as capable leaders, able to exert influence and effect change</li> <li>- self-expectations are high, as is their self-esteem, and they are not discouraged from continuing to seek promotion after making unsuccessful applications</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- tend to under-value their own ability and potential, and lack self-confidence with regard to career matters</li> <li>- feel a need for encouragement and feedback from others to boost their professional self-esteem and confidence and are much more likely to apply for promotions as a result of suggestions, encouragement and mentoring from professional colleagues</li> <li>- the support of (usually senior) colleagues can therefore be a determining factor in the career development of the protégée</li> </ul>	<p>circumstantial constraints and take on what is manageable, balancing judgements about work against the realities of their lives outside work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- pragmatists differ from protégés, in that they will seek out opportunities and make decisions for themselves if this combines well with, for instance, family</li> </ul>
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(Smith, 2011, p. 15-22)

In terms of motivation, Smith's study also allows for a revisit of Shakeshaft's (1989) notion that "most women enter teaching to teach but most men enter teaching to administer". She classified two different types of female teachers and principals and found them either to be pupil centered or politicized. Those who were pupil centered held that "the main means by which they could make a difference for students was through teaching. The opposite was true of the politicized leaders, who saw the need to gain status and power in order to make a difference. A fundamental difference between the two types is that, while they have in common a commitment to a certain set of values, the politicized leaders relate this to a broader, political context" (17). This accepts further complexity as to the motivations of women administrators and as such is helpful in discussing the motivations of the women principals and vice-principals involved in this study.

## Mentoring and Networks

In qualitative studies examining barriers and supports to women administrators, the concepts of mentoring and peer networks frequently emerge as pivotal forces shaping women's career paths. Mentorship is generally understood in the literature to be relationships where women are aspiring to become, or just starting out in a career as an educational administrator. In their study of over ninety female administrators, Young and McLeod (2001) found that "women's entrance is contingent on their career aspirations (i.e., what they hope to accomplish and how), their experiences with administrative role models, their exposure to transformative leadership styles, and their opportunities to garner support for entering administration" (466), with several of these conditions being fulfilled by a professional mentor. They go on to state that, "the importance of...administrative role models cannot be overstated. For the women who participated in this study, the administrators with whom they worked had profound effects on their ideas of educational leadership and their decision to enter administration" (476). As crucial as mentorship is, this too can highlight the gender divide and further enhance the hierarchy that favors males. According to Jayne (1989), "men are naturally 'mentored' by other men in the hierarchy. For women this has, at least until now, needed to be encouraged for it to occur. Mentors provide their protégés with advice, 'visibility' and sponsorship" (p. 113). Young and McLeod also report another gender difference when it comes to mentoring from their study of women administrators. Where their research found that many men have access to mentors in administration prior to embarking on administrator roles themselves, in the majority of cases, women did not have contact with administrative support networks until after they had entered an administrative position.

Peer networks on the other hand, provide a similar system of support, but generally differ from mentorship in that the women are seeking advice and support from colleagues on issues encountered in their roles, rather than on issues pertaining to career advancement, as peers tend, by definition to be of a similar status. These networks are nonetheless just as important for women administrators, because of the particular professional responsibilities of school principals for whom confidentiality is an essential quality, close friendships between female principals are of great importance (Wallace, 2002). These peer networks are often cemented early in an administrator's career, frequently while still completing professional credentials, as this is a place where all of the participants are generally working towards the same professional goals and administrative ambition is the norm. In her findings, Jayne states that in such circumstances, "the female students particularly value the increased confidence gained from the experiential learning and the close support of their peers. Extensive informal networks have been forged, many of which remain active for some considerable time after completion of [the administrator's] course" (1989, p. 112).

### **Barriers**

For women to move forward in educational administration, it is important to understand what may be holding them back. Carol Shakeshaft (1989) frames her discussion of the barriers presented to women pursuing administrative roles in education as falling into one of two categories: overt and covert. Those barriers that Shakeshaft would deem covert are described as sex discrimination operating largely outside of consciousness; for example the different kind of encouragement and support that females may experience (or lack) as children

as compared to their male peers, the nature of support from spouses and personal and educational experiences that shape later expectations about professional fulfillment. On the other hand, overt discrimination is more blatant sex discrimination that becomes readily apparent in hiring policies and practices and on-the-job conditions that discriminate or hinder one's achievement or advancement due to gender. Pigford and Tonnsen (1993) also position barriers to female administrators into a dichotomous framework. Here, the duality lies in the differentiation between those barriers classified as internal and those that are external. Operating in a similar way to Shakeshaft's covert barriers, these internal barriers include socialization in the home occurring in a female's early years, as well as in school where boys are commonly socialized to be leaders and girls to be helpers. Furthermore, "not only have women been socialized in ways that have not made them administratively inclined, those who hire have been socialized to believe that those qualities frequently associated with females are antithetical to those qualities needed to manage and conversely that qualities needed to manage are ones not possessed by women" (p. 113). Pigford and Tonnsen follow this thread of socialization further to demonstrate that later down the career path, this treatment puts aspiring female leaders in a damned if you do and damned if you don't position: those who embrace their typically 'feminine' traits face being overlooked or not taken seriously as leaders, while those who adopt more typically 'masculine' traits risk being perceived as too abrasive, too ambitious or too cold. Further to this, in her study of female administrators, Wallice (2002) offers that

many women felt that dressing, acting, and leading 'like a man' was necessary in order to command respect from other school principals – mostly male – as well as their own

school staff and community, but it left them feeling uncomfortable in their own bodies. On the other hand, presenting oneself in a way that was congruent with one's socialization as a woman means that many women were trivialized or sexualized among male colleagues. Either option is troubling for another reason as well: conformity of a particular way of being male or female constrains possibilities for non-traditional men and women in roles of school leadership. (p. 18)

Pigford and Tonnsen's internal barriers also include lack of confidence, lack of role models, fear of rejection (by subordinates as well as superiors) and finally the high cost of success in terms of sacrificing family and jeopardizing marital status. More recently, however, Young and McLeod (2001) have responded to such literature about internal barriers, "where women are not socialized to aspire to leadership because of gender role stereotyping and discrimination, this has been forcefully critiqued – such explanations locate the problem within women and fail to address larger societal and ideological issues" (p. 466).

There is also much discussion of the idea of the 'old boys' club' being an informal – though very powerful - screening process guarding entrance into educational administration. Somers Hill and Raglan (1995) discuss the significance and impact of the male social network as an extremely powerful barrier that limits the opportunities for advancement of women. Termed as a "lack of political savvy", they discuss this social force that, though perhaps not overtly out to discriminate against women, limits their opportunities to be a part of important conversations and decisions, simply because many of these "take place on the golf course" where women are simply not present, and likely not invited. Somers Hill and Ragland also

outline other barriers to women including male dominance in leadership and hiring positions, lack of meaningful mentoring and a lack of career positioning – that is having the prerequisite skills and experiences that are popular with males doing the hiring. In this sense, male administrators commonly serve as the gate-keepers to the principalship. Wallice (2002) goes even further than seemingly benign male social networks, charging that, “mostly male gatekeepers put significant barriers in the way of women who wished to become school administrators by imposing quota systems and programs that were organized around male norms. Women often accepted these limitations as congruent with their own understanding of their family responsibilities. However, many women questioned these arrangements of gendered privilege and acted individually and collectively to challenge barriers to their desire to become school principals” (18). In all, barriers to advancement towards principalships and superintendencies continue to be derived from a combination of gender bias, lack of mentors, traditional hiring practices, inadequate advertising of job opportunities, perpetuation of role stereotypes, few opportunities to gain practical experience, and limited job availability in a period of enrollment decline” (Edson, 1988 as cited in Glazer, 1991, p. 15).

Pragmatically, Shakeshaft (1989) asserts that after a discussion of all the overt and covert barriers, what weighs the most for many women “is not the internal barriers that keep women from aspiring but rather the reality of a world that expects that if a woman works outside the home she will continue to do the major portion of work inside the home as well. The difficulties of juggling the full share of family responsibility with administrative tasks may just not seem worth it to many women” (p. 89). For Shakeshaft, it is really an androcentric world – we can look at women not applying, not being qualified and so on and so forth, but you

need to go back even further to understand that this is a male dominated world and males and male behaviours are valued where women and women's behaviours are held in a separate, less valued place. That is a significant and dire statement. If however the demographics continue to show positive change in the numbers of female administrators entering the role of the principal, can this positive change also be shown through a decrease of such 'androcentric' attitudes and barriers to women entering and currently working in school administration?

### **Constructs of Power and Leadership**

The nature of power and leadership are important concepts that affect, and are affected by, women. In terms of women as educational administrators, the conditions required appear to be dynamic rather than static. In their 1988 research on women in educational administration, Ortiz and Marshall observed, "educational institutions, like many other complex organizations, have taken hierarchical form, displaying varying degrees of bureaucratization and emphasizing control and competition rather than the form and character of collaborative or cooperative service organizations. The work of administrators who maintain hierarchical control is valued over that of educators who view collaboration and cooperation as more suitable in the operation of schools. To the extent that women fall in the latter group, they run the risk of being overlooked by sponsors, historically male, who adhere to the dominant view of control and competition" (126).

To this end, Bascia (2001) examines four key conditions in the lives of female educators that affect their ascension into principal or vice-principal roles, including societal constructs, non-classroom work assignments and responsibilities, critical or "trigger" moments and the



spatial and temporal nature of women's leadership work. The last two items of Bascia's framework stress that what makes a woman a leader is not easily generalized or isolated to a particular context. Similarly, Strachan's (1999) comparative study of three female secondary school principals who all initially reported to practice very similar leadership styles, were all influenced by their own very different value systems, impacting how each went about and achieved their individual school goals. These female leaders were active and creative in terms of making up their leadership style and method as they went along to suit their individual contexts.

These ideas about leadership styles become important as they bleed into ideas about barriers for women in administration. Doughty and Leddick (2007) studied the perceptions of supervisees to supervisors with particular attention to the influence gender holds between them. In their findings, many stereotypical constructs still hold true and people act accordingly. For example: male supervisors were found to be less likely to give negative feedback to female subordinates, with their thinking being that they can handle a man's anger but not a woman's tears. Ultimately, this results in women not getting adequate opportunities to evaluate their own performance and change for the better. In addition, male supervisors asked for male supervisees opinions twice as much as they did of their female supervisees. In conversations with mixed groups of supervisors and supervisees of both genders, women tended to offer topics for discussion while men decided the direction for the conversation. Overall female supervisors were shown to be relationship oriented versus male supervisors who were shown to be more task oriented. Fennell (1998) also discussed the idea of women as leaders through an examination of the different power structures typically found at play in schools. The women

leaders in these studies almost exclusively favored power with and power through as the means for positive change in their schools. This is not surprising when considered with Grogan and Shakeshaft's (2011) construct of the five ways that women lead as summarized in the chart below:

<b>Relational leadership:</b>	Horizontal rather than hierarchical leadership – accomplishing goals with and through others. Women may not be powerful in the traditional sense, but “it is not surprising that in order for many women to be comfortable with the notion of holding power, power needs to be conceptualized as something that is shared with others and that is not power over but, rather, power with” (p. 7).
<b>Leadership for social justice:</b>	Women, more often than men, talk about the reasons that they got into education as wanting to change lives, make the world a better place, change institutions so that they serve the needs of all and all have a greater opportunity for success.
<b>Leadership for learning:</b>	Typical female leadership style tends to appear more collaborative than typical male leadership. Women principals are more likely to “introduce and support strong programs in staff development, to encourage innovation, and to experiment with instructional approaches” (p. 18). This is largely because they have spent more time, on average, in the classroom prior to becoming administrators than their male counterparts. “Women educational leaders often make decisions based on the priorities of student learning” (p. 19).
<b>Spiritual leadership:</b>	Women report deriving power from connectedness and spiritual leadership works through a sense of connectedness to others, to self or to the greater world.
<b>Balanced leadership:</b>	After a day of work leading a school, many women leaders go home to another full day of household and caretaker responsibilities (p. 21). Interestingly, Grogan and Shakeshaft report that, “this has brought a dimension to their leadership that can in fact enhance performance” (p. 23).

In terms of getting things done at the school “the women tended to use four of French and Raven's (1959) power sources – expert, resource, referent, informational as well as legitimate power, with coercive only as a last resort. In terms of change strategy, they used

normative-re-educative in combination with rational-empirical ones with a very minor use of power-coercion...the latter being the predominant method of the four men in the study (Jayne, 1989 p. 112).

As a more recent response to these gender based categorical behaviours, Damianos (2004) in her study of women administrators in Ontario writes that, “recent feminist educational thinking has come to question and challenge older frameworks, particularly any unitary theory of gender that positions men and women in diametrically oppositional categories. Rather, absolute gender constructs are seen as problematic. If some of the literature points to traditional feminine leadership traits, qualities such as nurturing, cooperating, caring, communicating, building relationships, being student and curriculum focused, to name just a few, the women certainly seemed to exemplify and actually prefer such approaches” but that these roles were constantly in flux and “nothing was ever really constant, stable or absolute” (359). Rather, in terms of power and leadership, Damianos depicts “a post-modern orientation [which] offers broader, more realistic views into these women’s experiences” (360). This means that on the one hand, women can recall a distinct gendered hierarchy based on a male-defined culture, with men occupying the upper echelons of power, an old boys’ network and discriminatory and prejudiced attitudes functioning to keep them outside these offices, yet on the other hand women can also speak of the men who mentored or actively supported them. There are no longer any uniform, clearly defined and absolute truths about one’s gender.

From this literature review, several key findings guide my study. First, the demographic information is important in the creation of my own administrator profile for women principals and vice principals in this Ontario School Board. Second, the qualitative analysis of the interviews is influenced by factors which researchers like Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011), Young and MacLeod (2001), Jayne (1989) and Wallice (2002) recognize as distinct in women administrators, such as motivations, leadership style and job perceptions. These factors are central to the key themes that emerge from the interviews of work/family life balance, mentoring and peer networks and the importance of gender.

## Methodology

### Literature That Shapes My Methodology

The population numbers of teachers and administrators in Ontario in 1998 shows that 28% of secondary administrators were women, a figure which had risen to 44% by 2000, and to 60% by 2010 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2000, 2011). On the surface, it would appear that this is a huge step for gender equity, as the number of female administrators has increased significantly, even surpassing parity with the number of male administrators. Upon further examination however, Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) point out that “Although representation of women in school leadership has increased, women still do not fill administrative positions in proportion to their numbers in teaching, or in proportion to those who are now trained and certified to become administrators” (p. 28). In fact, in literature focused on gender in educational administration, it is frequently stated that women are woefully underrepresented in administration given their dominance in the teaching ranks (Grogan and Shakeshaft, 2011; Smith, 2011; Loder, 2005; Shakeshaft, 1989). While a ‘fair’ view may be to promote balance and equality among the sexes in terms of numbers of male versus female administrators, this does not truly represent the numbers in the teaching profession, from which the administrative pool is drawn, where the number of female teachers outweighs the number of males. Indeed, Gill (1997) found that women only comprised about 30% of school principals, despite the fact that they are much better represented in educational administrative programs at faculties of education, both at the Masters and Doctoral levels. This is further complicated by hiring practices in school boards as Reynolds, White, Brayman and Moore (2008) point out: the idea

of fairness soon becomes equated to the idea of balance. As such, often hiring policies – generally unofficial but firmly entrenched – dictate that there must be equal or balanced numbers of females and males in administration, or if there is already a male administrator, boards may seek a female administrator for balance. In terms of official policy, this is generally not explicitly stated as what Clegg (1981) would refer to as a strategic or state rule, but rather it is ‘just how things are done’.

Using provincial demographic data as well as data from a single school board, a profile of the female administrator can be constructed, and assessed for change over the last decade. With this information, we can begin to understand just who is the female administrator in Ontario today? According to the research of Pigford and Tonnsen (1993), a woman administrator is likely to be in her mid-to-late forties and have fifteen years of teaching experience. The typical male administrator is likely to have only taught for five years and is considerably younger than his female counterpart – late thirties to very early forties. Almost two decades later in Ontario, does this portrait still ring true?

In order to go deeper into an understanding of the female administrator’s experiences, I used semi-structured interviews to capture the voices of women in order to help examine what the demographics tell us. I created two cohorts of women administrators, ten years apart in experience. Borrowing from Ryder’s (1965) ideas in sociological and anthropological study around life course study, “a cohort may be defined as the aggregate of individuals (within some population definition) who experienced the same event within the same time interval” and “if change does occur, it differentiates cohorts from one another, and the comparison of their

careers becomes a way to study change” (844-845). The entry of a fresh cohort into educational administration represents the potential for change, without specifying the content or direction of that change. Studies of women in educational administration provide many examples of cohort – or generational – studies of female administrators that attempt to capture patterns and trends relating to change over time. For many sociological studies, a participant is deemed a member of a particular cohort based on birthdate. Ryder suggests that people who are born at or around the same time experience similar social and historical events that may affect their role in similar ways. For this study, it made more sense to divide the cohorts based on their years of experience as administrators. Once these cohorts are defined, a lens is created through which we can attempt to study change.

This change is reflected in attitudes, motivations and perspectives surrounding barriers and supports along the path to becoming, and subsequently working as, a school administrator. The notion of “intercohort variability” (Ryder 1965) allows that not all members of a cohort will experience or perceive events in the same way, accepting that age, or the date that one begins her administrative role, can be arbitrary in terms of generalizing trends for the whole cohort, and other factors such as culture, religion and personal circumstance can and do play a role in these women’s perspectives as well.

A cohort analysis serves as the primary framework for the qualitative portion of this project. Four cohort studies illustrate the methodological framework on which I have based my own methodology. In the first, Reynolds (1987, 1983) surveyed two generations of administrators working for the Toronto District School Board as principals between 1940 and

1980. When asked why they became administrators, ‘the right place at the right time’ was the key response that many of both genders credited as their motivation. Between the two generations, some changes in the participants perceptions of society were evident, however male and female positions in the teacher hierarchy remain relatively unchanged.

Tabin (1993) provides another study of generation leaders, categorized as recent women appointees versus experienced women appointees (pre 1982 and post 1987). Unlike Reynolds’ study however, this work did not include any male administrator respondents. Despite this, the women administrators reported very similar results in terms of motivation to get into education as did Reynolds. In addition, Reynolds, White, Brayman and Moore (2008) provide a generational study of secondary school leaders, with a more specific focus on succession planning and principal rotation. The data support a modest increase in women entering into secondary administration from 1940 to 1980, “but one could question, as we do in this article, why the rate of change was so slow, what might have been happening in other contexts and what is the situation today” (p. 33).

Finally, Loder’s (2005) generational study of women administrators - born between either 1931 to 1948 or 1960 to 1972 - focuses her argument even more specifically. She claims that barriers like gender stereotypes and discrimination, lack of mentoring, and ‘old boys’ networks – the typical culprits to women being denied access to administrative roles – are now being overshadowed by work / family conflicts in both the United States and Great Britain. “Overall, women have not been successful in offsetting their increasing responsibilities in the workplace with decreased obligations on the home front. An unprecedented number of



women in the United States are working mothers, which makes child care a pressing concern...And as the baby boom generation ages, not only is child care a pressing concern but also care for aging parents” (743). This study takes all of the aforementioned barriers into account and specifically borrowing from Loder, asks pointed questions about barriers created by having dependent children as a prospective or acting educational administrator.

### **Methodology for This Study**

This study uses mixed methods. It was completed in two distinct phases – the first being quantitative and the second qualitative. The quantitative phase consists of data collection from the human resources department of the school board and statistical analysis using statistical software (SPSS). The second part of this study is qualitative and consists of interviews with participants about their perspectives on their experiences as female school administrators.

The reason for the mixed methods approach is to be able to fully answer my research question. The quantitative piece works to ascertain whether there actually has been an increase over time in female administrators (both in the province of Ontario, and in a particular school board, which may or may not reflect these provincial trends) and whether the demographic information confirms or refutes the trends cited in earlier literature.

Subsequently the qualitative piece hopes to contribute to the conversation about why such trends may be occurring. Participant interviews were selected because I wanted to maintain as clear a voice as possible from the women around which this study centers. In addition, interviews afford the opportunity for much richer data than a tool like survey questionnaires.

Given the personal nature of the decisions that women face on their path to become administrators, this rich detail is invaluable. Though interview participant numbers are smaller than a survey or questionnaire sample, the trade-off in terms of detail is helpful in terms of answering my research question.

With the exception of the Ontario Ministry of Education data provided in the quantitative section of this project, all of the data gathered and the research conducted is from one school board in Ontario. This is a mid-sized school board in terms of both population and geography, and contains both urban and rural schools.

As an important part of the ethics protocol for this project and in the application to conduct research within this board, I affirmed that the identity of the school board and the participants would remain confidential. In the body of this paper it is simply referred to as ‘the School Board’ or more simply, ‘the Board’. In addition, Pseudonyms have been used to conceal identities of the interview participants. Transcripts of all interviews are available to support the authenticity of the comments provided.

### **Selection of sample**

The quantitative data include the entire population of administrators from the School Board, both male and female. This data were collected in two data ‘snapshots’: the first snapshot captured data as of September 1, 2000 and the second snapshot captured data as of September 1, 2012. These two data groups allowed me to create two cohorts; I then created a demographic profile for both, and compared and contrasted their features. These two school

board cohorts serve as a sample of the population of school based administrators in Ontario's publicly funded schools (both Public boards and Roman Catholic boards), as a comparison to the statistical data about numbers of administrators as provided by the Ontario Ministry of Education for the years 2000-2001 and 2010-2011 (at the time of this writing, this was the most recent data available).

The interview sample was obtained through an email invitation to all of the female administrators currently working as principals or vice-principals. Each potential participant was informed about the research question and the nature of this project. They were also provided a copy of the interview questions. I was able to secure participation and consent from ten female administrators in this group, which represents roughly ten percent of the number of female administrators currently working in this School Board. I also sought a fair representation among the interview participants from among the two cohorts outlined above in the quantitative piece of the analysis – that is those who were administrators in 2000 (a.k.a. 'more experienced administrators') and those who have become administrators since 2005 (a.k.a. 'newer administrators'). Fortunately, this also provided for a balance between those who are vice-principals and those who are principals, though among the groups, those who have been in administration since 2000 were more likely to be principals while those entering administration since 2005 were more of a mix between vice-principals and principals, due to the experience typically expected to secure a position as a principal.

### **Type of data to be collected with suggested instruments/draft questions/protocols**

My research question requires both qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative data responds to the first part of the question regarding whether or not there has been an increase in women entering school administration. I submitted an application to conduct research with the School Board in order to collect this data from their Human Resources department. In a preliminary meeting with an HR manager, I learned that this information is consistently collected and available dating back to 1998 through their software system called WANG. Therefore, the type of data that I requested encompassed a list of all school administrators that included for each:

- Years of classroom/teaching experience
- Date of appointment to first administrative role (likely as VP)
- Date of appointment to principal role (if applicable)
- Birthdate
- Gender

The data does not include any names, employee numbers or specific employment locations.

For the qualitative portion of my research, I was able to access female administrators in the School Board through my application to conduct research. This allowed me an audience with some female administrators who would be willing to participate in a thirty to forty-five minute interview about the supports and barriers that they have faced as females pursuing educational leadership roles. I invited these administrators through an email message (see

Appendix A) sent with the support of both a system principal and a superintendent who have district-wide responsibilities for leadership development in the School Board. There are approximately ninety female administrators in this Board and I invited them all to participate in the interview process. Initially, I had hoped to conduct interviews with eight to ten – making four or five from each cohort grouping. Ultimately, ten female administrators responded within the timeframe required and were able to participate in full interviews for this project. Before they committed to an interview time, I also sent them a list of the interview questions (see Appendix B) in order that they could make an informed decision as to whether or not they wished to participate, and what to expect. Once they agreed to an interview, they also signed off on a consent form (see Appendix C).

### **Ethical Issues and Protocol**

In general, this project presents relatively low risk issues in terms of ethics. There are still however some ethical issues that must be considered. In dealing with both the quantitative and the qualitative data, every effort was made to ensure that the data was kept confidential and safe. To that end, with the quantitative data, there was no request for names or specific school locations which could identify the members of the sample. All of the data – both the qualitative data and the interview data – was kept electronically on an encrypted hard drive and password protected. The data was accessed only by the author of the study and will be destroyed after five years. The digital recordings of the interviews have been kept in a similar manner and will be destroyed after one year. The reports that were sent out for member

checking were requested back and edited for any identifying content. As well, the interview participants only received a copy of their own interview transcripts.

Considering the qualitative data gathered through the interviews, there was the possibility for some discomfort with a couple of the interview questions as they may have pertained to personal or sensitive decisions and events in the participant's life. To this end, I made the interview questions available to anyone interested in taking part in an interview before they made a decision as to whether to participate or not. Once a participant agreed to be interviewed, I again forwarded them a copy of the interview questions ahead of time. Also, I clearly stated and reminded participants when they agreed to the interview, as well as immediately before the interview commenced, that their identities will always be kept completely confidential, that they did not have to answer anything that they did not want to and that they were free to stop the interview at any time.

### **Approach to Analysis of the Data**

The analysis of the quantitative data was completed using SPSS software. This generated some descriptive statistics to examine whether the School Board as a sample of the population from Ontario follows the same trends (as shown in Quick Facts, Ontario Ministry of Education, 2011) in terms of increasing numbers of female administrators since 2000. As well, I used the statistical software to examine the mean ages of female versus male administrators as well as the average number of years of teaching each gender has before entering into administration. For the quantitative data set, I separated the sample into two data snapshots: one comprised of data as of September 1, 2000 and the other comprised of data as of

September 2012. The purpose of gathering two different cohorts of data is to examine whether these factors above (mean age, years of teaching prior to administration) have changed over time in this particular school board, and compare these results to the ones available for the province of Ontario. I have also purposefully selected the first cohort to be in 2000, as immediately prior, the years 1997 – 1999 were a time of great change in the working conditions for administrators, with labor unrest, strikes in Ontario schools and the removal of administrators from the teacher's union collective bargaining units across the province. Though the fallout from these events resonates with many in education still today, I purposefully wanted to avoid selecting the years 1997 through 1999 because they may have affected the statistics that I examined in unpredictable ways.

The analysis of the qualitative data was completed by first transcribing all of the audio-recorded interviews. Transcripts were forwarded back to interview participants for verification and clarification. Any notes or clarifications that they provided were included in the qualitative analysis. NVivo software was initially used to help identify trends in the interviews, however my own reading, classification and grouping of responses proved to be just as effective for the final analysis and allowed for some more nuanced observations. These trends identified in the analysis are compared against the theoretical framework concepts identified in the literature review. My analysis was largely centred around whether the qualitative interview data rejects these theoretical constructs, supports them, or extends them in another direction.

### Quantitative Data and Analysis

The quantitative data were used to formulate a response to the key question proposed in this thesis – where are we now? The data generated about the ages, teaching experiences and terms of principals and vice-principals of both genders serves to illustrate a set of profiles that compare not only male administrators to female administrators, but also female administrators in September of 2000 to female administrators in September of 2012.

The table that follows below provides initial numbers of administrators in these two different periods.

**Table 1: Administrators by Gender  
2000 and 2012**

	N in 2000	2000 Percentage of Total	N in 2012	2012 Percentage of Total
<b>Female Administrators</b>	93	52.25%	129	63.24%
<b>Male Administrators</b>	85	47.75%	75	36.76%
<b>Total Administrators</b>	178		204	

	N in 2000	2000 Percentage of Total	N in 2012	2012 Percentage of Total
<b>Female Principals</b>	54	51.92%	62	56.88%
<b>Male Principals</b>	50	48.08%	47	43.12%
<b>Total Principals</b>	104		109	

	N in 2000	2000 Percentage of Total	N in 2012	2012 Percentage of Total
<b>Female Vice-principals</b>	39	52.70%	67	70.53%
<b>Male Vice-principals</b>	35	47.30%	28	29.47%
<b>Total Vice-principals</b>	74		95	



From this data, it is clear that the overall number of administrators has increased over the past twelve years in this School Board. Leading this overall change is the substantial increase in the percentage of female vice-principals from 2000 to 2012. To see such a jump in the percentage of female vice-principals in 2012 suggest that in the future, their positions as vice-principals may ultimately result in an increase in the percentage of female principals as well.

The total percentages show that in September 2012, female administrators in the School Board are edging closer to the 70% benchmark figure of females in teaching in the province of Ontario (Quickfacts 2010-2011). In fact, the provincial percentage of administrators in 2010-2011 (the most recent available at the time of this writing) indicated that the percentage of women in administration in Ontario Public Schools was 60.0%. This School Board surpasses this level of females in administration (combined principals and vice-principals), and the two time snapshots would indicate that the number of females in administration is increasing, and may continue to do so. To examine the Board data further would also indicate that women vice-principals are faring even better, comprising 70.53% of all vice-principals in this Board. That figure is important in that it does reach, and slightly surpass, parity with the figure of 70% - the all-important percentage of the teaching force in Ontario public schools being female. This indicates that in this position, in this school board, the percentage of vice-principals is a fair reflection of the percentage of women in teaching positions.

To further examine this information about the gender breakdown of administration in this School Board, it is also helpful to look at the percentage break down by panel: elementary

and secondary. Though this information is not available with the September 2000 data from the School Board, the September 2012 data reveal some insights about the current gender split in administration.

**Table 2: Elementary Panel Administrators by Gender and Role  
2012**

	N	Percentage of Total
<b>Total Administrators</b>	147	
<b>Female Administrators</b>	96	65.31%
<b>Male Administrators</b>	51	

	N	Percentage of Total
<b>Total Principals</b>	88	
<b>Female Principals</b>	51	57.95%
<b>Male Principals</b>	37	

	N	Percentage of Total
<b>Total Vice-principals</b>	59	
<b>Female Vice-principals</b>	45	76.27%
<b>Male Vice-principals</b>	14	

**Table 3: Secondary Panel Administrators by Gender and Role  
2012**

	N	Percentage of Total
<b>Total Administrators</b>	57	
<b>Female Administrators</b>	33	57.89%
<b>Total Male Administrators</b>	24	

	N	Percentage of Total
<b>Total Principals</b>	21	
<b>Female Principals</b>	11	52.38%
<b>Total Male Principals</b>	10	

	N	Percentage of Total
<b>Total Vice-principals</b>	36	
<b>Female Vice-principals</b>	22	61.11%
<b>Male Vice-principals</b>	14	

The tables above indicate that in the elementary panel, the percentage of female administrators (total, principals, and vice-principals) significantly surpasses the percentage of female administrators in the secondary panel. In one sense, this is a good predictor again that in the future, as these female elementary school vice-principals gain experience, they will move into principalships, which likely will bolster the percentages of females in this role as well.

The disparity between the percentage of elementary and the percentage of secondary administrators is a pattern that is also reflected at the provincial level. According to the 2010-2011 figures from the Ministry of Education, the percentage of female teachers in elementary schools is 80.8%, while the percentage of administrators is 64.6% - a gap of 16.2%. At the secondary level province-wide, the percentage of female teachers is 54.9%, while the percentage of female administrators is 48.6% (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2011) – a gap of 6.3%. Though there may be a lower overall percentage of female administrators at the secondary level, there is actually a smaller gap between the percentages of female teachers to

female administrators than in the elementary panel. Though the gender breakdown for teaching staff in this school board was not available, the pattern reflected in the percentages of administrators both at elementary and secondary seem to echo the levels of the province.

These figures about the percentages of female administrators address the notion that women have been systematically underrepresented in educational administration. The School Board data indicate an overall increase in female administrators trending towards a percentage that more accurately reflects women's representation in teaching.

The demographic information provided by the School Board can also be used to create a more informed profile of who the 'typical' female administrator is – at least from a demographic sense – and compare her with her male counterpart.

**Table 4: Administrator Profiles By Gender  
2000 and 2012**

Female Administrator Profile	September 2000	September 2012
Mean Age	51.16	49.17
Mean Time Spent Teaching	19.89	14.23
Mean Time as Vice-principal	8.49	4.70
Mean Time as Principal	5.95	4.59
Mean Total Time as Administrator	11.95	6.75

Male Administrator Profile	September 2000	September 2012
Mean Age	50.80	47.47
Mean Time Spent Teaching	15.75	12.53
Mean Time as Vice-principal	10.23	4.99
Mean Time as Principal	12.09	7.99
Mean Total Time as Administrator	17.22	8.96

\*\* all figures are in years\*\*

Over the past twelve years, the female administrator has become younger, falling just inside the 'late forties' age bracket that Pigford and Tonnsen (1993) found to be typical. Pigford and Tonnsen also found however that her male counterpart is likely to be 'considerably younger': according to the information provided by these profiles, he is younger, though it is doubtful that one would call it a considerable margin. Another factor to consider with age is the difference between the 'typical' female and male in both snapshots. In September 2000, there was a 0.32 year age gap between females and males. In September 2012 however, this age gap had widened to 1.7 years – so the women administrators are getting younger, but so are the male administrators, and by a slight factor more.

The female administrator is also spending less time teaching that she did twelve years ago, though she still spends almost two years longer in the classroom than her male colleague. Again in terms of differences at the two different times, in 2000 she spent 4.14 more years in the classroom as compared to only 1.7 more years in 2012. In this respect, the female administrators seem to be catching up to male administrators.

With respect to administrative positions, the female administrator continues to spend slightly less time than the male as a vice-principal, and far less time as a principal. Overall, her total time spent as an administrator is significantly less than her male counterpart. More time spent in teaching generally equates to less time left in the career span for administration. In addition, time spent on maternity leaves and raising children can also extend years in the classroom and delay years as an administrator. Once again, when examining the gap between the genders in 2000 and again in 2012, female administrators are catching up to their male

counterparts with differences between their average time spent in administrative roles shrinking from 2000 to 2012.

The quantitative data provided by the School Board show that there are increasing numbers of women working as school principals and vice-principals over the twelve year period studied. In particular, the rise in women working as elementary vice-principals in 2012 suggests that more women will continue to take on the role of principal in the future. Moreover, this data also reflects the larger trends in the province of Ontario about gender splits in administration more accurately reflecting the same gender splits in teaching. These data are also able to respond to ideas found in literature about average age and time spent both in teaching and in different administrative roles. Women administrators are spending less time as classroom teachers, which suggests longer careers in administration. Though the length of their stay in the principal's or vice-principal's office is still shorter than their male colleagues', the changes indicate that women administrators are beginning to catch up.

### Interview Data and Analysis

Conducting the interviews with these female administrators was a pleasure. They all approached the interviews openly and provided frank and personal perspectives about their individual experiences. Their answers were clear, coherent and direct. Many of them had a story to tell – either their own, or one that they witnessed first-hand from another colleague or friend. Reading their responses, three clear themes emerge as major issues that women administrators face today. The first, and not unexpectedly, is the balance that women must negotiate between the demands of a career in educational administration and the duties and obligations they have to their family – particularly to their spouses and children. The second theme is that gender itself is still an important factor figuring into the professional and personal lives of these women. Gender posed a major challenge that the majority of these women recognized. Gender-based stereotypes and discrimination were encountered on a fairly regular basis. The third theme that emerged was the importance of mentorship and peer networks. Such relationships underpin a multitude of professional decisions facing these administrators, from the very beginnings of their careers through to retirement.

The School Board as a whole was a supportive environment in which to conduct this research and was very helpful in facilitating the interview process. The qualitative data, like the quantitative data, were subdivided into two cohort groupings: more experienced and newer administrators. Administrators in the more experienced group had at least ten years of experience in administration, though not necessarily with this school board. The women in the newer administration group had five years or less working as a school administrator. These

two cohorts served as not only a starting point in examining trends in responses, but also limited one of the interview questions about the participant's personal view of changes over time to the more experienced group only. Please see Appendix B for a full list of interview questions and Appendix D for the interview script.

All of the interviews took place in late August or early September 2012, before the start of the school year.

### The Two Cohorts

Of the ten women who participated in this study, five were principals and five were vice-principals. Four were in the more experienced group, with ten or more years of experience working in administration, and the remaining six had fewer than ten years working as a school administrator. All of these women disclosed that they had children. All of these women were or had been married at some point; three were single mothers or had been at some point in their careers.

	Vice-principal	Principal
<b>Experienced Administrators Cohort</b>		Julianne (E)
		Maya (E)
		Beatrice (E)
		Joan (E)
<b>Newer Administrators Cohort</b>	Gwen (S)	Stephanie (E)
	Katrina (E)	
	Alexandra (S)	
	Paula (E)	
	Denise (S)	
(E) = Elementary Panel      (S) = Secondary Panel		



### **Mentoring and Networks**

In the literature and studies reviewed for this project, the discussion about the work life of a woman administrator invariably turns to that of professional relationships – through mentoring and networks. These are widely seen as integral forces that promote the entrance of women into administration and model how to operate once they are there.

#### **Mentorship Before the Job**

When Alexandra spoke about her time prior to becoming a vice-principal and the leaders that she worked with at the time, she recalled,

My leaders in the building started encouraging me...leaders have to recognize you as a leader and think that you have that potential and then nurture it, and then they encourage you to do X, Y, Z, and to take on X, Y, Z, and so you need to have that as well. Because you can't just promote yourself – you need to have that support and that mentoring from others to see that in you. So informally, mentored I say – definitely nurtured, encouraged strongly and respected for the fact that I wasn't in the position to do it from the time they started encouraging me, because of the special needs of my son. So the encouragement, the mentoring didn't dissipate just because I couldn't do it on their timeline

Similarly, Denise remembered the administrator who she worked with when she decided to embark on the path towards school administration. "I'll admit it, I was scared...but Fran took me under her wing, so to speak. She was a great principal and a great role model. I learned so much about what I needed to do and what kind of principal I wanted to be from watching her.

She was always looking out for...not just me, but a few of us on staff at the time who had similar ambitions". Indeed, the importance of the role model or mentor can be even more direct, as Gwen – a vice-principal with five years of administrative experience - shares that in her career path, school leadership "wasn't something on my radar, it was other people suggesting I take this course or that course or that I consider it. And then the more that I took courses and learned about the role, the more interested I was". Paula, another vice-principal, shares a similar story about how she was prompted into administration.

My first year that I was a teacher, there were a couple people on staff including my principal who said 'you know what, you're going to be an administrator'. And I said 'no, no, no, I'll never be an administrator'. And they said 'no, no you've got sort of the style and the work ethic and that kind of thing that will lead you to administration'. And at the time I didn't really believe it and I wasn't geared towards administration at all. I felt like I had my family ahead and I was going to stay a teacher...but as I was offered the opportunity to become a lead teacher, my principal gave me a lot of opportunities to lead assemblies and take on different leadership roles in the school. And she was really encouraging, 'I really think you should think about admin'. So that gradually lead me into it.

None of these very dedicated vice-principals immediately saw school administration as a destination on their career path. In a similar study of over ninety participants, Young and McLeod (2001) found that "Not one of our female interviewees reported entering the field of education thinking that she would eventually go into administration. Not one." (471). This

could indicate a couple of things: first that the job of an administrator, for whatever reason, may not initially appear to match their own perceived strengths or interests. In fact, women may not necessarily equate administration with success and not see it as a logical progression in their career path (Biklen, as referenced in Tabin, 1993). Second, that often many women teachers do not feel comfortable setting out in their careers with ambitions towards administration. Ortiz and Marshall found that “female teachers are cautious about showing ambition and that they learn not to show that they aspire to administration until they have gained tenure” (132). Often external validation or prompting is needed to push them towards taking on the role of a principal or vice-principal. This concept of ‘anticipatory socialization’ (Adkinson, 1981) in which “the individual becomes oriented toward a new status before occupying it (p. 332), is less likely to occur for women (Tabin 1993), however “women, more so than men, require encouragement to pursue careers in administration. Men...tended not to have mentors or interact in networks, suggesting that many men can move into administration without these sources of support. In contrast, the opposite was true for women” (Young and McLeod, 2001, p. 485). Almost every woman involved in this study articulated the huge role that their mentors played in them ultimately working as an administrator. Young and McLeod (2001) also concluded that, “The importance of...administrative role models cannot be overstated. For the women who participated in this study, the administrators with whom they worked had profound effects on their ideas of educational leadership and their decision to enter administration” (476).

The experienced administrators also all cited mentoring as an integral component of their preparation to become an administrator. Beatrice shared her experience, stating

We didn't have the style of mentoring that we have today through the tap-in program and the on-site job shadowing. That would have been very interesting for sure, but... If you really want to know what the job is like you find your own methods, and that's what I was able to do. And I found a mentor who was just pivotal in all of the decisions I made. She would help me by saying, 'you know what, try this regional committee or try that, you'll get a better view if you go to this area and try that', so she helped to broaden my experience in a way that I wouldn't know how to do without somebody giving me the prompts. You need to know way more than your building to be able to seek a leadership position across the board

Though these mentoring relationships were not formalized for the experienced administrators, Beatrice's experience shows their function and importance for a woman who was looking towards administration as a career. Moreover, Beatrice's comments stress that these women often had to be active participants in the mentor/mentee relationship, paradoxically finding the relationship for themselves, yet needing the prompting that this relationship could provide to move further into leadership in a school.

Joan was able to share a different mentoring experience that some of the other experienced principals would also likely have encountered regarding the Federation of Women Teachers Associations of Ontario, whose mandate it was to represent the interests of women teachers in Ontario, through until 1998 ([www.otffeo.on.ca](http://www.otffeo.on.ca)). Joan remembered, "with FW at that time they were encouraging, and when I think back, that's one of the reasons that I did go into administration is because they were encouraging women to get out of the classroom and

go into administration. And I think in some ways...that organization supported women a lot in striving to be administrators because they were trying to really equal [things out]...when I think back, a lot of women were being promoted". This is in line with Wallice's (2002) findings that "in addition to mentoring opportunities, FWTAO actively lobbied against discriminatory practices that were preventing women from attaining access to principals' qualification programs" (10).

### **Mentorship on the Job**

Both Alexandra and Denise spoke about specific individuals who mentored them on their path to administration and both women also spoke about the continuing importance of the mentor, even past the initial entrance into the role. Indeed, these mentors can still be quite crucial in their guidance surrounding both the personal and professional challenges associated with working as a principal or vice-principal. Denise said of her mentor, "I still call her up from time to time...we chat, catch up, but a lot of the time she is still great for advice on how things should go...with things like staffing decisions...P. D. ideas...it's like she's checking up on me, making sure I'm doing alright". Alexandra said that "I worked with Jessica in [another board], and we worked together here as well, so somebody that was able to balance family and work – that's definitely [her] strength. So, she would be one of my strongest role models of 'that's do-able', as was a vice-principal, a former vice-principal who is also a friend and now a principal".

In fact, once on the job, what these participants most commonly considered the strongest source of professional support was mentoring; not formal mentoring programs, but rather having strong role models (both male and female) in administration working with them,

giving them guidance, support and opportunity. As a relatively new vice-principal, Gwen remembered that, “when I first moved here from [another board], the principal that I worked for was an incredible mentor – informally. She would call me in for a half-hour discussion about something, but I would then stay in her office for the next two and a half hours, after school...people would come in to talk about a school issue and I would just stay and listen. Or she’d take a call from a parent, or superintendent and I would just stay and listen. And that gave me a better understanding of what the job truly looked like.” Gwen’s experience stresses that many of these women draw guidance from quasi personal-professional relationships – those that take place in the professional setting or context, but forged through personal connections. This lends support towards Grogan’s and Shakeshaft’s (2011) characteristics of the Spiritual Leadership style common to women administrators, who practise their leadership through a sense of connectedness to themselves and others.

It is also important to keep in mind that as positive as these mentoring relationships can be for female administrators, when these relationships are deficient, so too is the effect. As Beatrice put it, a major challenge in her mind for female administrators is,

Probably being mentored by male principals. Very difficult dynamic. Over the years that I have had those experiences I didn’t find that it was much of a partnership, it was more of a – I was sort of the personal assistant to the male; I didn’t feel it was a partnership. There were other male principals who would not even speak with me as a female vice-principal. Because not only was I a vice-principal, which I guess was a secondary role to the principal, but I often felt that maybe it was because I was a

female. That certainly has not always been my experience. I had a chance to work with a male principal that really saw our relationship as a partnership. And the learning that we did together – because he learned a lot from me and I learned tons from him but that is the only male administrator that I have worked for that I felt – not second in command, and I think that’s a problem. I have worked for a female administrator and it was a full partnership. She was raising younger kids, I was older than her – it was a great partnership. So I think you have to be really careful about female administrators and who is mentoring them.

Though Beatrice recounts a positive experience with a male principal (when she was a vice-principal), overall her indication is that this was the exception, rather than the norm.

Relationships and mentoring are extremely important supports that many of these female administrators draw from. Beatrice’s feeling that mentoring relationships can also present one of the greatest challenges for women administrators is cause for attention. When this crucial support system is compromised because of a gender issue, the positive effects resulting from that support system can be threatened as well.

### **Formal Mentoring Programs**

The newer administrators were generally quick to recognize formal board-based mentoring support in place to aid them in their work as administrators. Not surprisingly, many of these programs were in place to orient them to their new position, largely designed for new vice-principals, or even those new to the school board. Many of these newer administrators had experience working in other school boards as well, and as such, they cited specific issues

that can arise from this type of change. According to Katrina, “When I first started [in this board] the only mentoring for VPs was a VP group. And I was [in a unique school situation] so a lot of what they talked about didn’t really apply to me, so I have to say that I slowly stopped going. And it wasn’t really mandatory at the time. So then the following year... I got to choose a mentor, and that was a lot better for me. They still had the VP groups, but they weren’t as formalized...whereas now it’s more structured and you have, [for example] a Special-Ed focus, a TPA focus, which is great”.

As powerful and influential as these mentoring relationships are for these women, they are not all perfect. In fact, Alexandra raised an important point in her comments that explores why these relationships are more *ad hoc* for many of these women rather than arrived at through formal mentoring programs within boards or professional organizations:

Because time is always...of the essence. So I think the formal mentoring programs are of the best intentions and on paper, it looks great and it’s well intentioned. In reality getting two administrators to get out of their schools and get together, or to find the same time that they could go after work and meet at four o’clock, and that would be getting out of the school really early to do that. I mean, it’s not as practicable as it is a nice thought

Alexandra’s comments suggest that in practical terms, two administrators may find it difficult to foster a meaningful mentoring relationship – though perhaps it is easier to have that mentoring relationship while not working as an administrator. This is an important idea in that it implies from a pragmatic standpoint that the mentoring relationship may in fact be easier before



actually entering administration. This is complicated by the findings of Young and McLeod (2001) who found that prospective women administrators generally reported that they did not have access to administrative mentoring networks before they were actually working as administrators. If this is the case, it signals a gap between the realistic demands and allowances of the administrator's role, and what all of these women have clearly stated was something crucial to their career growth. While this may not initially seem to be discriminatory *per se*, the women in this study as well as in other literature (Young and McLeod, 2001; Jayne 1A, 1989, Jayne 1B, 1989; Wallice, 2002) widely report that mentoring is something crucial for them, something they need in order to be more successful in their career. Yet, the nature and demands of the administrator's role make such supports impractical and unrealistic. Alexandra's and Katrina's comments demonstrate that these supports are still important sources of support for these women once working in the role of an administrator. However, as roles, expectations and commitments change, some women find it difficult to take advantage of the support that is available to them. In essence, the very support designed for them as administrators is not available to them because they are administrators. One must question then whether professional organizations looking to support administrators need to take mentoring programs more seriously and recognize their value, or whether this value is understood but not able to be prioritized appropriately.

### **Peer Networks**

As a group, the principals articulated an evolution in the need for mentorship toward the need for strong peer networks. For these women, any on-the-job supports were generally

informal, and seemed to be *ad hoc*, based on where an administrator ended up working – in terms of their school or network of schools. These women spoke about the relationships that they were able to create, maintain and rely on for professional guidance, for support, for feedback and often just for sounding boards. Julianne’s comments repeat the importance of personal relationships in this professional support arrangement for women administrators: “For principals? No...no...for VPs? Yeah. I see that they have VP mentoring programs out there...but for principals they don’t have anything, not that I know of, maybe there are things out there for new principals but I still use my network of people that I know”. The learning that these women often talk about which resonates with them is generally not found through workshops or professional development sessions, but rather it is based in professional/personal relationships that provide the support they need and in turn allow them to provide support to others. Stephanie reflected,

I would say our admin in [this area of the district] are such a tight team for supporting each other through any single question, through helping with interviews. We have a lot of stress if you’re a single admin, you need to interview with a partner and we’re always staffing. Whether it’s an EA or an LTO or a contract position, but our friendship goes really deeply, that we would never leave somebody stuck, so we have professional book clubs, we have professional support groups, where we are just at the other end of a telephone. And someone’s always done something a little bit better than someone else so ‘oh, let me see your data wall, we’re on our way over’. So I would say the support comes from a network that...is, by design, necessary, but in reality it’s a sincere one.

In addition to Stephanie's explanation of her support network, Maya – who works elsewhere in the board – also has a similar support in her peers in that, “we dialogue a lot. We have pretty strong, healthy relationships in our family of schools. Now I still will call up a principal that has, maybe only two or three years [of experience], if I find that they have more strengths in one area or another than I do...and our superintendents are really, really supportive.” . To these experienced administrators, professional personal relationships have been a key source of support not just before they were vice-principals and principals, but also currently in their roles as administrators. Moreover, these networks have transformed from the mentorship purposes of career direction and advancement to professional development and learning. These peer support networks are informal and organic in nature – changing and evolving to meet the constantly changing needs that these women administrators have in their roles. To this end, Shakeshaft states that “Family and work support, although crucial, need to be supplemented with a large system of contacts so that women can learn about job availability and about how other women handle similar administrative situations” (as cited in Young and McLeod, 2001 p. 136).

Though these administrators are fortunate in their ability to create professional/personal networks, the importance of these networks is further demonstrated in the frustration expressed by those who are not able to create those types of networks in their current positions as educational administrators. In a sense, the effects are felt just as strongly for these women administrators when these systems are lacking. As a principal who has worked with an admin team and now works as a single administrator in a smaller school, Joan reflected, “Sometimes I do feel very alone as a single administrator. I never realized how you

would feel isolated...and I'm lucky that I've developed a network that I can call but it wasn't always like that. When you first come from another board, the [network in this board] is already very established, and so it takes a while to break into that...But when you have, you have a network of friends who you can call. So I mean, I do that now, but I'm finding it a little more difficult now than when I had a colleague working with me." Once again, the idea of relationships that these women administrators can readily call on for support is crucial in their perspective. Moreover, Beatrice, another of the experienced administrators interviewed, explained that these professional/personal relationships need to be naturally created, at a grassroots level, in order to be effective supports. When implemented through a top-down program at the board level,

I find that they are very poorly organized. I did sign up to be a mentor, was given someone to mentor, and it was kind of, well we've got to spend all this money, it's come from the ministry, all got to be spent by May 1<sup>st</sup>, so we had a breakfast together and he came and shadowed me at my school for a day, and then it all dissolves. There's no consistent network and there should be far more consistent partnerships. Even we – [the vice-principal] and I – have partnered with two other single administrators here to try and support them because we're here together. So we were trying to support them, because they're really on their own. A lot of administrators who are on their own are not properly mentored and there are very few supports and it's all top down. There's never any chance to say 'are there any folks that you feel that you could help?' or are there some folks that could help me? What are some informal networks that we could set up in our family of schools around professional talk even?' I just find that there's

very little time even for professional talk. Like table talk time, where you kind of get 'how do you do that? How do you handle that?' And those are informal supports because then you can call those people later ...So now I find I'm far more, far more isolated. As my career's gone on, I have been more and more isolated, although my skill set has gotten much, much better. So I understand the whole process, but there is very little opportunity for me to mentor somebody, and I'd love to. But there's none of that...it's all kind of top-down, here's all the things that you can sign up for. There's very little grassroots, what do you need and how could your friends or your folks –what kind of networks could we set up informally? I don't think everything has to be formalized. Some of the stuff that was formalized I felt was very poorly rolled out.

To all of these administrators, the creation of professional/personal relationships that are authentic in nature and need, serve as integral supports for their roles. Indeed, Beatrice's frustration at not being able to properly mentor another prospective or new administrator is unsurprising given the importance that many female administrators place on mentorship. In fact, to many, they place so much value on the endorsements and encouragement that they received, they in turn feel an obligation to mentor and endorse other women (Young and McLeod, 2001). The newer administrators also recognized the role of informal peer networks, but Paula explained that these informal peer networks could in fact be difficult to come by. In fact, she explained,

I really didn't know a lot of people my age that were going through for admin...and the ones I did know were men, actually, so no, I didn't have a lot except for...what happens

when you're taking PQP, you do develop a little network of people that do encourage each other. But there was a little bit of competition too to be honest. Some people didn't want to practice...our interviews together, you know, practice back and forth, and there were actually a couple of people that said...'I just want to work on my own', they would say because [they didn't] want to give away what [they were] going to say...or [they felt] too insecure about it.

The participants all recognized the need for these relationships as part of success and growth as an administrator, and those who have had those relationships limited at any point note frustration and see it as a detriment to their work.

### Work/Family Life Balance

Not surprisingly, the most common barrier that these women reported involved family, and in particular the conflict that they felt or perceived because of being both administrators and mothers. Paula was able to articulate many of the issues that the other participants expressed surrounding the impact that an administrator's role can have on a woman and her family, but also the impact that the family can have on the woman's role as an administrator.

Yeah, I actually do think that there have been some. Like when you have kids...no matter how progressive your spouse is, I think there's always that parental feeling you have as a mom, and I guess I can't speak for all women, but I know that I had that parental feeling that I needed to be there and be a good mom, and be good to my kids and so I slowed down a lot more. I think you see a lot of men going through in their thirties where as some women take until their forties to get there... Just because they do want to see their kids through that early child phase... And I think the reality is that when you're in any kind of position of responsibility you can't always say 'I've got to go home to my kids'. We should be able to in a way, but you also have that ultimate responsibility for the school quite often, so in a way it also has to be your first role, along with your kids. So you have to balance that, and that's a tough thing. So I think it does take a little bit longer. I think there's always that stress of 'am I being seen as professional enough on the job, or am I running home too much to my kids?'...But then of course you feel bad for your kids if you're not there for enough of their particular needs, whatever their needs are.

Though it may not take all female administrators longer to get into a vice-principal or principal position, Paula voiced the challenges and conflicts that many of these participants experienced in trying to become or work as an educational administrator while having a family at home. She illustrated the competing drives between the needs of children and the needs of the school when one is both a mother and a school principal or vice-principal. The conditions may vary from each individual to the next, however the sentiment from these women was the same in that achieving a harmonious balance that is both good for the family, good for the school and good for the woman herself is one of the major obstacles that many of these women felt they had to overcome.

### **Completing the Credentials**

In order to become a school administrator in this school board, as with most others in the province of Ontario, all candidates must complete certain academic and professional courses, including honors specialist or master's courses and the principal's qualification courses (PQP). To this end, interview candidates were asked about their experience in completing these courses from a personal perspective, and in particular whether they had dependent children living with them at the time they were completing any of these credentials. If so, they were also asked to reflect on whether dependent children presented any challenges in completing their credentials. The interview participants represented a broad spectrum of ages (from mid-thirties through to late-fifties) and marital statuses (some were married, some separated or divorced), though an interesting commonality in this group of women is that they all have children, and furthermore, their children were all of dependent age and living at home



with them while they were completing some or all of their administrator credentials. The ages of their children also covered a wide range, with these women being mothers to infants, right through to teen-aged children, and some with special needs. There were two respondents who were single mothers at the time they were completing their principal's credentials as it factors into their remarks about time constraints and support systems.

When asked about challenges in preparing to become an administrator, master's or honors specialists were rarely mentioned, but interestingly PQP courses were almost always discussed. Julianne recounted that, "For my master's, no – there wasn't that challenge of balancing. For my PQP – yes, and big challenges. Big challenge because the PQP I chose was on weekends. So that meant that I had my husband taking care of the children all weekend and I was basically out, you know at the courses so it was definitely more of a balancing act." In fact, most of the women interviewed referred specifically to the time commitment and design of the PQP courses. This is interesting because it is the PQP more than any other requirement that is specifically geared to school administration: anyone can take a master's or honors specialist course for a number of different reasons which may have nothing to do with administration, but the course that all administrators must take – at least in Ontario – is the one that presents more of a challenge to women, particularly women with families at home. Furthermore, these PQP courses demand a certain sequence of credentials be obtained before admission into the course; generally, one must have their honors specialist or master's courses, plus a certain amount of teaching experience before admission, thus making it more difficult to complete in the very early years of a teaching career. While this has some practical benefit, from a different perspective, the 'prime time' to complete these courses, while having some teaching

experience behind, but still enough career ahead to make a move into administration attractive, is also a 'prime time' for many teachers to have children and be raising young families. Katrina reflected, "I have two children. One was about four and the other one was one. So I completed everything pretty much by candlelight...[laughs] while they were sleeping...and that's what prompted me to wait the two years to do the next one."

Though the Principal's Qualification courses have become more open and accessible to women in the past two decades (Wallace, 2002), the responses of these women indicate that these large chunks of time can be problematic for many with families, and often difficult choices must be negotiated in terms of family obligations and completing credentials within a certain time frame. In this vein, Stephanie spoke about her long road to completing her credentials:

As much as I think it would be wonderful to take courses through the summer, when I'm working full-year, it was a really great opportunity to be with my children in the summer and to be the mom – the stay home mom – that I had always dreamed of being. But financially it made sense to continue with my career and have a daycare provider. So what I did is I did my courses through the evening in the winter months. And that was extremely stressful on my family because my family was used to me being the front provider whenever I could be. [Normally] I would get home hours before my husband, [but while doing the courses] that left our kids in daycare a little bit longer, and without Mommy at least one night a week. It was for sure a hardship, but when you know that

it is going to be required to get to where you want to go, sometimes you just take all those years to do it. One at a time, plug along.

Indeed, both Katrina and Stephanie – a vice-principal and principal respectively – spoke about the time required to complete these credentials while also being a mother. Often when children are involved, there is no quick or efficient path to principal's qualifications. Of course, this is no surprise then to look at the comments of these women in conjunction with the data from the quantitative portion of this paper and see that in this school board, the average age of a female administrator is roughly two years more than her male counterpart (49.17 years for females versus 47.46 years for males). While this seems to indicate more time in the classroom for women as compared to their male counterparts being in line with general findings in the literature (Glazer, 1991; Tabin, 1986; Ortiz and Marshall, 1988), it may also suggest something further. Tabin (1986) offers the idea that women are older than their male counterparts because of time spent focused on child rearing. This is an important factor, and even once women return to work, childrearing still impacts a woman's career. The whole process to become certified as a principal is a lengthy one, and drawn out even further by those with the responsibility of being a primary caregiver to young children. These caregivers are not exclusively, but are quite often, women.

The concept of time surfaced in many responses when these women reflected on the needs of their families versus their own needs for professional development in order to become qualified administrators. Vice-principal Gwen, whose children were between infancy and six years old when she was working on her principal's qualifications, stated that,

You need chunks of time that are uninterrupted. And my kids were little, and [I] didn't have chunks of time that they weren't interrupting. So the way I managed – I tried to take small things out of the equation. I got a cleaning lady...to-do lists off the plate, I started ordering my groceries on-line. All the little efficiencies I could put in place I did...And then last, but not least, my husband took the kids away for weekends to go visit family or what have you a lot...and that was difficult, because I wanted to go too. But I also needed this done. And the worst one was I had to have my gall bladder out, and when the doctor said six to eight weeks at home I went 'oh my god, that's awesome' as opposed to 'oh no, I have to have my gall bladder out'. I knew it was tough to juggle when I was really excited that I was sick, because I had a really big chunk of time to be at home

Underlying Gwen's comment is the idea that the time required for a woman with children to become a school administrator is not readily nor easily available. Often changes in lifestyle, expectations and even relationships are required in order to fulfill these demands when family plays a role.

Gwen's comment also confirms a common idea that most of the respondents echoed in their reflections. The idea of a support system in some form was paramount to their success in completing their credentials. Denise reflected on the support that she drew from in order to make the accreditation process work for her and her family: "My husband was great with the kids...don't get me wrong, it wasn't easy by any stretch...there was a lot of tag-team going on, like I would do the drop off and he would do the pick up; he would get dinners going and I

would race home after my courses for bedtime...I don't think we saw each other much during that time, but we made it work for our kids". Paula, a married vice-principal, offered a similar story and imparted that the support system is not limited to the spouse only. "But it was always a challenge to get that covered, and also you have to meet up with people, right? So you're trying to make those arrangements to meet up with people – and what are you going to do with the kids...but I do have my Mom, and my Mom was an administrator and a teacher and she would come and help if my husband couldn't be there." Maya, an experienced principal, offered her experience in trying to get her qualifications completed as a single mother, and how that required a slightly different support system: "I was young in my teaching career. I had just recently gotten divorced. You know, I had to pay for a babysitter every night and I was taking my part one, say on a Monday for phys-ed and then I'd take my drama part one or whatever on a Wednesday, and of course...that went on for a couple of years. Right, and then my principal courses were on the weekends. So...every weekend or every other weekend I'd have to find somebody to look after [my daughter]. Then of course [the classes] were nights, so I'd go to work full time and then pick [my daughter] up and then get a babysitter and then drive down to...one of my courses way up in...York Mills and Finch or something like that...it was a trek." Finally, Alexandra presents yet another perspective on the necessity of maintaining that support system as a single mother of a special needs child.

I had support in managing the challenge. I had to wait until [my son] was...about four - that's when I started getting the direction of where I should be as an administrator. I have a special needs son whose 19 now. I couldn't even fathom taking the courses until he was in high school ... and then having the confidence that I could you know, trust

somebody to be with [my son] on the evening that either my masters course was and/or the PQP course was and/or a full day Saturday. So I needed to have that comfort level and that confidence that it was ok for [my son], that it would be ok and he would manage with Mommy getting home at 9:30 at night,...or not being there for a Saturday and being home at, like six o'clock...I managed it by ensuring that I had a safety net and support and basically any time that my son was with his Dad, I was working my bahoozas off on evenings and weekends. So... I would put in 13 hour days on a Saturday and Sunday when he was at his Dad's that weekend, because I couldn't get any work done when he's home with me in the evening or on the weekend. So that's how I managed it

Clearly the concept of Hothchild's 'second shift' (1989) is alive and well. Perhaps these women are even doing Hothchild one better: they are compelled to perform triple duty - a full workday at school, followed by a full complement of household and childcare duties and on top of that, evenings and weekends spent in courses of completing course work requirements.

Whether it is a spouse or family members, friends or other outside caregivers, all of these women needed something in place as a support system to help with dependent children whilst they completed their administration credentials. That said, all of these women who did recognize a crucial support system still also recognized the difficulty they had and the challenge that it posed for their families. Having a support system makes the process possible but not without difficulty. One final observation about the tone of the responses from all of the participants: though it is admittedly a small sample group, overall there were no explicit

complaints or overtly negative comments about this time in each woman's career. All of the participants had a very similar attitude that communicated *yes, it was a difficult process, but that is just what you have to do*. They all acknowledged it was difficult part of their path to becoming an administrator, but not one said that it was unfair or unexpected. It was not an attitude of resignation, but rather acceptance of the fact that this sort of sacrifice and commitment is just a part of the role and that the difficult task of achieving balance is something to be expected.

### **Achieving Balance Once In The Role**

One of the prominent items in the questions that the participants were asked was about barriers: whether they encountered any conditions that may have initially deterred them from working as an administrator, or what arose once in the role that made the job difficult. As expected, many of the women – both experienced and newer to the role – cited the time demands of the job itself as being one of the most daunting prospects they faced. Alexandra voiced the same concerns that many of the other women recognized as well, “deterred me would be the additional hours that are required as an administrator, the additional evenings that you need to be at school functions”. This is unsurprising as in today's current educational climate, these types of time commitments are widely recognized as a major facet of the job of the administrator (Howley, Andrianaivo and Perry, 2005). Paula shared how these types of expectations also initially deterred her quest towards administration, “earlier on there was a point where my son was really ill...And I really had to focus on the family at that point and not do extra courses and slow things down with the M. Ed and everything. So there was a point

where I took a little bit of a hiatus... And there was also a point too with the PQP...Just because work was getting so incredibly busy and I was offered the opportunity to open up a new school...at the time my principal also became ill...so she needed me to take on a lot at the school and so I did that and I couldn't...balance that with the family, I just had to be reasonable and I waited." Family demands, new and changing work environments – these are all realistic stresses which women face in their careers and which unfortunately may delay or deter them from getting into administration. The job presents a huge demand on one's time, regardless of whether the administrator is male or female, but what that administrator feels they are 'missing out' on may differ for men and women. The extra time spent at school, or performing school duties equates to time lost for these women with their families, and particularly with their children.

### **Finding Support**

To successfully strike a balance between the 'greedy institutions' of family and school, outside support is required. When asked about such supports, all of the women responded in terms of family or friends that they were able to rely on to help out primarily with child care issues.

Many recognized a husband or a spouse as an important support through this time. Joan shared that, "my husband...is extremely supportive. And I couldn't have done a lot of the evenings and the extra things when [my son] was small if it hadn't been for him." Further to this, three of the women detailed how their spouses were able to shift their work schedules in order to help out more with small children and allow for the preparation work that needs to be



done in order to become a school administrator, such as completing principal's qualification courses. Loder (2005) asserts that "support, or lack of support from family members, especially spouses or partners, can make or break a woman's decision to become an administrator" (743), while Young and McLeod (2001) contend that "when spouses or partners provide or indicate that they will provide support, women may feel encouraged or at least more free to pursue their careers in administration" (488). Wallace (2002) would argue however that the fact that a male spouse arranges his work schedule to help his spouse implies that the power still rests with him, and she only gets the time to pursue her goals because he has acted in a way that allows it. This however is a far more cynical conclusion to reach than these participants would indicate, as their attitude about working with their partner for personal support was one of cooperation and empowerment.

Another aspect of the role that a spouse plays in maintaining a family / work life balance that came up with the interview participants is a little more specific in that it deals directly with marriage and the effect that an administrator's job has on it. Alexandra voiced what she saw commonly happening among her female colleagues:

I think the biggest challenge that women who are school administrators face is that they start out with support from their spouse – if they're married – but that the nature of the job is such that it demands so many extra hours. And you're working at home. And you're responding to emails. And you are doing X, Y and Z and you [have] work to do on the weekends...and I think that is a challenge to a lot of women's marriages. What I certainly saw in [another board] and I can speak to that because I was there for so long,

there were more separated and/or divorced secondary school female administrators than married. But they had started out married. So I think that is the biggest challenge – is truly being able to maintain the balance so that one’s spouse doesn’t feel...and I don’t know if that gets into you know, male ego, or the male wanting more attention...or feeling that they’re spending more time with the kids or having to do more because ... for whatever reason I have seen a lot of relationships end [for] female school administrators. And it was something [my colleagues and I] talked about, it was an observation. Men seemed to be able to keep their marriages but that’s because the expectation is that they would have those roles much more so, right? Typically I think a female spouse would understand if they were working 60 hours a week and doing these nighttime [tasks]...but I don’t think it necessarily plays out as well the other way

The effect on family life, and particularly on marriage, is a real consideration for women in educational administration or those who are considering a move into such a role.

Many of these women also recognized their own mothers who were able to assist with family responsibilities during this time. Denise remembers that “maybe it was because I had my Mom’s support...she herself didn’t work, but always encouraged me to go for it...she wanted me to have all the opportunities that she might have missed. And of course, there was all the babysitting that she helped out with when my kids were little”. In their study about supports for women administrators, Young and McLeod (2001) also found that, “Many of our participants named their mothers as their greatest source of support and inspiration. For example, the fact that one principal’s mother had taken on a number of leadership roles in her

life made her support especially meaningful” (487). The personal supports that these women reported were all either spouses (and almost exclusively husbands) or mothers, and all based within their own family.

When it comes to outside childcare however, the responses were mixed. Though one administrator had high praise for a community care program that she was able to draw on, others discussed how difficult outside childcare could be when working in or towards administration. Julianne, whose children are now grown, remembered “No flexible child care. I always say that I have lived through heart attacks 5000 times because of that pounding in your heart going ‘oh my God, I’m not going to be able to pick my child up...I’m going to be late...this is taking longer than I want’. That feeling was horrendous. I still remember driving in the car in tears thinking, I’ve got to get there – I’ve got to get to the school.” Though her example may be the most poignant, half of the respondents articulated similar frustrations with a lack of flexible childcare outside of the home or family. They clearly regarded childcare as one of their primary responsibilities, regardless of their family structure. Both the mothers who were single and those who were married expressed similar comments surrounding anxieties with childcare tied to the time demands of being an administrator.

The lack of personal supports can become such a barrier to women seeking to pursue administration that it can be a factor in deciding when, or whether to pursue it at all. As Beatrice shared, there were,

No informal peer networks, no flexible childcare. Absolutely not. And I was a young mom during those years in the 90s, and I completely avoided using any of my training

because I had to raise my children...I have no idea how elementary school – even some of the secondary school vice-principals I see with young families, I have no idea how they do it, because it's very , very difficult. See, I avoided all of that. I was a late bloomer. I didn't become a principal, a vice-principal until I was in my forties. So my boys were already a bit older and able to come home after school and of course arrange child care for them to come home after school and all of those things, but I wasn't dropping youngsters off at daycare or anything like that. I had to avoid it during that time

Beatrice's experience demonstrates that for many women who wish to pursue school administration as a career option, having dependent children can highlight gaps in personal support. As such, for women like Beatrice and others, this could have real consequences in terms of how and when a career change can occur.

### **Strategies Towards Achieving a Balance**

In the literature, it has been well documented that the demands of an educational administrator can compete with demands of family and home life, particularly if one is raising dependent children (Shakeshaft 1989; Pigford and Tonnsen 1993; Reynolds, 1987). Most of the participants of this study articulated this challenge as well. The attitude in dealing with this balance issue however is slightly different with some of the younger, less experienced administrators. Gwen, a newer administrator who herself has younger children echoed the same balance issue as her more experienced counterparts, however also offered a different take on how to deal with this challenge.

[Women] try and keep [work and home] too separate. I believe in meshing work and home... And it's ok. It's not work is work and home is home. The blackberry – I put it off to the side when I get home, but if it's more convenient for me to sit down for an hour and answer email because I'm more focussed after that in talking to the kids, you do that because...it's not like, when you walk out that door it's over, because it's just not. I think that we try to lie to ourselves too much. [Kids] know what's on your brain because they're thinking about school from that day too. So, I think it's the psychology of it more than the job...it's a lot of stupid hours sometimes but I think...women are maybe not as good sometimes about their headspace as to increasing or decreasing stress levels

This attitude of the five newer administrators, as articulated by Gwen, is in keeping with the findings of Damianos (2004) in her similar study of newer administrators. Her participants' "narratives reveal there were frequent allusions made to home and work interface. Personal and professional worlds intermingled in so many diverse and intricate ways" (p. 357). Further to this, Loder's (2005) study revealed that "this younger generation of women administrators inevitably had to become highly skillful at devising strategies to negotiate work-family conflicts, for the sake of their personal health and well-being, the quality of their relationships and their professional survival" (p. 762). In comparing these responses, there is a subtle generational divide with the more experienced administrators saying that these two entities of work and home are separate and distinct, and expect that it should remain that way. Thus when they overlap there is conflict or stress. On the other hand, a younger generation of administrator is emerging who feels that work and home can, and should, be blended together – there are no

concrete dividers between them and ultimately that is what makes the balance easier to achieve. Edson (1988) also identifies two paths typical to female administrators in terms of achieving the work/family balance; the first, and typically common to older administrators, are those who have their children first and then focus on their career. The second path is comprised of the administrators who identified aspirations early and then find ways to blend work and family, which was typical of younger administrators. In essence, the newer administrators are finding that balance achieved by blending, not by separating. In fact, postmodern position rejects the idea of a fragmentation between home and work, instead urging women to transcend universal theories that no longer explain the human condition (Glazer, 1991). Gwen's response, more typical of the newer administrators would suggest that these women have indeed begun to adopt a more postmodern perception of the family/work life balance.

## The Importance of Gender

### Entering Into Administration

Early in the interviews, all participants were asked, what motivated you to become a school administrator? Despite the wide range of experience levels and paths towards administration, their responses were very similar. For these women, it was about making an impact. They cited reasons of wanting to reach more students and more teachers. This is interesting in light of the fact that it is widely held in research, as described by Leithwood, Louis, Anderson and Wahlstrom (2004) that a school administrator actually has less impact on student achievement than does the classroom teacher. In fact, the teacher is the number one indicator of student success. This is not to say however that the difference that these women want to make as an administrator is misguided. The intention of using administration as a way to make a difference advances Grogan and Shakeshaft's (2011) notion of social justice leadership. Women, more often than men, talk about the reasons that they got into education as wanting to change lives, make the world a better place and change institutions so that they serve the needs of all and all have a greater opportunity for success. In their study too, Howley, Andrianaivo and Perry (2005) concluded that "prospective school administrators most often wanted to enter the principalship in order to 'make a difference for kids' and to 'influence the direction their schools were taking'" (761). Furthermore, Young and McLeod (2001) found that in a sample of over ninety women administrators they interviewed, "the most prevalent commitment they expressed was the desire to facilitate the learning process" (470).

Leadership for these women was not exclusively about the depth of impact, with a single student or even a class of students, but rather about the breadth of impact on all students. These administrators all spoke fondly of their own teaching careers, and they all care for students on a deep level. The scope that they could affect students however was wider working in administration. As Beatrice, an experienced principal explains,

I was motivated a long time ago because I think there is the idea that you can...make a bigger difference when you can affect – if you can affect – the teachers who then are impacting the students. So rather than being, hopefully, an exemplary teacher in the classroom, and impacting on the few number of students that you as that teacher impact on – if you can share that, then you have a broader brush to try to make a difference.

Julianne, an experienced principal, articulates how, for her, administration became a way to extend her classroom teaching goals: “I wanted to be a teacher since grade five...and once I got into a school and was a teacher, I realized that everyone didn’t do things the same way. I did things in the classroom and I thought that I could make a difference if I moved up and shared the way I was doing things, so that was basically how it worked.” Similarly, Beatrice also recognizes how administration was initially a way to extend her teaching interests:

I had become a secondary school department head, so I was given some responsibility at the secondary school level and really enjoyed that. I also went through secondary school reform as a teacher and that had a big impact on changes that were occurring in my phys-ed department, and particularly [the] science I was teaching. And I really



enjoyed that change that was occurring in teaching and learning, and that is when I aspired to be...a secondary school department head. And department heads run departments, run groups of people, there are opportunities for larger leadership roles in a secondary school, so that was my catalyst.

What is clear from Julianne and Beatrice – as with many others who were interviewed – is that for these women, the role of the administrator is seen not only as a job which has some similarities to classroom teaching, but as a way to advance teaching and learning agendas within the school for all students. This is a clear demonstration of Grogan and Shakeshaft’s (2011) leadership for learning style, which emphasizes the collaborative nature of the leader working with her staff on development, and enhancement of instructional approaches. These types of leaders are motivated because they want to affect not only students, but also teachers.

The motivations of the women administrators in this study also provide for a response to Smith’s (2011) categorization of women administrators as ‘planners, protégées or pragmatists’. Based on these interview questions, the participants did provide some evidence as to the existence – or lack – of these traits in administrators. Smith found six of her 40 subjects exemplified the traits of a planner. Within this study, all of the women both exhibit and lack some of these characteristics. What was primarily lacking from the planner profile were clear career aspirations from an early stage – except by Gwen, who said that though administration was not initially on her radar, she was “an achiever-type” who would inevitably seek out the “next thing” in her career. The description of planners being motivated and positive was demonstrated by most of the participants, and many poignantly exemplified the

trait of not getting discouraged. This includes both Julianne and Stephanie: Julianne who was not discouraged by her superior's assertions that she should reconsider a foray into administration because she had a family, and Stephanie, who initially 'failed' her administrator interview, but regrouped and reaffirmed her commitment and found success. Virtually all of the participants demonstrated high self-esteem, and a planned approach being delayed because of family was detailed by both Paula and Stephanie, who explained how they had to take their time and enter into administration only when the time was right for their families – which included children.

In response to Smith's (2011) ideas about women administrators as 'protégées', the characteristics such as the importance of mentoring and endorsement certainly apply and are well discussed by several of the participants in this study (see Mentoring and Peer Networks). On the other hand, the characteristics such as avoiding decisions, lack of self-confidence and undervaluing were not in any way revealed with this group of women through these interview questions.

Finally, the description of Smith's (2011) 'pragmatists' can be seen in the stories of many of these participants, in terms of the decisions that many of these women had to make in order for their career to work for them, as well as for their family. Maya told of how, as a single mother, she had to take courses at night and on the weekends, all while piecing together care for her daughter. Stephanie and Paula both spoke of 'slowing things down' on the career track until the time was right. Gwen recalled bringing her children into the school with her on the weekend, where they would play while she would catch up on paperwork. I did get the distinct

impression from all of the women that once they had decided to do go into administration; it was not a matter of if, but rather when. Instead of the pragmatist, that is when the stronger, politicized administrator traits surface. Smith's pragmatist seems slightly more passive, but her politicized leader is further motivated by passion and confidence – something that all of these participants demonstrated in spades.

### **Constructs of Power and Leadership**

Beatrice, an elementary school principal, reflected on her time as a secondary teacher in which she witnessed elements of leadership that she felt dissuaded her from the role. “What I saw administrators do at the secondary school level was not what was interesting to me at all. There was lots of student discipline going on, even the way they were regulating the use of drugs and alcohol with the kids – it was just so much I didn't like of what administrators did in secondary schools”. Far beyond the pragmatic, Beatrice closely examined her own motivations and what she wanted to get out of the role as compared to what she was actually seeing ‘on the ground’. This helped inform her as to whether administration would be a fit for her or not. This careful examination of what administration entails was common among other participants as well. Stephanie, another principal, talked about this when she reflected on how her initial foray into school leadership through the interview process was a deterrent at first for her: “...let's say I didn't get the right amount of checkmarks from the interview. I interviewed as I felt they would like to hear what a principal would do in reaction to their questions, and when I went for my debriefing, I was learning that had I talked more about what the classroom teacher would have done as well, so I missed that whole stance on those questions. I had a lot of

leadership with special-ed and I was opening a new school as a lead teacher and at that point in my life I thought well maybe I'm not going for the right reason. Maybe I should stay in the classroom." Clearly, this experience gave Stephanie pause to sort out the role of the teacher, versus the role of the administrator and – like Beatrice – decide whether she really liked what she saw. In her comments, Joan, another principal, made an important observation in that she – as with many of the women interviewed for this project – did not see administration over teaching in a hierarchy. For women like her, Beatrice and Stephanie, there is nothing wrong with 'staying in the classroom' if that is what one wants to do and where one feels they would be most effective. To place the administrator's job in a hierarchy above a teaching job would be, as Joan put it, "Doing a disservice to those who want to stay in the classroom".

Once a woman decides to pursue an administrative path, power dynamics change. For Katrina, "I found that interesting where you kind of think about your relationship with the staff, that when you are an administrator, you kind of have to separate yourself to a certain degree, which is difficult for me because I really like people and I like knowing a lot about people and I guess when they feel a closeness they can come to you and say, 'well you know, we're friends – can you do me this favor?' That was the one thing that I thought I would have difficulty with". Even before getting into administration, she was acutely aware of changing power dynamics and what they would do to relationships with her colleagues. For Denise, "I was hesitant at first to tell my colleagues that I had finally decided to go for it. Becoming an administrator was kind of like defecting where I worked...and some of my professional relationships did change because [I became a vice-principal]...I really struggled with that at first...it made me wonder if this was the right thing for me, but I still have some great friends who are teachers". This is

unsurprising and supports Bascia and Young's assertion that "a woman who goes into administration...is sometimes accused of 'abandoning' her female colleagues who are teachers" (p. 286). These relationships are important to many of the women that were interviewed but also must be realistically re-negotiated as part of the transition to administration. Katrina's and Denise's feelings about changing relationships help to support the ideas of Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) in terms of typical leadership styles for women. In their ideas about relational leadership, they find that women administrators often prefer power with as opposed to power over. The perception of a vertical power shift rather than a horizontal one is uncomfortable. Women gaining additional power as school administrators may initially feel uneasy with this change. Katrina and Denise both also demonstrate those qualities of Spiritual leadership (Grogan and Shakeshaft, 2011), wherein power is derived from a sense of connectedness to self and others. When this connection is threatened or lost, it is unsurprising to hear reflections, like those from Denise, where she questioned whether administration was really for her. This too may be a response to the discomfort felt when a woman gains additional power as an administrator yet experiences loss in other aspects of her professional life.

### **The Female Administrator's Identity**

According to many of the interview participants, gender stereotypes and biases continue to play a large role in defining the female administrator's identity in the workplace. By this, the accounts of these principals and vice-principals reveal that often judgements are made about their administrative capacity based on gender-linked factors such as marital and family

status, appearance and leadership style. Their accounts provide evidence for the overt barriers as outlined by Shakeshaft (1989), on the job conditions that discriminate or hinder due to one's gender. Indeed, in a profession such as teaching which is largely dominated by women, and even in a board such as this one where the number of female administrators is above the provincial average, there is still evidence that gender stereotypes and discrimination permeate the workplace. Two experienced principals discussed very similar frustrations at how strong women are perceived as educational administrators. According to Stephanie,

I still think...the word aggressive and the word assertive get really blurred. And sometimes if a male colleague says something in a certain way, that person is using their clout in a positive way, and wow are they ever assertive and we all look up to this person...and yet it could be a very similar, or identical message but then the female giving it then is sometimes being defined as clawing her way, or aggressive or inconsiderate, yet the message wasn't any different. So sometimes I think the audience is more ready to hear a vision, or a direction that is involving everyone to stand up and take notice from a male versus a female.

To put an even finer point on it, Julianne explained,

When you're aggressive as a female administrator, you're a bitch. When you're aggressive as a male administrator, you're good and you're powerful and you're shooting up. That's the biggest challenge that I think I faced... I'm really goal oriented, I'm really straightforward, and I'm fast... I want to get things done... I'm sure a lot of senior admin see me as a bitch....Whereas if it had been a male who go the technology

that I got in this school, that no other school has, it would have been 'let's profile that school, let's show what's happening'. That's the most infuriating thing about this that I've encountered.

Clearly, these principals feel that in their careers, they have themselves been, or seen other women administrators, punished socially for being as ambitious as their male counterparts. What these women articulate is a trade-off: while they may be able to 'get things done' professionally, they run the risk of creating an undesirable reputation among their colleagues and superiors. Whether these women are just naturally more assertive, or whether they feel they must be in order to accomplish what they want for their schools, they run the risk of being labeled for their behaviour, regardless of the validity of their accomplishments. This finding is not exclusive to this study, as Damianos (2004) found after speaking with several of her female administrator participants and concluding that women should be able to exert their strength, "without being labeled bitchy if strong...we need to move away from easy stereotypes" (p. 364).

Unfortunately, a tendency towards less assertive behaviour can have negative effects as well. Katrina shared that,

when I started I found that...my gender, my size, and at the time I guess my age, people thought that I wasn't ready for the position or they didn't take me seriously. So I did find initially that a lot of the staff tried to tell me things that were not really the case....and they would come into my office and I found that the first comment that they would make would be 'wow, your hair looks really good today' or something about [my]

appearance, which I thought, why are you here? I'm sure it's not about my appearance. So they felt that if they had to tell me something, that I would take it easier on them...if they first complimented me on my appearance... And little comments that were made... at a conference, a male administrator came up to me and said 'oh, we're doing a tally at our table and we've decided that you're one of the best looking vice-principals'... Like those kids of comments – inappropriate – that I found for the first two years.

This presents another type of stereotype, one based on appearance and age, which affects how a woman administrator is perceived in terms of her readiness for the role. If she appears young or attractive, she too may be punished socially in her role as a school administrator despite her professional accomplishments. This type of attitude may have been more prevalent in decades past, but still has a presence for some of today's female principals and vice-principals, as demonstrated by Katrina's story, who is a newer administrator. Katrina, Stephanie and Julianne all bring examples of overt barriers that resonate with the definitions provided in the literature about discrimination based on gender (Shakeshaft, 1989; Pigford and Tonnsen, 1993; Doughty and Leddick, 2007; Damianos, 2004), based on both the physical appearance of a woman as well as her behavior and professional demeanor.

Many of these women explained that the threat they felt to their professional identity was because they had families and that they were mothers and this was seen, or these women perceived that it was seen, as contrary to the development of a strong professional identity. When asked about her greatest personal barriers, Julianne offered that, "It was the family, it was definitely family. I have four children. And it was being taken seriously – you can't give



your time to this. And that would have definitely been the obstacle, would be people's perceptions...I actually had administrators who said to me that women with families and four children would not be able to balance the role of an administrator, and a VP. I had both of those conversations with admin, male administrators, prior to going forward". What is especially difficult about her experience is the power dynamic she illustrates between a classroom teacher and a woman, interested in administration, and not one but two male administrators who saw fit to make that judgement of her, regardless of her work in the classroom and around the school.

She went on to recount her own experience dealing directly with other people's perceptions of an administrator who has children.

When I went through... the process for VP to principal – I had a principal...somebody new to the role, who I heard was saying 'she's got four kids, she's really busy'. You know, like she won't be able to handle the principal role. And I actually confronted them directly. I called them and I said 'I've heard through the grapevine that you're saying that I can't do the role as a principal because ...' and they denied [it], 'no, I would never say that, I would never...', and I knew they would deny it, but I wanted them to know that I knew.

Julianne also shared some of her frustration in confronting these perceptions:

It's hard. It's hard – I always say it should be performance based and I had this conversation with some administrators that I worked with when I was a VP. Can you tell me that I'm not performing what you've asked me to and I'm not doing the job?

Yeah, my kids are in rep. sports and yeah I'm racing around and I'm driving here and I'm driving there but can you tell me that I can't do this job as well? And then when they would say 'no', then I would say 'then why are we even having this conversation?'. But it's their perception that...you get a call in the middle of the day from one of your children, and they're sick, or something's happened, they need to talk, and then you can't do your job. Yes you can – I can do my job and I can do it really well. I can balance both of those things.

Certainly for Julianne, the idea that her family status was a part of how she may be perceived as a professional could be a deterrent. All of the participants were very open and honest in discussing deterrents that they experienced, and as such, these deterrents surrounding the conflicts between family and work compelled these women to carefully examine the cost of embarking on a leadership career.

Despite the fact that some women administrators are very comfortable balancing work and family, there may be pressure to convince others however that this balance can work. This obstacle was personally recognized by both the newer and more experienced administrators in this study. According to the responses of these participants, it is one thing for women as individuals to reconcile the responsibilities of family and a school administration role; however, it is another matter to further prove to colleagues, peers and others that a woman in school administration with a family is also entirely capable. Katrina shared some obstacles to her professional profile that may have suffered because she is female.

There are certain things, like committees that I've applied for that it's always a male, right? And... I've always found within the board, there's this kind of network of males, and you always see them sitting together, and it's always the same group, and it's always the same group that gets involved in committees...I mean, I'm a little bit more detached from it now because I'm not as close to the board office, but I found when I was closer to the board office, that was always the case, like it would be the group of males and then your token female. So I think sometimes I've been overlooked in certain committees because of that.

Beatrice also shared her perspective on this gender barrier in the workplace, and in her view, not only does it apply to committees and 'boys clubs', but to the important mentoring relationship that so many of these women recognized as crucial to their own preparation.

"Male principals – experienced male principals – not taking their mentorship role really as a partnership would be probably one barrier". The stories here support the findings of Somers-Hill and Raglan (1995) that the male social network can be seen as a powerful force in educational administration, and that the lack of meaningful mentoring for women does not do anything to remedy this situation. Katrina and Beatrice reveal, through the barriers that they recognized in their own experience, that these gender stereotypes can hinder the professional development opportunities for a woman administrator, whether it is through committees and professional work groups, or through the quality of mentorship, which is viewed as something essential for many female principals and vice-principals.

There are also expectations and biases based on gender for the female administrator from other outside forces. Stephanie shared that “A friend of mine is a principal and her vice-principal is a male. And she says more often than not and definitely more than once a week, someone comes into the office and when the two of them are together, assumes that he is the principal. And she gets that all the time. So after she’s answered something as the principal, they want to go through her to the VP to get listened to.” Certainly, this adds a further layer of bias that some female administrators have to work through in order to effectively lead their schools as a part of the wider community. Maya shared such an experience:

I know I felt it the first year I was at [this school], where there were two Caucasian, middle-aged men that were previous administrators and it was a very...you know, white neighbourhood...and I came in. I know that it took a lot of no’s on my part, or ‘you need to leave my office now’ with males [who] perhaps would have been more respectful to another male. I’ve encountered it here...and I’ve found that a lot of...men have tried to think that they could get away with what they want by raising their voice at me or telling me it’s going to happen...there was one man that was quite belligerent, and I said [to the vice-principal], ‘you know what Bob? We would probably put out a lot of fires if you took the calls from this man’. So I think, yeah...even with some male teachers sometimes that might handle a situation differently if it was a male speaking to them. Sometimes I feel I have to be a bit tougher where I shouldn’t have to be if I was a male.

Denise remembered, “there was this parent, and he would go to the other vice-principal – who is a male - about some issues, and to me about others. And once, he said, and he was joking

but...he said 'it's like playing Mom off against Dad'...and that just didn't sit right with me. It's like too nineteen fifties or something, like he was going to go to Dad if I didn't tell him what he wanted to hear". The relationships between administrators, parents and other outside community members can be impacted by gender. When these relationships are challenged by gender bias, it can present another type of barrier for the female administrator to work through.

Two of the newer administrators, both vice-principals, also offered an additional perspective on the source of biases and stereotypes that female administrators face: self-imposed gender bias and bias stemming from within their own peer group. Paula spoke about the support that women administrators are able to provide each other:

You know what I think? It's hard to say, but I think it's a little bit more subtle...I think I would like to see women a little bit less competitive with each other. I think that there are groups of women who are supportive, but there is still a lot of competition among women. Because maybe they feel the pressure, do you know what I mean? Maybe they feel the pressure in the workplace. And I also think there still is a little bit of a ceiling in terms of achievement, because you do see a lot of men in the upper admin. So yeah, there are a lot of female principals here but we do see a lot of men in the upper admin and...I would just like to see maybe, I think it's going to have to change over time. I think we're getting past the barriers but I think that I'd like to see women more supportive of each other in terms of moving forward.

In addition to public perceptions and relationships with male administrators, gender biases and stereotypes can stem from women themselves. When asked about the greatest challenge to women administrators, Gwen offered her view: “I don’t want to be sexist but I think that we [women] have trouble getting out of our own heads and letting some things go. I think we put more pressure on ourselves...the job is full of pressure, but I think we put more pressure on ourselves than is necessary”. Paula and Gwen have articulated barriers which, they feel, largely originate within the perspectives and minds of women themselves. Though not explicitly listed as such, these ideas of female competition and self-induced pressure could be seen as a product of socialization, or behaviours that one has grown up with, one of Shakeshaft’s (1989) covert barriers. Whether all of these workplace barriers are interconnected or whether they can be tackled one at a time, it is clear that the participants have all witnessed some sort of gender discrimination or bias. Their experiences with gender bias involve colleagues, community, peers and themselves and these biases are perceived to be significant barriers to the work of female educational administrators.

### **Personalizing Gender Barriers**

It is important to note that without exception, all of the women who participated in these interviews voiced very clear and distinct ideas about the barriers that women encounter as they prepare or work as educational administrators. They were aware of these barriers; they saw them and understood their effects. Many of their answers were also very similar in nature and tone. On the other hand, their responses when asked about their own experience directly are quite contrasting indeed. Of the ten participants in fact, three were adamant that they had

personally never experienced any sort of barrier related to their gender. For example, when asked if she had ever experienced barriers because of her gender, Gwen responded, “No, I don’t think so. I’ve heard that from people but I haven’t seen it...I haven’t seen it in a way that has verified their concern”. Joan replied even more emphatically, “No. Absolutely not...I think that [being a woman] was in my favor when I first became an administrator, but I also worked extremely hard...I’ve never noticed that I haven’t achieved something because I was female”. Similarly, Stephanie responded, “I have personally not dealt with that. I’ve always networked very well with both males and females and in my social group, same. I’m very comfortable with a male or a female and I don’t really see gender, I see people; and I’ve always had a lot of people along the way supporting me feeling that yes, this would be the right decision and yes they’d love to work with me and I always felt buoyed up by the people I work with”. These three women all responded to earlier questions in ways that clearly indicate they are aware of gender barriers that women administrators face, and they also all spoke of difficulties that often arise between family commitments and working towards, or working as, a school principal or vice-principal. What is also clear however is that these three women are adamant that they do not see these factors as barriers or obstacles that impeded their careers. Perhaps it is a perspective that sees tension between work and home as just a part of ‘the way things are’, or perhaps it is with the understanding that these difficulties do indeed exist but not in so far as they are actually limiting. For whatever reason, these three respondents refused to acknowledge their gender as a barrier to them in their work as an administrator.

### Experienced Administrators Reflect on Change

Included here as a final discussion, the experienced administrators were asked to reflect on changes they have seen through the duration of their careers as administrators. Their comments include many observations concerning the three central themes of this analysis, so they have been included here to provide some final perspective on where we are now, based on where we have been.

As discussed earlier, the numbers of female administrators in schools, both in Ontario, and in this particular school board, all show greater numbers of women working as principals and vice-principals in elementary and secondary schools over the past decade. Previous studies show this increase trending – albeit sometimes very gradually - over several decades (Reynolds, White, Brayman and Moore, 2008). The participants in this study were not presented with this data, but rather they were asked if they had noticed a change based on their own experiences, and what could account for it. Unequivocally, all of the experienced administrators who were asked this question said that they did indeed feel that there was an increase in the number of women entering school administration – which in itself is unsurprising, given the empirical data. What is more revealing however are their ideas about what could possibly be behind this increase. Their responses cover a spectrum, which considers changes in broader society right through to changes in the minutia of the job itself. Maya reflected,

I've definitely seen more women come into the role – especially in [this board] too, our family of schools...I think it's... because, I would say in most fields that we see...women



are seeking more managerial roles. I think just because our society has enabled that to happen more...there's more women now that are stepping out from marriages if they're not happy, and being able to afford things, and you know, not thinking 'oh my god, I can never leave because I'm stuck...'. More women... are going to seek higher levels of education rather than just staying home and thinking 'ok, well, I'm just going to have babies.

Maya's observations are important in that she views these changes as a reflection of what is happening in society overall. She also alludes to the financial independence a woman can work towards as a school administrator. In their study of motivations of teachers to become administrators, the researchers Howley, Andrianaivo and Perry (2005) noted, "a principal's salary serves as an intrinsic motivator for many women because it highlights and reinforces their independent status and level of professional achievement" (p. 761). Joan also cited changes in society as facilitating the growing number of women on the job as school administrators. She continued to say however that these changes in society have not only made it easier for women to work as administrators, but have made women themselves better in their preparation and ability to do these jobs.

We do see an upward movement in leadership among women...and I don't want to use the word 'upward' because I do think the most important person is the teacher in the classroom. So administrative positions now are women...what could account for these changes? I think society and...equal pay for equal work and...I guess with what I came from, everything being equal, the female got the job. And that's probably the way it

was then, but I think now, I think women are a lot better. I do think we've got a lot of women who are very good. I mean I just look at my colleagues that I talk to on a regular basis, that I ask advice. They're amazing.

From a purely pragmatic perspective, Julianne offered her ideas about why more women are now seeking jobs as principals and vice-principals: "I see administrators coming now and having babies, and I'm going oh my god, that would have never happened when I was coming up. It was all these women, you know – eggs were dry, ok you can be a principal. They were never letting people who were having families...that's huge. And you, you take off a year...we didn't have any of that." Though earlier these women discussed the real, day-to-day difficulties of raising families and working as school administrators, the fact is that they are all seeing it happen more and more, and as Julianne suggested, earlier in the 'family' stage of one's life – including pregnancies and maternity leaves. No longer is the job reserved for those without immediate family obligations. These respondents have seen changes in wider society mirror – or be mirrored by – changes in their own workplaces and among their own peers. According to these women, these have been important influences at work in increasing the number of female administrators in schools.

Two other of the experienced respondents provided their insights as to the rise in female administrators from a more grassroots level, looking at changes they have seen immediately in their own board and schools. These responses may also provide a more detailed explanation of what has and could still be happening that allows more women to work as principals and vice-principals. Stephanie provided that,

I definitely see an increase in the number of female admin, but not at the superintendent level. Not in the higher positions. And I wonder if it is just the natural mentorship when you are working closely with a female admin and they're telling you, 'you know what, this is for you. I see this and this and this in you. May I suggest this or let's work together on that'. And I just think it might be the female principals or vice-principals who are already in the role. We are asked to be tapping people on the shoulder, we're constantly asked to be looking for leaders, and maybe we're just noticing it more readily in females right now.

In effect, Stephanie says that the increase in female leadership is somewhat cyclical, with more females in leadership positions, more 'up and coming' females are likely to get that 'tap on the shoulder' and take on leadership activities in order to prepare them for the job. This creates a mentorship dynamic that could play a key role in increasing the number of female principals and vice-principals. Beatrice also offered her opinion in terms of differences between what she currently sees happening in secondary schools versus in elementary schools. "I think in secondary school I have certainly seen an influx of some very capable women that are entering administration much earlier. For me, entering administration at 41 was more the norm for my age group, but I'm seeing people enter much younger. So I'm seeing opportunities for females in secondary schools, but again it's more in secondary schools. I see more influx of potential in young secondary school principals. I see less of that – I see more males coming forward in elementary schools to potentially become principals." Though Beatrice's comments about more males coming forward in elementary would require further study with this Board's Human Resources files, she raises an interesting point about the age of the female administrator.

Though the mean age is indeed decreasing for administrators – both female and male – it would be helpful to explore Beatrice’s idea about entry age, not just average age, of the female administrator to see if the quantitative data would support her observations that females are ‘starting out’ in administration younger today than ever before.

In terms of specifically linking change to gender, Maya offered her insights, based on her experience in the school community in which she currently works.

I guess there’s more respect now connected to the female. I’ve noticed too with parents that maybe, depending on the community, females are not taken as seriously because for them, culturally, they’re not to be taken as seriously ...but I’ve noticed now, even being in this community, from the first year when I started to the second year that there’s a difference. When I started in the first year, some parents would come in and they didn’t want to speak to the female administrator. They would only speak to the male administrator. You know, ‘no offence’, that would be the end of the sentence. And now I find that they realize that it’s really no different talking to the male or the female, you know the board policy and procedures are the same and we really do handle the situations in a similar manner. So I think that’s changing too.

Maya observed that the change is just as much a reflection of the community as it is of the role. This can have many far-reaching social benefits.

Consider this: Students who come to school, barely present by the ills they know in troubled and troubling homes and who find some semblance of stability in the corridors and classrooms, may be the ones to most profit by a school whose principal or vice-

principal exudes warmth, care and sensitivity...if school hierarchies are more and more equitably represented by both men and women thereby normalizing women in power, female students do not have to search too far to see inspiring role models; to see that there are alternative truths and possibilities for themselves. Furthermore, male students are also socialized to understand and appreciate women as leaders thus helping to shape their relations with women later on in their personal and working lives. Students from certain ethnic or racial backgrounds are compelled to acknowledge that patriarchal relations and female subordination are not the norm, and may not have to be a blueprint for their own lives. Men and women must be seen working side by side in a leadership capacity. (Damianos, 2004, p. 364)

The responses of these experienced administrators provide that a change in the number of female administrators is reflected in, or perhaps reflective of, a change in broader attitudes. From relationships with mentors, peers, community and through to impact on students, these women administrators confirm that an increase in female principals and vice-principals goes beyond a simple statistic. This kind of change has real consequences and demands careful consideration in terms of both causes and effects.

### **A Change In The Role Itself**

All of the interview participants agreed that there has been an increase in the number of women principals and vice-principals, but they also all agreed that that the job itself has changed over the years that they have been working as administrators. When asked about how specifically the role has changed, they offered many different views on how and why these

changes have happened, and on how it affects the way they view their own work. Joan said, “I think the job expectations have changed... It has changed so much. And it’s a lot of pressure right now. And, not that it wasn’t before, but it’s a different kind of pressure...changes in staff...in contract negotiations...and I just think that it’s not something I would choose now. It’s like, we used to do it for kids and I don’t know if it’s there anymore. And that’s what’s hard for me to see sometimes.” Following this, Maya articulated a similar view about the mounting stresses involved in the administrator’s role, with a different personal perspective:

It’s extremely stressful. It’s very stressful. I think it’s definitely not the role I thought it would be when I first got into it. [But] if I could choose one profession that I would be in, it would definitely be this. I think it’s because, I say this all the time, I would never want to be...I have no desire to be superintendent. Because all they do is put out fires because parents aren’t happy with the decisions we make here. I love being around kids, so do I love my role? Yes. Is it really, really stressful? Absolutely, because when you look at what you’re doing, you know from health and safety we’ve got seven hundred and some-odd kids here and there’s likely three to four hundred parents, you know and a staff of eighty, and all the things that come with it...I think the job...you’re not prepared for what you think it is, until you’ve been in it for a while.

The comments of Joan and Maya both support the notion that the administrator’s role is more pressure-filled than ever before. They also both hint at the increasing managerial responsibilities principals are confronted with in their position as school leaders. That being said, both women, as well as the quantitative data, support the fact that women are working as

administrators in increasing numbers. With more managerial duties and more willing and able women, this puts to the test ideas such as those from Pigford and Tonnsen (1993) that “women nurture learners; men run schools” (p. 1). Maya’s reflection however does suggest that women are indeed interested in both elements – concurrently nurturing the learners and running the school. Further to this, Beatrice explained, “I think that there are a number of principals that see vice-principals...as managers of schools, and not leaders of people and leaders of program. And I think program leadership has gotten further and further away from the principal role. I think instructional leadership and creating strong leaders within your school is a big job that we have. I think a lot of principals hand all of the managing to vice-principals and that’s all they do. Even the year that I was at XXXX, I loved the year because I had the chance to do some instructional leadership with a department and I loved that, but managing of the school was really up to the vice-principals”. This would suggest that instead of tasks being divided up along gender lines today, staff development and learning versus managerial work might increasingly be seen as different domains according to job descriptions – principal versus vice-principal. In terms of this fluidity in the principal’s agenda, Julianne commented on this, stating that it comes right from the top: “As directors change, definitely your role as an administrator changes...it’s not well defined right now. Is it harder? Well, I wouldn’t want to be first year [principal]”. Clearly, these women feel that the job itself has changed, but what echoes through their comments as well is the idea that it is difficult to pin down further what the job is, as fluidity and change itself has paradoxically come to define much of the principal’s job in recent years. According to earlier literature (Shakeshaft 1989; Pigford and Tonnsen 1993; Ortiz and Marshall 1988), this could explain why there would be fewer female administrators in

education. Given the rising numbers of women principals and vice-principals in this school board as well as the province however would indicate that these women are not only aware, but prepared for such change.



### Overall Conclusions

A major purpose for this paper was to examine the evolutions and revolutions of women's role in educational administration. After reviewing the literature and speaking to women administrators, a response to the research question begins to emerge.

Does current data support the notion of an increase in women entering principal and vice-principal roles? It is clear that in the province and in this school board, an increasing percentage of school administrators are women. Moreover, the mean age of the female administrator has dropped - so too has the age of her male counterpart. Women administrators are closing the gap between the number of years they spend as administrators – both as principals and vice-principals – compared to their male colleagues. Women who become administrators are also spending less time in the classroom teaching prior to assuming their administrative roles.

Which leads to the second component of this project: what conditions have changed that could be contributing to these changes?

### Mentorship and Networks

Any discussion about the overall findings of this project would not be complete without a discussion of the practice of mentorship and how it can serve as a major support for women pursuing a career in and working as educational administrators. When asked about their motivations to get into educational administration, seven of the ten administrators (including all of the newer administrators) referenced some form of mentorship as a crucial factor

motivating them to get into the field. Whether it was receiving the proverbial tap on the shoulder or more subtly accepting leadership tasks and responsibilities around the school or working with an administrator role model, these women often attributed much of their start in administration to the role of a mentor. Furthermore, the idea of mentorship continues into the role, as cited by five of the participants, including all of the experienced administrators. At this stage, mentorship takes of the form of a supportive peer network on which these administrators all speak about calling on for various professional and sometimes personal tasks and situations stemming from their work as a school principal or vice-principal. The experience of almost all of these administrators also indicates that typically, these mentor relationships have been difficult to arrange in an effective and formal way, as most of these women naturally found informal ways to foster these relationships based on the context in which they were working. Though many of these women spoke about Board or other Professional mentoring programs that they were aware of, those relationships that they viewed in terms of value and longevity were the ones that they were able to forge themselves; either with a principal or vice-principal with whom they had personally worked and admired, or with other like-minded colleagues who had similar leadership aspirations. Either way, these women found and maintained mentorship and peer network relationships that remained a key support through their work in schools as educational administrators.

### **Work/Family**

Over a decade ago, Wallace (2002) wrote of her interview participants, “Her daily routine while a principal included finishing her day by ensuring that the casserole for the next night’s

family meal was ready, lunches were made, and laundry and other tasks done for her husband and children. Yet she claimed that nothing had ever stopped her from achieving her career goals” (p. 7). Wallace noted an interesting disconnect with her participants in that they claim that they were never blocked by gender, yet did not realize the social/cultural constructs in place that are so naturally gender biased and impact the way their daily and professional lives interact. Edson (1988) also found a small percentage of women administrators considered family responsibilities a barrier, yet the vast majority continually reflected on the subject. To be fair, many of the respondents in this study spoke about the responsibilities of finding childcare, of picking up the children from this care and of racing around with them to get them to their activities, or another caregiver. They spoke of having a supportive partner who adjusted his schedule (which according to Wallace implies that the power rests with him and that she only gets the time because he acts in a way that allows it). Indeed some of these same women too refused to see these as barriers. At the same time, their experiences balancing work and family provide a response to Wallace’s claim of a disconnect between the two.

Achieving the balance between work and family is still a major concern for almost all of the women who participated in this project. The women with young children recognize this as a significant barrier, one that can be overcome with major supports. These supports tend to be drawn from the woman’s own personal reserves however – spouses or other family members – in order to complete credentials and work as a vice-principal or principal. The differences begin to emerge when it comes to examining these women along generational lines: the more experienced administrators saw the work/family balance as an either/or proposition requiring a great deal of compromise at best, or sacrifice at worst. On the other hand, the newer

administrators were much more likely to accept the spheres of work and family as frequently overlapping. As Gwen demonstrated, they were generally adept at finding ways to make these two fit together, whether it meant bringing kids to work on a weekend or changing domestic routines like how the grocery shopping got done; these women accepted work and family together as a new reality. So in answer to Wallice, perhaps this newer generation of administrators is not disconnected at all, but rather changing ahead of a society that still needs to catch up. Admittedly, they are still taking on major responsibilities in the realms of both work and family, but they are doing it on their own terms: doing it differently, but still getting it done.

In 1989, Jayne wrote that “societal changes regarding the division of labor relating to child/family/home responsibilities need to occur before women will receive equitable treatment in the workplace” (1a, p. 111). Whether society has really changed in this regard cannot hope to be answered by this project, but what can be said is that perhaps in waiting for this long overdue change, this newer generation of women administrators has beaten society to the punch: they have figured out ways to coordinate these responsibilities and obligations while maintaining a sense of satisfaction with their home and professional lives.

### **The Importance of Gender**

A traditionally held notion found in the literature that I kept returning to was that women get into education to teach, but men to run schools. After speaking to these women participants and reviewing similar studies, I would argue that the role of the principal has evolved over the past couple of decades, as have the expectations of women choosing to work

in administration. There are increasing numbers of women principals and vice-principals, and, according to the women interviewed for this project such as Maya and Joan, an increase in the managerial tasks involved in administration.

Maya and Joan spoke directly about these changes, such as the work required on staffing and with union and in the health and safety requirements of the facilities. Stephanie spoke about hiring practices and decisions that have become a major part of her role as a principal. They accept these duties as part of their job, which also includes responsibility for staff and professional development, something that Beatrice recounted as a very fulfilling part of her job description. Indeed, most of these administrators, both newer and more experienced, cited this ability to make an impact as one of the key motivators for pursuing administration.

The narratives of these women reveal that gender biases and discrimination still exist. Indeed, Shakeshaft's (1989) overt and covert barriers still have a place in the experiences of these participants. Though barriers like sexist remarks and stereotypes still happen, most of the barriers reported are covert, such as the demands of motherhood and the difficulties associated with raising dependent children while trying to qualify and ultimately working as an administrator.

### **Implications for Practice**

This research suggests some implications for practice to further increase the numbers of women in school administration and support those already working as school principals and vice-principals.

A focus on mentorship and peer networks is an important strategy for the practice of recruiting and supporting female administrators. Though most of the effective relationships that these women reflected on were independently created, these arrangements should be emulated in professional development delivery models. While it is true that the 'artificially' arranged mentoring relationships were not recognized as particularly effective, perhaps school boards can use information and feedback from the administrators themselves about existing mentorship relationships that are working as a platform through which to focus on board-wide professional development agendas.

Closely related to mentoring is another implication for practice from these findings: the active recruitment of women leaders towards careers in administration. This is not a new practice – indeed many of these administrators spoke of the 'tap on the shoulder' that they received, or that they were encouraged to give as leaders themselves. One dimension to further the recruitment process however would be to give prospective female leaders a true taste of all aspects of the job of a school administrator – both the managerial components and the teaching/student centered components. By doing this, prospective women leaders will gain an accurate sense of all that this role encompasses, thereby creating realistic expectations of the demands and time management required of them.

Another implication for practice that the findings of this paper suggest is modifications to the principal's qualification program. Though no one program was specifically cited, and no issue was taken with the content of these programs, many women found the time demands that they posed to be particularly onerous, especially given that most of them had young

families, including dependent children, when they were trying to complete these credentials. Perhaps more on-the-job or practical components – as opposed to seemingly endless evenings or weekends – can be utilized so as not only to make more efficient use of a professional’s personal time, but also to give prospective administrators more of an experience rooted in the workplace. This is another benefit which is tied in with the implication discussed in the paragraph above.

Finally, the evidence provided in this paper through the literature and through the comments of the professional women who provided their insights and feedback is that the role of the school administrator could seek more opportunities to integrate work and family. Though many of the ‘newer administrator’ generation are already seeking out ways to make this happen on an individual basis, imagine the possibilities if the principal’s role had some of these flexibilities built in. What those would be specifically demands further study and input, however opportunities for supported child care or technology that would allow more ‘work from home’, particularly in the hours when school is not in session, would go a long way to supporting effective and healthy work/family balances that so many women in administration seek.

### **Implications for Further Study**

Based on the value placed on mentoring by the participants involved in the interviews, this would be an area that would be valuable to explore in further depth – both in terms of how it affects and is affected by gender, as well as its role overall in shaping new and practicing administrators. It would be helpful to focus specifically on what makes mentoring relationships

work or not work for administrators. Some of the women participants spoke about mentors in terms of being female role models after which they shaped their own careers. On the other hand, some of the participants did not necessarily specify that mentors need be female. Overall, this begs the question – in terms of mentorship, what is the best model for the practicing and aspiring educational leader and does this model differ for males versus female administrators?

Another area suggested by the responses of some of the interview participants was the idea of age as a confounding factor to career barriers. It would be helpful to examine how age as a factor can be intertwined, or separated, from gender. Some participants, like Beatrice, spoke of their mentoring relationships with “older males” or “younger males”, and even discussed the relevance of the age of fellow female colleagues in these types of arrangements. In addition, the general conclusions to this study may also be considered as being affected by age. For example, many of these questions were answered along ‘generational’ divides, particularly about achieving and maintaining family/work balance. This is true for other similar studies of women administrators, such as Tabin’s (1986). Her study made similar conclusions about the meshing of work and home by a younger generation of administrators. Given that this was in 1986, that ‘younger’ generation would be the ‘more experienced’ generation of today – though in this study the more experienced generation spoke of sacrifice and compromise while the younger generation more readily accepted work and family together. In light of this, it would be very interesting to create a longitudinal study where the ‘newer’ group would be tracked, and find out if – five years from now, ten years from now – their perspectives change to be more in line with what the ‘more experienced’ group said. If society and the role



of the administrator have indeed changed, than one would expect that today's 'newer' generation of administrators would hold their views of blending work and family together. If however they change their stance more in line with an either/or proposition as voiced by the 'more experienced' group, then one might wonder if this less reflective of changes in the job or in society and more reflective of changes in perspective and experience within the individual.

## Appendix A – Information Letter Email to Administrators

June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2012

Dear Administrator:

I am a graduate student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto and I am conducting a study that examines the changing demographics and perceptions of women working as school based administrators. This study, entitled **“Where Are We Now? Changing Demographics and Perspectives of Women in Education”**, will be conducted under the supervision of Dr. Jane Gaskell. Specifically, I am examining the barriers and supports that women encounter as they pursue and ultimately work in schools as principals and vice principals. I hope that this project will lead to a better understanding of what supports are available to women considering administration, as well as what needs still need to be considered in order to address the gap between the high proportion of women in teaching versus the lower proportion of women in school administration. If you are a female working as a school principal or vice-principal for a period of twelve years or more (since 2000 or previous) or fewer than five years (since 2007 or more recent), I would like to include your voice in the study.

Statistically in Ontario, females comprise approximately 70% of the teaching work-force, yet only slightly less than 50% of school administration (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). Through a cursory examination of the administrators currently employed in the Halton District School Board (available through hdsb.ca), the proportion of female principals and vice-principals in Halton is anomalous to the rest of the province – indeed it appears that the proportion of female administrators more closely reflects the proportion of females in teaching. An examination of the reasons and conditions present that allow this condition to exist in Halton would provide important information to further promote leadership programs and help to inform succession policies.

In one thirty to forty-five minute interview, I will ask a series of questions about your experiences as you worked towards becoming an administrator as well as since being employed as a principal or vice principal, with specific focus on any barriers or supports that you encountered along the way. With your permission, these interviews will be audio-recorded and later transcribed, however your identity will only be known by me. There will be no personally identifying details used in the report. The identity of the school board will also remain unspecified in the final study. Once the transcription is complete, within two weeks you will be forwarded a copy – either by mail or electronically as to your preference - for your inspection prior to the final analysis. Should you want to add further detail or clarification, this will also be included in the report. You will have an additional two weeks to review the transcripts and return comments to me. Again, this can be done electronically, by mail or through pick-up at your school site; a stamped return envelope will be provided for your convenience. Participation is voluntary

and should you choose to participate, please be aware that you may withdraw at any time without explanation or penalty and any data collected (written or through audio recording) will be completely erased. Should interviews prove to be difficult to arrange with administrators who are interested in participating in this project, an electronic, on-line confidential survey will be made available to gather the same information as would be sought in the interview. If you would prefer to answer a survey on-line as opposed to an in-person interview, please contact the researcher for a survey link. In the event that more potential participants volunteer than is required for the scope of this study, potential participants will be sorted based on years of experience as administrators (more than twelve years and less than five years). Potential participants will then be randomly selected from these two groups to ensure a balance in participant experience. Should this occur, all potential participants will be notified right away as to whether their participation is required.

As the school year is rapidly coming to a close, I would be available for interviews throughout the summer months and into the fall –ideally interviews can take place at your school after classes have adjourned for the summer or before staff return in September. Ultimately however, the interviews will take place at a location and time that is most convenient for you. You will receive a small token of appreciation as thanks for your time and effort.

When the study is completed a report on the findings will be given to the school board and made available through the Research Advisory Committee and the School Leadership System Principal. As well, you can access an electronic copy of the final report through the University of Toronto Research Repository (T Space) at <https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/handle/1807/9944>. You may also contact me directly at the address listed below for a copy of the final report.

The information gained through this research will primarily be used in the publication of this thesis. A final report will be made available to the school board. As one of the potential benefits to this study is to provide information about the circumstances of women in educational administration, there is a possibility that this study may be disseminated or presented to professional groups or at professional conferences, though none are planned at this time. Should this occur, please be aware that at no time will the school board or any participants be identified. As the researcher for this project, I can assure you that any information you provide will be kept confidential and my faculty supervisor and I will be the only individuals with access to the data. No personally identifying details will be used in reporting – pseudonyms will be used and the board will not be directly identified. All written notes and consent forms will be kept in a locked cabinet in my home for a period of five years, after which they will be destroyed. All electronic files, including transcripts, will be stored on an encrypted hard drive in a locked cabinet in my home for a period of five years, after which they will be destroyed. All audio files will be stored on an encrypted hard drive in a locked cabinet in my home for a period of one year, after which they will be destroyed.

As a participant in this study, please be aware that at no time will you or your responses be judged or evaluated. By participating in this study, at no time will you be at risk of harm. If you have any questions related to your rights as a participant in this study, or if you have any concerns about how you have been treated as a research participant, please contact the Office of Research Ethics, [ethics.review@utoronto.ca](mailto:ethics.review@utoronto.ca) or call (416) 946-3273.

Please email me directly if you are willing to participate in an interview. If, on the research day you are unable or unwilling to participate, your feelings will be respected.

I sincerely appreciate your co-operation. If you would like to receive more information about the study, please contact me at the number listed below or my faculty supervisor, Dr. Jane Gaskell, at

(416) 978-1172. Your consideration is greatly appreciated.

Thank you,

Aimmie Kellar

Graduate Student – M. A.

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*Please keep a copy of this letter for your records.*

## Appendix B – Interview Questions

1. What is your current role (principal or vice principal)?
2. How long have you been in this role?
3. What motivated you to get into school administration?
4. Did you complete your principal's qualification courses and/or other professional courses (M.Ed., Honors Specialist courses) on a full-time or part-time basis?
  - a. At the time did you have dependent children living with you? If so, did dependent children face a challenge in completing your qualifications? If so, how did you manage this challenge?
5. Did anything initially deter you from pursuing a job as a school administrator?
6. In preparing to become a school administrator, did you find any outside or personal supports in place to make this transition easier? (e.g., flexible childcare, informal peer networks)
7. In preparing to become a school administrator, did you find any professional supports in place to make this transition easier? (e.g.: Board based mentoring programs, flexible professional programs)
8. Since becoming a school administrator, have you encountered any professional supports in place to aid in your role? (e.g., formal mentoring or networking programs)
9. What do you feel is the biggest challenge that women who are school administrators or who are interested in being school administrators face?
10. In your pursuit to become a school administrator, do you feel that you encountered any obstacles (either in the workplace or in your personal life) related to your gender? If so, how did you manage these obstacles?
11. Through your career as a school administrator, do you feel that you have encountered any obstacles (either directly in the workplace or work related in your personal life) related to your gender? If so, how do you manage these obstacles?
12. Optional Question for More Experienced School Administrators: Through your career as an administrator, have you observed any change with regard to the number or role of women as school administrators? In your opinion, what could account for these changes?

## Appendix C – Consent Form

**Letter of Consent to Participate in Interview Research Study Entitled: “Where Are We Now? Changing Demographics and Perspectives of Women in Education”**

Dear Participant;

Please read the statements below and initial beside each item or set of items where indicated. Please sign and date the bottom of this form in the space provided. If you have any questions or comments, please contact the researcher or research supervisor:

**AimmieKellar (researcher)**

**Dr. Jane Gaskell (supervisor)**

[kellara@hdsb.ca](mailto:kellara@hdsb.ca) or (905) 635-2829

[jane.gaskell@utoronto.ca](mailto:jane.gaskell@utoronto.ca) or (416) 978-1172

Thank you.

I understand that I am participating in an interview with a graduate student from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto for a study that examines the changing demographics and perceptions of women working as school based administrators. Specifically, we will discuss the barriers and supports that women encounter as they pursue and ultimately work in schools as principals and vice principals.

I understand that though there are minimal risks involved in participating in this study, this is still a consideration. The nature of the questions could be sensitive to some and I have been made aware of the material before the interview.

As an interview participant, I understand that this completely voluntary. If at any time before or during the interview I wish not to participate, I am free to withdraw from the study at any time, and may do so without explanation or penalty and that the data that has been audio taped to that point will be completely erased. If during the interview I wish not to answer any item I am free to do so without explanation and without any negative consequences. I also understand that the researcher can disclose any of my responses at my request from the analysis and final report at any time.

I understand that any information about my identity will be kept confidential and not revealed to anyone aside from the researcher at any time. In the final report, use of pseudonyms and aggregates will be used to report specific details and trends. The school board will not be specifically identified in the final report.

I agree to have this interview audio recorded for the purposes of transcription. I understand that the audio recordings will be destroyed after one year and the original interview transcripts will be destroyed after five years.

I understand that the purpose of this research is for the completion of a M. A. thesis and the researcher and faculty advisor will be the only individuals with access to the research data. I also understand that a final copy of this report will be provided to the Halton District School Board. As one of the potential benefits to this study is to provide information about the circumstances of women in educational administration, there is a possibility that this study may be disseminated or presented to professional groups or at professional conferences, though none are planned at this time. Should this occur, I am aware that at no time will the school board or any participants be identified.

I understand that a transcript of our interview will be provided to me for review before the final analysis. I also understand that I can obtain access to a final copy of the research report through the Halton District School Board's Research Advisory Committee

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



### Appendix D – Interview Protocol

The interview participant will be welcomed and thanked again for their participation in this project.

The interviewer will review her position as a MA research student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto and review the items on the consent form that the participant has initialed and signed.

Before beginning the audio recording and the formal portion of our interview, the participants will be asked if they have any questions or comments that they would like to discuss. As the interviewer, I will remind the participants that their participation is completely voluntary and they are free to withdraw at any time. Furthermore, at no time will they be judged or evaluated, and at no time will they be at risk of harm and no value judgment will be placed on their responses. I will also remind them that they may also refuse to answer any questions that they are not comfortable with.

At this point, the formal interview will begin with the start of the audio recording. The interviewer will introduce the overall research question: *does the current data support the notion of an increase in women entering principal and vice-principal roles? If this increase proves to be true, what conditions have changed or evolved that could possibly be contributing to this increase?* and explain that the series of questions that she will be posing hope to get at the idea surrounding barriers and supports available to women as they pursue and work in school based administration.

The interview questions will proceed as follows:

- \* What is your current administrative role (principal or vice principal)?
- \* How long have you been in this role?
- \* What motivated you to get into school administration?
- \* Did you complete your principal's qualification courses and/or other professional courses (M.Ed., Honors Specialist courses) on a full-time or part-time basis?
  - \* At the time did you have dependent children living with you? If so, did dependent children present a challenge in completing your qualifications? If so, how did you manage this challenge?
- \* Did any circumstances or conditions initially deter/discourage you from pursuing a job as a school administrator?
- \* In preparing to become a school administrator, did you find any professional supports in place to make this transition easier? (e.g.: Board based mentoring programs, flexible professional programs)
- \* In preparing to become a school administrator, did you find any outside or personal supports in place to make this transition easier? (e.g.: flexible child care, informal peer networks)

- \* Since becoming a school administrator, have you encountered any professional supports in place to aid in your role? (e.g.: Formal mentoring or networking programs)
- \* What do you feel is the biggest challenge that women who are school administrators or who are interested in being school administrators face?
- \* In your pursuit to become a school administrator, do you feel that you encountered any obstacles (either in the workplace or in your personal life) related to your gender? If so, how did you manage these obstacles?
- \* Through your career as a school administrator, do you feel that you have encountered any obstacles (either directly in the workplace or work related in your personal life) related to your gender? If so, how do you manage these obstacles?
- \* *Optional Question for More Experienced School Administrators (those with 10 or more years as an administrator):* Through your career as an administrator, have you observed any change with regards to the number or role of women as school administrators? In your opinion, what could account for these changes?
- \* This ends the formal questions in this interview. Are there any other comments that you would like to add at this point to the record?

Audio will then be stopped and participants will be thanked and will also receive a complimentary \$10 coffee card for their efforts in participating.

My contact information will be left with the participant if they wish to contact me about their interview at a later date. I will also be letting them know approximately when to expect a copy of their interview transcript for their verification.

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