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AUTHOR Mertz, Norma T.; McNeely, Sonja R.
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ABSTRACT

The movement of women into line school administrative positions has fueled the debate over whether females and males lead in different ways. This paper presents findings of a study that examined the "lived" experience of two female high school principals. Data were collected through observation and indepth interviews. Although the women had different personalities and leadership styles, the following themes emerged: (1) they spent most of their time in brief, unplanned, verbal interactions; (2) they saw themselves as the final authority in their schools, seeking little input from others; and (3) they accepted central-office authority. In conclusion, the leadership styles of the two effective women principals appeared to differ little from those of effective male principals. This raises the question of whether role and the nature of the job are more important determinants of behavior than gender. (LMI)

JOURNEY INTO THE THEORETICAL GAP: A STUDY OF FEMALE HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' "LIVED" EXPERIENCE

Norma T. Mertz
The University of Tennessee

Sonja R. McNeely
Knox County Schools

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JOURNEY INTO THE THEORETICAL GAP:
A STUDY OF FEMALE HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' "LIVED" EXPERIENCE

What we know about school administration, how it is to and for those who hold such positions, derives almost exclusively from the experience of the dominant officeholders. From its inception, school administration has been male-dominated (largely white male) and male-defined, i.e., explained, conceptualized and seen through the eyes of males. Theories of school administration, in turn, rest on a male-defined conceptual base. In an article analyzing the gender gap in research in educational administration, Shakeshaft (1989) noted,

> *Studying male behavior, and more particularly white male behavior is not in and of itself a problem. It becomes a problem when the results of studying male behavior are assumed appropriate for understanding all behavior.* (325)

While males continue to dominate positions in school administration, females have gradually, but steadily moved into such positions in the last twenty years; and their advancement into line administrative positions has been statistically significant (McCarthy and Zent, 1981; Mertz and McNeely, 1988a, 1994). This has been true even in high school principalships and school superintendencies, two positions particularly resistant to the advancement efforts of females (Jones and Montenegro, 1985; Cunningham and Hentges, 1984; Mertz and McNeely, 1988b, 1989).

The movement of women into line administrative positions has fueled anew the debate about whether females and males lead differently, "see" the situations in which they find themselves differently, and think differently about the work and the people with whom they work. On one side of the debate a prominent group of popular and professional writers has argued that males and females lead differently (cf: Aburdene and Naisbitt, 1993; Helgeson, 1991; Loden, 1985; Cohen, 1989; Tannen, 1990; Gilligan, 1982; Josephowitz, 1980; Pounder, 1990; Shakeshaft, 1987; Bell and Chase, 1989), and even that the way women lead, i.e., more nurturing, democratic and empowering, is the way organizations should be led. An equally vigorous and compelling literature on the other side argues that there are few, if any, differences in the ways females and males lead (cf: Bartol and Wortman, 1974; Day and Stogdill, 1972; Donnell and Hall, 1980; Harlan and Weiss, 1982; Charters and Jovick, 1981; Dobbins and Platz, 1986; Eagly and Johnson, 1990; Astin and Leland, 1992; Trout, 1985; Berman, 1982). In their meta-analysis of 50 studies on the leadership style of male and female principals, Eagly, et al. (1992) found that differences identified were

either insignificant or more appropriately attributable to accommodations females made in order to operate in male-defined leadership positions.

The question remains unresolved--and unresolvable--given the current state of knowledge, but is one that becomes both more intriguing and pressing as increasing numbers of women join the ranks of line administrators. Shakeshaft (1989) has argued that "research in educational administration is weak both on research on women in organizations and research on the impact of gender on behavior (326)." She argues cogently for "an expansion of theory and research to include nondominant groups (325)," particularly women, and she speaks to the need for studies which "help us understand the way they (females in educational administration) think and speak about their worlds (335)," "on their own terms (327)." In the absence of such studies, she argues, it is neither possible to examine current theories for androcentrism, nor to reconceptualize theories inclusive of the perspective of females.

It is within this context that we undertook an intensive study of the "lived" experience of two female high school principals. We sought to get at their experience of being high school principals; on their own terms; from their particular perspectives; as they experienced it; to see what they did and how they did it and how they thought about and talked about what they did. The study of these two principals was seen as one small step in the journey to fill the theoretical gap identified by Shakeshaft (1989).

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Two principals were chosen for study because they represented what the researchers perceived was manageable, given the intensive nature of the study. The two principals chosen for study had been appointed to their positions at the same time, had held their principalships for approximately the same length of time (one and a half years), had been selected and appointed by the current superintendent, and were each perceived to be exceptionally able.

Since the purpose of the study was to describe a phenomenon that existed in the real world, one that could be inferred from observed behavior and the reflections of those living the experience, observations in situ and interviews with the subjects were seen as appropriate methods to use to realize the purpose of the study. Each researcher was "attached" to one of the two principals. The researcher visited with "her" principal over a period of one school year, biweekly where possible, going with the principal wherever she

went. The researcher attempted to collect data about what the principal said and did, to whom, when and where, ethnographically, in the tradition of cultural anthropologists (cf: Wolcott, 1973; Becker, 1970; Pelto, 1970; Whyte, 1955). As a check on one another and to provide a sense of the "other" principal and school, each researcher visited with the other principal at least once.

Before the visits began, and after the school year ended, each principal was interviewed by the researchers acting as a team. The interviews lasted from two to three hours each and were designed to get at each principal's history; perceptions of her work and how she saw it; explanations for what she planned and what she had done; to capture how she talked about her work and intent; and to see how she defined and described her year. The researchers attempted to follow the dictates for phenomenological interviews, "to let them tell us what we need to know rather than to ask them what we think, a priori, we would like to know (Pollio, 1991,4)." We attempted to frame simple, open-ended questions, to listen, and to ask clarifying questions to encourage the subjects to provide detailed, "thick" answers. We took seriously Harre and Secord's directive (1972) that "the things people say about themselves and other people should be taken seriously as reports of data relevant to phenomena that really exist and which are relevant to the explanation of behavior" (7).

Contextual analysis of the observational and interview data was used to develop categories/derive patterns, from the data itself. Each researcher read and reread copies of the data collected, identifying, checking and trying categories that appeared to emerge from the data in a search for "repetitive refrains, the persistent themes" (Lawrence, 1983). Then the researchers compared categories they had each derived, collectively comparing, testing, arguing about, discarding, and finally agreeing upon the categories and patterns that seemed to meet the test of honoring, as Belenky, et al. (1986) would have it, "the wom(e)n's own meanings and experiences" (16).

PORTRAITS OF THE PRINCIPALS

Ruth and Linda (not their actual names), the two high school principals, would seem, at first blush, to be a study in contrasts.

Ruth is a tall, matronly woman with an imposing presence, physically and kinesthetically. In her presence one is stuck by the sense of "brooking no nonsense," of "being in charge," of "tending to business." Ruth is everywhere--

around the building, in the outer office, in the halls, checking the corridors, peeking into classrooms--and it is impossible to mistake her for anyone other than the principal. She has a booming voice that carries the length of the halls and she can be heard to use it as she challenges a student coming into the building late, "Is this what time you come to school?" or ambling down the hall during class time, "Have you got a pass? Go back and tell Mr. _____ to give you a pass."

Ruth has an air of confidence about her that matches her stature. She speaks to everyone she happens on--visitors, students, teachers, security guards, custodians: "What are you doing here? "How can I help you?" "What did you do about . . .?" "I'm so proud of our students who. . ." "I'll be with you in a minute. Do you know where my office is?" "You did a great job on the floors."

The physical structure of the main office and administrative offices make Ruth's office particularly accessible. Until recently, there was nothing separating the main office from the short hallway leading to her office, making it both easy and inviting for anyone entering the office to wander back to her office. The way things operate in the main office, anyone can come into the outer office and proceed, without being questioned, to the hallway leading to the principal's and assistant principal's offices. Students waiting to be seen by the assistant principal, whose office is right next door, or who want to see the principal, sit around a table just outside her door; they and she are visible to one another through the half-glass door to her office. In addition, one wall of her office is waist-high glass, and another wall contains windows looking out to the front of the building. There is a steady stream of people to, through and going by her office. It is common for people to wander by, look in, pop in, and ask for a minute of Ruth's time. If she is not too busy, and even if she is, she generally invites them in. The physical set up also allows her to look out at the people outside the building, and Ruth gets up often to call in a student she wants to talk to or to catch a parent she sees outside her window. She raps on the window to catch the parent's attention, and if successful, gestures the parent to come in.

Ruth is black and is principal of a 762-student, urban, inner city, overwhelmingly black high school. The school is situated in what is identified as an economically deteriorating, primarily black area of town and is fed by a largely black junior high school whose students traditionally score considerably below the national average on standardized tests in academic subjects. Thus, a large number of students--although by no means all--come to the high school unprepared for high school level work. The men's football and basketball teams

have long been a source of pride for the school and community and not a few male athletes from this high school have gone on to college--and even to the pro's--after starring in these sports.

Ruth came to the high school from 16 years of service as a guidance counselor and assistant principal in the high school of a neighboring school district, approximately 35 miles away. That district (ABC) is affluent, suburban, largely white, middle to upper class, and enjoys a reputation for academic excellence. Ruth had been the first black administrator in the ABC district and had been extremely well thought of by the community.

Although she had long served in the neighboring community, she had been born and brought up in the community in which she now works, and had always had a "yen" to come back to her community and to make a difference. When a new superintendent--who came from a high school principalship in the district and had had occasion to meet and get to know Ruth, one building-level administrator to another, took office (elected), he approached Ruth about leaving the neighboring community and coming to take over what was perceived to be a problem school, one that lacked leadership, had been allowed to drift for a long time, whose students scored embarrassingly on standardized tests (compared to most other schools in the county), had a high teacher turnover/rejection rate, and one which had operated with questionable financial practices.

Ruth was interested in coming to the school. It was five minutes from home and three minutes from her aging mother to whom she was strongly attached; and it responded to her "itch" to do good, to make a difference in her community. Despite her years of working in the neighboring school district, Ruth had deep roots in the community served by the school, and indeed, is considered a "matron" in the black community. She literally "knew" most every family served by the school and the mothers and grandmothers and fathers and grandfathers of many of the students. She had long been an observer of the school and had been "heartsick" at what was not being done for the "children."

Ruth came to the school in January, taking over from a younger, black male who was elevated to a key position in central office. At the time, she had one assistant principal, a white male who had been at the school for more than 20 years, first as librarian, and subsequently as an assistant principal. He had hoped to be appointed principal. His background and experiences were similar to Ruth's. She, too, had been a librarian, in the public library and in the library of a small college, before becoming a guidance counselor. The following

August, a second assistant principal was assigned to the school, a young black male brought in from out-of-state. He had limited teaching experience and had come from a position as a coach.

At the time of the study, Ruth was 55 years of age. She was enrolled in a doctoral program in educational administration at the local state university. She had been married for more than 30 years to a teacher in the school system in which she was now employed. He retired within 6 months of her ascendency to the principalship. Her daughter, a lawyer, son-in-law and granddaughter live in another city in the state, but she sees them often. She is active in social service clubs associated with the black community and she and her mother are active in the church.

Ruth speaks about herself and her talents with considerable modesty and humility, always denying or at least downplaying her skills, political astuteness and drive. In response to praise for some action she is apt to say, "I don't know if I did anything." She maintains that a couple of key people, including her mother, have made her aware of "what I do well and what I don't. It's important to know what your strengths are and what your limitations are." While she is clearly modest about herself, some of her modesty is an assumed, "cloaking" she has chosen to adopt as an older female and black who has had to operate in a male, white world. Indeed, her actions and manner often belie her modest, humble words. She acts with absolute sureness, never second-guessing herself, and she is clearly proud of her accomplishments in the short time she has been at the school.

Ruth entered the school in full awareness of the many problems to be addressed, and she is not reticent to discuss them. "The children are just not getting an education." "There are people here, teachers, who haven't planned for learning; who don't do what they're supposed to do. You can't make it work if you don't have folk (teachers) to make it work." She sees her role as "weeding them out" and "turning us (the school) in the right direction. We have to have school." She perceives that she was chosen to "clean up the school" and as someone who "would not mess up;" something she is determined to not do.

Immediately upon entering the position she focused on three things:
(1) cleaning up the building and ensuring that it looked and was clean at all times; (2) straightening out the school's tangled financial affairs and practices "without having to ask central office to bail the school out," and instituting and maintaining sound financial dealings. (It took one and a half years of work with

auditors, creditors and staff, but it was accomplished, without help from central office.); and (3) getting the students out of the halls, into the classrooms and to school. She has achieved all three objectives.

Ruth wants to "leave a legacy for the future," and explains that her goals for the school are:

1. Getting people in the school to think about school and what it means.
2. Taking children where we find them and bringing them up.
3. Working with kids as a whole.
4. Making kids feel better about themselves.
5. Teaching them (the students) to read and write.
6. Capturing what the kids bring, their hidden talents, their curiosity.

Ruth sees welfare as a vicious cycle trapping many of her students and their families. "It's a dependency mentality. It must stop. We have to educate a mind. Education frees the mind." Teen pregnancy, which is endemic in her school, is her "hot button," and she has made trying to reduce, if not end it, her personal crusade. While offering help, she rails at girls who become pregnant, mentions it at almost every meeting she has with students, male and female, and literally cries over every pregnancy. She sees each one as a personal failure.

Ruth knows doing something about the school's programs and instructional performance ("inadequate") are two areas of great need. She argues that she's not sure how to fix these. "I don't know, but I'll know it (the right thing to do) when I see it. I understand what school should be, what it should look like. "I'm going to turn us in the right direction."

Ruth perceives that the principalship, especially at that school, as not something she could/would do for a long time. "It's wearing me out." Nevertheless, she describes the situation and how she feels about it most interestingly. "This is a bitch (of a) job. I really like it."

Linda presents a totally different persona. Not nearly as tall as Ruth, she seems, at first glance, to be almost a young girl. Vivid blue eyes, short, bright, strawberry blonde hair softly framing her face, full makeup carefully applied, polished fingernails, youthful dresses in bright colors, often with gold buttons, and gold jewelry, convey a youthful femininity and a sense that appearance is extremely important; that her appearance has been carefully constructed. This is not necessarily who she is, but rather what she chooses to convey, the image of an all-together, modern, successful woman. Linda has a crisp, no-nonsense

voice, and a crisp, no-nonsense walk. She moves with authority and no one seeing her move through the building or speaking to a student would fail to recognize her position. Seen in her office and at meetings, however, she seems softer, gentler, less assertive, the picture of the white, southern woman.

Twice a day she moves out into the building, alone, in running shoes, to walk slowly, but purposely through the building. The building has a number of corridors, as well as an out-building (housing some vocational classrooms) separated from the main building by a parking area. Linda generally follows the same route, circling through the corridors, across to the out-building and back to the office from whence she started. Most of the classroom doors are closed and the windows in the doors covered. It is clear that checking out the building--not what is going on in classrooms--is the order of the day. Along the way she speaks to students she meets in the halls, "What's wrong?" (to a girl who is crying), "Your haircut is neat. What did your mother think of it?" (to another); stops by the girls' bathroom, talking quietly to two girls she finds there; sends a student back for a bathroom pass; picks up papers from the floor; and occasionally drops into the library to speak to a particular student.

Linda knows the name of every student in the school, no mean feat in a 1250-student high school. She feels it is important to be able to identify each student she sees--or may see--especially entering freshman. She confided that she studied annuals (pictures/names) to be able to pull off the feat. It is unquestionably a source of amazement to students and staff, and an impressive demonstration for parents.

Linda's school has recently undergone a major renovation to expand, modernize and "prettify" what was essentially an old school. Once a showcase, academically and physically, the school had been largely ignored for a number of years after its long-time principal died. In that period, the school lost the students on which it had built its academic reputation, students drawn from an affluent pocket within the commercial and economically limited area in which the school is situated. The renovations were part of a plan to woo those students back to the school from the elite private school to which they had fled, and to make the school acceptable to other affluent families who were to be rezoned from an affluent, largely white, upper middle class, strongly academic school.

The student body of Linda's school is unusually diverse, in race, class and ethnicity. The school draws its students from university students (their children), national and international, from trailer parks, from working-class enclaves, from affluent subdivisions, from the upper-class pocket, from subsidized housing

projects. Indeed, it is the most culturally and economically diverse high school in the district.

Linda has been married for more than twenty years to a local business person, and is the mother of two teenagers. As with her role as principal, her role as wife and mother are extremely important to her, and she works hard at fulfilling each of these roles. In speaking about her entry into education, she explained that she came to education "later," i.e., after marrying and having children. At 29 she went back to school to train to be a social studies teacher. She taught in both a middle school and a high school before transferring to the high school from which she was subsequently propelled into administration.

This high school was led by a dynamic young man who had transformed the school from a largely rural, nonacademic institution to a cosmopolitan, comprehensive high school which enjoyed an exceptional reputation for the quality of its academic program, sports, sportsmanship and overall quality. The school's success was attributed to the vigor of its principal--a can do, how can I help you?, anything is possible, let's try it administrator--who operated collaboratively with his administrative staff and faculty, and had an amazing capacity to generate enthusiasm and loyalty. After she had spent three years in the school, this principal urged Linda to go back to school to become certified as an administrator. She wasn't interested in becoming an administrator at that point; "I'd miss teaching. I couldn't really see myself in administration in a high school, at least in that short a time," and did nothing about becoming certified. Three more years passed. When the local university initiated a special program to prepare administrators, the principal "pushed it" with her, and once in, she had "no regrets."

As part of the program, Linda had an extended administrative internship with this (her) principal. It was a true mentoring relationship. Not only was he generous in involving her in the realities of school administration and in "sharing things with me he didn't share with others," but he gave her opportunities to demonstrate her willingness and ability to manage the tasks of a building level administrator. He was extremely pleased with her performance and perceived her to be a person of great promise. Before she even finished the program, he asked her if she was interested in becoming an assistant principal (at another high school). This principal, who had considerable influence "downtown," recommended that she be appointed an assistant principal to go with his long-time assistant principal (an older, white male) to the school in which she now serves as principal. It was perceived that this former assistant principal, now to be principal, would be able to engender good feeling in the school and

community, something sorely needed, would be able to initiate and manage the major renovation planned for the school, and would ably prepare Linda to take over when he retired, which was to be in 3 1/2 years, although that was not generally known at the time of his appointment. This team joined two assistant principals, white males, brought in from serving in the same capacity in other schools.

During her apprenticeship in the assistant principalship, Linda's former principal and mentor was elected superintendent of schools for the county. Soon after taking office, with the mid-year resignation of Linda's then-principal, the new superintendent appointed Linda interim principal. He appointed her principal the following spring. The two other assistant principals remained in their positions. Both expressed great pleasure at working with/for Linda and eschewed any interest in becoming principal. An additional assistant principal was appointed to the school to replace Linda, a black male, who had come from teaching in Ruth's school.

The office complex in Linda's school, while just inside the newly-designed entrance to the school, is outside the major flow of student traffic. And within the office complex, Linda's office is set back from the office, to which all students and visitors come. No one can just wander into her office. They have to be announced, or she has to come out of her office. The assistant principals have offices just beyond her office, in a row along a long hallway, and they are protected from most intrusions as well, although less so than Linda. Linda's office is large, tastefully furnished and equipped with the latest technology. Her desk is caddy-corner to the door, so if she is seated, she faces the door.

Linda describes herself as "very competitive. Whatever I do, I want it to be the best." Being the best school--having others think of the school as the best--is what drives her. And she perceives that this can be done by changing the school's public image. Linda unceasingly lauds her school, staff and programs, in public and private. "I have the finest, toughest staff. I would have both my children here if they were younger." "The staff is the finest/most competent/ hardest working; we work incredibly well together." "Every child can find their place and be successful in some way."

Listening to Linda talk about her school--to parents, to district administrators, even to the researchers in the privacy of her office--one is led to conclude that there are no real problems or limitations to be overcome in the school. Of course students occasionally do unacceptable things, but all of the teachers are first rate, all of the programs educationally sound, and all of the staff competent

and committed. Clearly, this is not the reality, but it is way in which Linda chooses to deal with the reality in order to bring about the changes she perceives are needed.

Linda seeks to "promote the school at every opportunity. I'm not shy about it. I'm good at it." She has used the media skillfully to get publicity and recognition for the school, and has sought awards that provide recognition for the school. The signboard in the front of the school proclaims these awards to passersby. She seeks "public recognition" for the school and admits to "hammer(ing) at it (the public image of the school) with the staff."

Linda speaks of her school as being for everyone, and points to its student diversity as a point of pride. Nevertheless, in observing her initiated interactions with students, i.e., those things she chose to do, all of these involved academically able students, "the best _____ High School has to offer." Indeed, although not all aspects of her efforts to improve programs were seen, those which could be seen specifically dealt with and were directed to these students.

She wants her school to be "recognized as an academic giant" and to "be a school of choice," i.e., students would choose to come to the school versus being zoned (required) to come. As she sees it, to realize this vision requires her to alter the image people have of the school, not change what goes on in the school, fix the staff or programs, or rethink the way the school operates. She will change the school by changing the way those involved in and those looking at the school perceive it. And she works at this ceaselessly and seamlessly.

It does not mean she doesn't see or tackle problems. She does, promptly, directly, assertively, using her "teacher-voice" and "teacher eye-control." She is a no-nonsense problem-solver with a penchant for "getting at the truth." She interprets behaviors with a sureness born of experience, and doesn't hesitate to dictate solutions. And she is reluctant to settle for alternative solutions. She tries to resolve problems quickly and quietly, and to keep them from becoming public knowledge. In this she is not always successful, but she tries to minimize any danger to the school's reputation by contacting the media and downtown quickly.

In response to a student transgression reported in the press, she railed against the media, insisting they had gotten it wrong. Clearly upset, she was "livid" that they had not consulted her before putting it in the newspaper. She confided that she had spent all of the evening before and that morning making contacts

to counteract the negativity expressed in the article. She felt that what they had written had given a "very negative and false impression about the school and the students. There are so many good things going on in the school every day that they never write about. They look for negative things." For her, it was a failure of her public relations campaign.

LEADERSHIP STYLE

Ruth and Linda have very different operational styles, and their physical appearance matches their operational style. Ruth's style is head-on, in your face, this is how it is, this is what's going to happen to you. She is direct--in speech and manner--and what she thinks and feels is out there, revealed in her actions, tone of voice, body posture, and facial expression. There is no dissembling in her style. You get what you see!

"Mother" is the metaphor most descriptive of Ruth's style. "You've got to pull your britches up" (to a student in the hall who's trousers are perilously low). Larger than life, stern but loving, the people in "her" school--teachers, students, staff--are "her" children, and indeed, the school itself is her child. She's fiercely protective of the students, but grounded in reality. She admonishes, pulls at the heartstrings--and guilt-strings--beams with pleasure, frowns with disappointment, rails, praises, cajoles, coerces, hugs, and "knows what's best." It is not uncommon for Ruth to preface her dictates with, "I prayed about this last night."

Two interactions between Ruth and a student capture something of the spirit of her style. Ruth found a student causing a ruckus in the office as she was passing through:

> "Come on with me. Come into my office. W_____, I want you to sit down right there. You need to get your act together. I want you to listen and not say anything. . . My mother used to say when something is wrong with everybody, it's you. All the time you're frowned up and mad. You make mountains out of molehills . . . Your mother is a fine woman and wants you to succeed. People are tired of your threatening them with your mother. What you need to do is stop. You need to grow up. Now, you need to apologize to Miss E."
>
> "If I don't apologize, what will happen?"

"See, that's juvenile. (The student tries to speak.) No, you're not going to talk. You need to go out there and do what I told you."

Ruth to another student who has been sent to her office:

"You've got good sense. Why would you get into trouble with tardies? I can't run this school myself. Those of you who have good sense I expect you to help me. I need your help. Can I depend on you?"

As with her appearance, Linda's operational style is very different from Ruth's. Linda approaches things more quietly, more inquiringly. She asks questions, invites perspectives, listens to the views, seeks additional input if the "truth" of the situation is unclear. Her face and manner are impassive, in the best tradition of a judicial inquiry, and she gives little clue as to her thoughts and feelings. Metaphorically, her style is that of a "judge." She acts like a mediator, facilitator, seeking to adjudicate disputes and to resolve problems.

In some ways her style is deceptive; she does and seems to invite participation in the decision-making process. However, the participation is about fact-finding, about getting the participants to supply enough information so that truth is revealed or their views emerge, or that they "hang themselves" by their own words.

An example illustrates her approach. Two students, J, a white male, and M, a black female, have been sent by a teacher, Mrs. J., to one of the assistant principals because of an altercation in the classroom. The assistant principal comes to Linda saying that the male student doesn't want to talk to him, he wants to talk to Linda. Linda goes down to the AP's office and sits down behind his desk, facing the door. The students are sitting in front of the desk, as far from each other as it is possible to get.

Linda to female: "What was your reaction when J. came in mad? (Listens, takes notes). Where was Mrs. J. In this? What did you do?"

Linda to male: "What did you do when you came in? What then happened? (Listens, takes notes). You told me a minute ago that . . . now you're saying."

To male and then to female: "Give me two or three names of students who saw what happened." (She notes the names given.)

Calls the teacher (Mrs. J.) on the phone asking for the six students named by J and M to be sent to her. Tells J to go sit in her office and M to stay in the AP's office. She collect the six students sent by the teacher in the conference room.

"I need some help here. Every one of you saw and heard what took place. Here's a sheet of paper. I want you to write down what you saw and heard. It's not a matter of taking sides. All I want is what you saw and heard."

She reads them. They're all consistent. She marches back to her office, gets J, and takes him back into the AP's office where M is waiting.

"I called everyone in. I've got seven(?) kids to tell me what happened. Here, I'll read them as they wrote them." She does. Then she metes out punishment to each of the students, detention for J, clean-up detail for M. They negotiate which days they will serve these punishments.

Linda has as strong views as Ruth about what should be and how it should be, and she is equally confident she knows what is best. However, she goes about "getting her way" differently, under the guise of participation and involvement. She is able to maintain a dispassionate, judicial manner as long as she is not challenged. When she is, she responds as directly as Ruth. "A kid got in my face--with his mother there. I got angry. I told him if he didn't back off I'd throw him across the room."

While Ruth and Linda appear to have very different operational styles, the differences are more matters of style than substance. Below the surface of style they are more alike than different. Linda's style and appearance camouflage the similarities.

PERSISTENT THEMES

While Ruth and Linda would seem to be very different, the themes that emerged from analyzing both what they said and what they did, pointed to their

similarities. Further, the themes that emerged did not support the notion that Ruth and Linda thought or operated differently than is reported about the ways in which the dominant office-holders (males) think and operate.

Time

Despite the fact that Ruth allows herself and her time to be controlled by others and Linda exercises more control over her time and whom she sees, both spend their days in largely unplanned, relatively brief interactions with people. Their days are consumed by such interactions and it is difficult for them to "plan" their time or give attention to other things. While these interactions are about students, about staff, about "things" that occur, they fall into the category of management, and it is this to which they devote the major portion of their time.

In this, Ruth and Linda appear to "do" what it is the majority of principals is reported to do. Studies of principals demonstrate that they spend their time in brief, unplanned verbal interactions only distantly related to instruction (Morris, et al., 1984).

While both principals spoke of academic excellence and their pursuit of curriculum improvement and student learning, neither focused on curriculum or instruction, nor do their administrative staffs. In terms of the way in which they use their time, they make the required classroom visits for evaluation purposes, and will support the efforts of teachers or supervisors from central office with respect to curricular matters, but they devote little of their time to these areas. They neither engage in discussions nor activities directly related to curriculum or instructional improvement. This was especially surprising in the case of Linda, who described herself as "an expert in the area of curriculum." At the end of our study, the district mandated that all high schools move to a 4x4 block schedule. This required both Ruth and Linda to learn more about such a schedule to plan for its implementation. They needed to be able to explain and defend it to parents and arrange for the schedule to be revamped. Both "managed" the implementation by meetings with the parents, delegating the in-school planning to a group of teachers, and, at least in Linda's case, arranging for teachers to visit schools in which such a plan was operating. Neither Ruth nor Linda was directly involved in the weighty curricular or instructional matters such a change entails. These were left to others.

The fact that neither Ruth nor Linda spent much time in curricular and instructional matters beyond that which was required by the job, and spent the

majority of their time in school management matters, is consistent with what is reported about high school principals. High school principals contend that their first priority should be program development, but that their first priority, in terms of the way they spend their time, is school management (Byrne, 1978).

It has been reported that females spend a longer time as teachers than males before gaining administrative positions (Gross and Trask, 1976; Mertz and McNeely, 1989). It is then postulated that females are more knowledgeable and concerned about curriculum and instructional issues. In the case of Ruth and Linda, Ruth has had virtually no classroom teaching experience, and Linda's eight years as a social studies teacher are consistent with the average for male principals.

Power/Authority/Control

While Ruth and Linda have different operational styles, power, authority and control are concepts central to the way in which they see themselves and their work. It is clear that they see themselves as "being in charge," the final and first authority in the school. They are sure of what needs to be done and what they and others need to do to realize what they envision for the school. In this they are not arrogant. On the contrary, they have confidence in themselves and their abilities, and are comfortable in their knowing. They are so clear and sure about knowing that the occasions when they don't get what they want in no way make them question what they've done or what they intend. They accept and embrace the hierarchical structure and organization of their schools, and see themselves as positioned at the top of the hierarchy (within their school); and they like being there. Control over what happens, control of the school, and not letting things "get out of control" are part of their lexicon and operational style.

Because they know and have absolute confidence in their knowing, they tend not to seek input from others in the areas in which they choose to exercise their authority. And they are resistant, if not hostile to input in these areas when it is contrary to what they wish or have already decided.

Representing a group of teachers who had been assigned the task (by Ruth) of making suggestions to improve the school, a respected teacher requested that Ruth get business cards for the teachers in the school (a technique pioneered by Linda's mentor in his high school). Ruth rejected the request immediately and vituperatively. "If you think I'm going to give money for such a frivolous thing, you've got another think coming," and dismissed the teacher out of hand.

She refused to allow the teacher to present a case for such cards or to consider a different response to the request.

A student had been brought to the office because she had taken some pills in class. Linda took her into her office, questioned her closely about the pills and what they were for, and insisted that she call her mother to come get her and take her home. The student called her mother, but when she got her on the line, Linda got on the phone. She told the mother that the student had taken some pills in class, that the teacher had sent her to the office because she was "acting goofy," a view which she affirmed, and that the mother would have to come and get her. It was not possible to hear what the mother was saying, but it was clear from Linda's face and words that the mother was justifying the pill taking (something cleared with the office), rejecting claims of "goofy" behavior, and resisting if not rejecting the idea of picking her daughter up. Linda was visibly upset--the muscles in her face and neck were taut, her tone strained--as she repeated all she had said and pressed the parent to come and get her daughter twice more. In the end, Linda said," Well, I'll keep her in the office for the next period, and have her watched, and if she isn't better, you'll have to come and get her."

Ruth and Linda tend to rely on their own counsel and generally do not seek advice from others, e.g., other principals. On the other hand, it is not uncommon for others principals to seek their advice and counsel, a practice which is common amongst the high school principals in the district. The fact that other principals seek their advice is a measure of the respect and admiration Ruth and Linda enjoy among their peers.

While Ruth is direct in exercising her authority, Linda tends to be more indirect, except when crossed. Linda is skillful in inviting input, comments and suggestions, especially from staff, and in listening thoughtfully to these. And if the project or decision involves something she perceives to be of little interest, importance or consequence to her plan for the school, she is entirely comfortable leaving the decision to others and making them feel that they have made an important contribution. Where the decision is something she has already decided or relates to a matter she perceives to be of critical importance or relevance to her plan for the school, she picks up on input and comments that support her position, and ignores or passes over those that do not. In this way she controls the outcome while seeming to seek and use input. Interestingly enough, Linda is aware of the way she controls decision-making. When the researcher questioned her about the "discrepancy" between her appearance and apparently soft manner and the skillful way in which she

controlled the outcomes of interactions, she smiled and confided that few, if any others, had noticed this discrepancy, and that, indeed, her manner and appearance were "invaluable tools" in securing the outcomes she desired.

An interesting corollary to this theme emerged for both Ruth and Linda. Both like and expect others (students, staff, parents) to agree with them and their views, and basically find disagreement unacceptable. Each equates agreement with loyalty, and disagreement with disloyalty. And for both of them, loyalty is an exceedingly important trait. Not surprisingly, both tend to identify those people on their staff who agree with them as people who are "loyal" and "doing what they should be," and those who do not, as people who are not.

Power and authority--being the authority and exercising power within the school--are important to both Ruth and Linda. They see them as inherent to the job and necessary to be able to accomplish what they seek to in their schools. They each perceive that they have put in their time subservient to the power and authority legitimately exercised by principals for whom they worked, and now it is their turn to wield such power and authority. In this, Ruth and Linda seem to be following in the perceptual footsteps of the generations of dominant office holders. There is little to suggest they operate in ways that are, in actuality, more participatory or democratic than what would expect to see amongst the dominant office-holders.

Acceptance of Authority

Ruth and Linda are careful not to go against what they see as "the rules." They try to follow the rules, regulations and dictates set down by the school board and central office. They make decisions consonant with the regulations, check to see what policy is, and neither question nor bend the rules. They agree to and are responsive to dictates from central office, and accept decisions from downtown even if they do not "love" the decision. Each principal had been "sent" an assistant principal. While the principal was nominally consulted and could refuse to have the person (something the superintendent had done in his time in the principalship), it was clear that central office wanted to appoint these particular people. Ruth and Linda accepted the persons sent and affirmed the "right" of central office to do this.

In their relationship to central office, they mirrored that which they prized in their schools. They accepted and respected the power and authority of central office, (it was at the top of the hierarchy outside of their schools), perceived that

central office had the right to exercise authority over them, and that they should give to central office the same obedience and loyalty that they expected from their staffs. When pressed about her agreement to a decision that had negative consequences for her plans for the school, Ruth, clearly unhappy, ended any discussion of the matter by saying, "It was their decision to make. I won't question their reasons." The fact that their appointments were due in large measure to the person heading the system, added to their sense of obligation.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The paper has been an attempt to explore the "lived" experiences of two female high school principals as one small step in the journey to fill the theoretical gap in understanding about the way females "think and speak about their worlds" (Shakeshaft, 335). Ruth and Linda are two females who hold principalships in an educational domain that has long been dominated by males and defined by their experiences. Their lived experience may be idiosyncratic to them and unrepresentative of other females in such principalships or administration. It may speak to/for some segment of females in administration or to none at all. No claim is here made that their experience is representative of anything but their experience. We have presented them so that their "voices" could be heard and their "lived" experiences added to the storehouse of knowledge now being constructed to review and reconsider theories of administration in the light of female experiences and to answer the question of whether females and males lead differently.

When we chose Ruth and Linda to "follow," we chose two female principals who were and are well-respected and thought of in their district, among their peers and in the community. After following them in their schools and talking to them over the period of the study, we can well understand why. They are serious about their work, deeply committed to doing good with and in their schools, and dedicated professionals. They were unusually generous in sharing their thoughts, experiences and actions, as they occurred. At the beginning of the study we expected them to be very different in the way they went about and thought about their work and anticipated that we would be able to present two very different "voices." What we found, however, were more similarities than differences, and what emerged was "a voice" rather than "voices."

The way in which Ruth and Linda thought about and went about their work as principal seemed little different from the way in which it is reported that high school principals (generally male) think and go about their work. We do not

know why this is so. It may be that Ruth and Linda were selected and are prized as principals precisely because they think and operate in ways that are considered "appropriate," i.e., consistent with the dominant office-holders. The high school principalship is still largely male-dominated and male-defined. As those in power contemplate the appointment of females to such positions, they may seek those females who are most like the dominant office-holders. It may be that "role" is a more important determinant of behavior than gender (role theory). Berman (1982), in her comparative study of male and female high school principals, found the task performance behavior of principals to be determined more by the nature of the principalship than by the sex of the principal. And in a study of aspiring and practicing administrators, Mertz and McNeely (1993) found that practicing administrators were defined by the similarity of their responses to common situations (what they would do), rather than by their gender, school level or Myers-Briggs type. It may be that Ruth and Linda represent something of the diversity in thought and action that may characterize females in administration. At this point, we lack sufficient "voices" to know.

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