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ABSTRACT

A study explored the ethical framework of care as a leadership attribute in three female principals at an elementary school, a junior high school, and a high school in northeast Pennsylvania. Recent studies of educational administrators reveal that new leadership models and attributes, identified as the ethic of care, are emerging among both male and female administrators. Carol Gilligan and others demonstrate that there is a continuing need to conduct research regarding the experiences of women. This is the case in educational administration, in part because of a lack of research despite the growing numbers of women in administrative positions. Extended interviews explored four guiding questions related to extending the ethic of care to females in the male sex-typed role of the principal, transferring the personal ethic of care to the professional sphere, enacting the ethic in making decisions, and maintaining the ethic in the bureaucratic structure of schools. The nature of this study is inductive, and the data are provided in descriptive case-study format using the principals' answers to questions derived from the guiding themes. Data from the state regarding the principals were added to those gathered from four interviews of principals and their staffs. Constant comparative analysis was used to identify patterns, code data, and categorize findings. The ethic of care was found in all three principals and was revealed in such areas as teaching, learning, dedication to students, efforts to create child-centered schools, empowering others, listening, and resolving difficult conflicts fairly. The research indicates that female leaders tend to utilize ethical perspectives of care and responsibility, in varying degrees, when dealing with children and adults at schools. (Contains 43 references.) (TEJ)

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Female Leadership and the Ethic of Care: Three Case Studies

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INTRODUCTION

One of the challenges of school leadership in the new millennium is to be responsive to the diverse needs of students within our democratic society. This paper presents an overview of the case studies that emerged from the qualitative research exploring the ethical framework of care as a leadership attribute in three female principals. These principals, working in public schools, represent each of the three different levels of public school education in Pennsylvania--elementary, junior high, and high school.

In studies of educational administrators, new leadership models and attributes are being identified (Beck, 1994; Marshall, Patterson, Rogers, & Steele, 1996; Regan & Brooks, 1995, Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001). The leadership practices and styles examined in these models have identified the ethic of care embedded in the responses of both female and male administrators working in education. These leadership models and attributes are in the definition stages. Continuing scholarship in this area is needed to contribute to this knowledge base (Beck, 1994; Marshall, 1998; Regan & Brooks, 1995).

This study provides additional information to the body of scholarship that is grounded in the experiences and practices of females holding leadership positions in public education. The voices and experiences of three female principals associated with the ethic of care are presented in this study. By listening to the voices of the three female principals as they related experiences in their roles as leaders within the context of their school setting, this study adds to the body of research on ethics and leadership (Beck & Murphy, 1994; Marshall, 1992; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 1997, 2001).

The need for this study and additional research on women was expressed in the classic work of Gilligan (1982), "Among the most pressing items on the agenda for research on adult development is the need to delineate in women's own terms the experience of their adult life" (p. 173). This investigation traces care through women's voices and presents a mode of thought and interpretation, "rather than to represent a generalization about either sex" (Gilligan, 1982, p. 2). The association of the ethic of care with females--and in this study with female principals--is not an absolute association only specific to the female gender or to school principals. However, this study was designed, as some of the studies of Gilligan (1982) and Regan and Brooks (1995) were, to examine ethics as they arise out of the experiences of women. The central assumption of this research is similar to Gilligan's (1982) in that "the way people talk

about their lives is of significance, that the language they use and the connections they make reveal the world that they see and in which they act" (p. 2).

In Gilligan's (1982) classic research on females and ethics, the importance of maintaining human relationships, the ability to recognize different needs, and the response of care towards others was heard in the voices of women. The ethical stance of care was identified by Gilligan as being highly valued by women, playing a critical role in their decision making process when resolving ethical dilemmas.

In the work of Regan and Brooks (1995), which explores ethics within women's experiences as school leaders, the responses and behaviors related by female administrators working in education were examined after participation in discussion groups. Through the voices of the women comprising these groups, a model of leadership emerged. This model, identified by Regan and Brooks as "relational leadership," is composed of five attributes: collaboration, caring, courage, intuition, and vision. While the source for these attributes was the specific experiences of women, Regan and Brooks maintain "these attributes can be learned and practiced by both women and men" (p. 2).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to provide a thick description of the female principals' ethical considerations within their administrative role. It describes, in their own words, the degree with which the ethic of care influences their decisions and behaviors. Decisions these principals made while on the job are recounted, and their responses to hypothetical dilemmas and interview questions are included in a case study of each female principal. The inclusion of the ethic of care, related by those who were interviewed, are examined in the context of a personal response, as well as in the context of a professional response--as a leadership attribute.

Women moving into public school administration follow a career path from teaching--defined in our society as a feminine role, to administration--defined in our society as a primarily masculine role. The gender stereotypes, implicit in their career paths, create unique dilemmas for women within their role as an administrator, as they undergo the process that moves them into the hierarchical structure of public school administration. Schmuck and Schubert (1995) contend,

Women administrators face the inevitable problems inherent in any role change. In addition, they face the unique problems of moving from a teaching culture that

is predominately female, especially in the elementary school, to an administrative culture which is predominantly male. (p. 281)

Because of this career path, which leads from a female sex-typed career to a masculine sex-typed career, this study examines data on the transfer of the ethic of care from a personal foundation to a professional one. Responses were investigated for references to the ethic of care as being a personal ethic, as well as a professional ethic.

In the existing hierarchy of school administration, the population of administrators selected for this study--the school principal--is the administrator who typically remains closest in contact with students, teachers, parents, and community. By focusing on the ethic of care in the practices of these leaders, this study adds to the descriptive data surrounding this attribute in leadership, and the influence of this ethic in the leadership position of the principal.

As the number of women enrolling in administrative preparation programs and obtaining administrative positions continues to increase (Montenegro, 1993; Shakeshaft, Gilligan, & Pierce, 1984), the perspectives and practices of female school leaders need to be included in the study of educational administration. Stefkovich and Shapiro (1995) cite the need for study and consideration of a range of ethical perspectives in school administration. Attention needs to be given to non-traditional, as well as traditional ethical stances, when studying and defining personal and professional ethical codes, and when transferring these codes into practice. Research with female principals and ethics can offer new perspectives on school leadership that will enable male and female students, instructors, and practitioners of educational administration to possess a more comprehensive understanding of their field.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SUBQUESTIONS

Based on the findings of such researchers as Beck (1994), Gilligan (1982), Noddings (1984), and Regan and Brooks (1995), a common premise emerged which linked their conclusions on ethics to women. This premise asserts that care and responsibility for others is the approach females tend to use when resolving ethical or moral dilemmas. While this approach is more typical of females, it is not gender exclusive. In research on assistant principals, Marshall et al. (1996) found caring administrators of both genders. However, Marshall et al. discovered that the bureaucratic organizational structure of schools and the traditional educational management perspectives, derived from observations of white male leaders, frequently interfered with the enactment of caring and devalued caring behaviors in administrators.

As the related literature was reviewed to gain the background information needed for this study, guiding questions emerged. These questions were developed relative to the participants in this study and to this study's focus on the ethic of care. These guiding questions then served as the foundation from which to formulate interview questions and hypothetical ethical dilemmas.

The answers to these guiding questions were later revealed through the analysis of the data collected. The guiding questions that this study sought to answer were: (1.) How does the ethic of care extend to females working in the male sex-typed career of the public school principal? (2.) How is the ethic of care transferred from a personal ethic to a professional ethic by female principals; and how will caring responses and behaviors manifest themselves in the decisions and practices of these female principals? (3.) How is the ethic of care enacted in the decision making process of female principals working within the administrative structure of a school system--which traditionally maintains a hierarchical chain of command, stresses order and discipline, and focuses on applying the universal principals of rights and justice in the resolution of dilemmas? (4.) In the bureaucratic structure of school administration, how are positive relations and connections with others, presented as vital to the female identity, maintained by female principals?

DELIMITATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The female principals selected as participants in this study come from the Northeastern Pennsylvania region. The demographics of Northeastern Pennsylvania can be typified as primarily a suburban and rural region populated by a large number of blue-collar workers and senior citizens. The area was originally founded on agriculture, mining, and manufacturing industries by a large ethnic population, which migrated from Northern Europe and Italy. Many of those living in this region are second or third generation Americans.

The values and norms of this region remain anchored to its founding ethnic groups. The region remains primarily conservative, white, lower middle class, and very traditional in its beliefs and practices. Leadership is viewed in this traditional manner--as a patriarchal task to be fulfilled by white males. These characteristics are evident in the individuals who fill administrative positions, not only in this region's schools, but in its other institutions as well.

In the public school systems of this region, there are few females in administrative positions. The majority of females can be found in elementary principalships, with very few female secondary principals and even fewer female superintendents. The females who do hold

these positions reflect the demographics of the region; therefore, the population included in this study is white middle class females. While this population may limit the generalizability of the study's findings, it is representative of the region. A significant feature of the female principals in this study's population is that they have overcome significant barriers to attain administrative positions, and they work within these barriers on a daily basis.

While this study is limited to females and caring, it recognizes that caring is not limited to the female gender. Rather than an overriding concern with generalizability in this study, it was important to consider that the research topics of caring and female leadership have only begun to be defined and validated in models of leadership for school administrators (Beck, 1994; Regan & Brooks, 1995).

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is inductive in nature, therefore the data are reported in descriptive case study format. Case study methodology is described as providing a thick or holistic description of the transactions and processes observed in the setting relevant to the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Since this study is reflective of the experiences of female principals, the subjects' own words are utilized in the subsequent reports of the data. Their responses are presented in the case study reports as "women's perception of their own situation" (Mies, 1983, p. 121).

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

Access to the female principals was gained through public records compiled and maintained by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Preliminary data sources included a principal from each public school level who were chosen randomly from these records based on their geographic proximity to Northeastern Pennsylvania, their gender, and their school level. No other criteria were purposively utilized to select the principals.

In developing a method of inquiry to seek the answers to the questions guiding this study, schedules of interview questions and hypothetical ethical dilemmas were developed. The guiding questions served as the foundation for the development of the interview questions and hypothetical ethical dilemmas. Three hypothetical ethical dilemmas were developed and compiled from the investigator's notes and experiences as a female principal at both the elementary and secondary levels. Hypothetical dilemma one presented a situation involving a non-achieving student; dilemma two presented a name-calling incident between a teacher and

student; and dilemma three detailed a scenario of recommending merit pay for a deserving employee in light of a directive not to do so.

To conclude the interview schedule with each of the participants, more open-ended and less structured questions were formulated around the retelling of a real-life ethical dilemma encountered and resolved in the capacity of principal. The questions in this portion of the study were adapted from a research study developed by Lyons (1983) to test Gilligan's (1982) hypotheses of gender and ethical reasoning. These interview questions fit the focus of this study.

An additional schedule of interview questions was developed for school employees. Their schedule of questions was reflective of the data gathered from the principals. These questions were presented to three employees at each of the principal's schools, thereby totaling nine school employees who were interviewed for this study. The school employee interviews provided supplemental data and a system of checks and balances as the data were analyzed.

The use of multiple methods, as well as multiple perspectives, helped to provide the thick descriptions that are characteristic of case studies (Fielding & Fielding, 1986; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It also allowed the data to be checked for reliability. The three employees interviewed at each of the principal's schools, along with other means of data triangulation such as document analysis and observation, enabled the quality of the data to be assessed (Patton, 1990). Using varied sources and resources allowed for increases in both validity and reliability (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990).

To maintain anonymity in this study, the reporting of the data include the use of pseudonyms for the subjects, the interview participants, and other individuals named in the context of the study, as well as for the schools, school districts, and their locations. Confidentiality was maintained following the work of Bogdan and Biklen (1992). In this case, the researcher did not share information with people at the research site other than the participants in the study. Also, Kvale's (1996) warning was heeded that the interviewer needs to know how to be sensitive and not go too far in questioning.

Briefing and debriefing sessions took place prior to and at the culmination of the four interview sessions for each principal. During the briefing sessions, the interviewer defined the situation and context of the study; explained the purpose of the interview and the use of any data collection instruments, such as tape recorders; and allowed the participants to ask any questions

before the interview began. Debriefing involved a summation of the main points learned from the interviews to allow the participants to comment on them (Kvale, 1996).

In this study, semi-structured interviews were accompanied by limited observations of the principals at their schools as they fulfilled their administrative roles. Due to the principals' need to maintain confidentiality in the numerous interactions they had during the day in conversations and meetings involving students and personnel, observations were limited in scope to public interactions with students, staff, and parents.

During the interview process, the principals' behaviors and interactions were documented in field notes. Field notes were written and reviewed after each interview and observation. To insure that reflection was sustained as an element of this study, a taped reflexive journal was also maintained by the researcher to focus on the reflective and more subjective facets of the study (Mason, 1996).

An additional source of data collection was document analysis. Documents, defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985), are any written or recorded material not specifically prepared in response to a request from the inquirer. In the context of this study, the documents that were collected included: faculty bulletins, newsletters and handbooks; parent newsletters; student handbooks; and documents of school policies, procedures, and/or beliefs. These documents were requested during the interviews for additional insight into the principals' practices and beliefs as communicated to others.

To elevate the validity of the study, a series of checks and balances were integrated into the design. After data were transcribed and organized from taped interviews, member checks (Merriam, 1998) were used for the principals in this study to review and verify the accuracy of the transcribed interview data and field notes, prior to their analysis. By using this method, data were examined and corrected, verified, or challenged by the sources of the data themselves--the participants of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

Constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Yin, 1994) was used to identify patterns, code data, and categorize findings. By examining and comparing the data obtained from the interviews, observations, documents and field notes for differences and similarities, patterns and categories emerged. As data were coded, constant comparative analysis enabled the responses to be compared within categories and between categories.

The guiding research questions served as the preliminary base from which to generate the patterns that emerged from the data; however, the specific coding categories emerged from the data. These categories were then correlated with the data through the use of code maps (Merriam, 1998) and were enlisted in a comparative analysis of the data to check for common patterns (Yin, 1994). As categories and properties were developed, relationships emerged.

Case study reports, based on the interview data, and portraits of each principal compiled from interviews, field notes, documents and the reflexive journal were also developed for each principal. The portraits of the three principals were described using a narrative format. The case study reports and portraits were compiled to present a thick description of each female principal within their administrative role. The end result, according to Merriam (1998), is a rich case study which "illuminates the reader's understanding of the phenomenon under study" (p. 30).

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Through the use of the constant comparative method, overriding themes and patterns emerged from the data as conceptualized in Figure 1. These categories were constructed during the two stages of analysis--the within case analysis and the cross-case analysis (Yin, 1994). Category names were derived from common themes that emerged as data were coded.

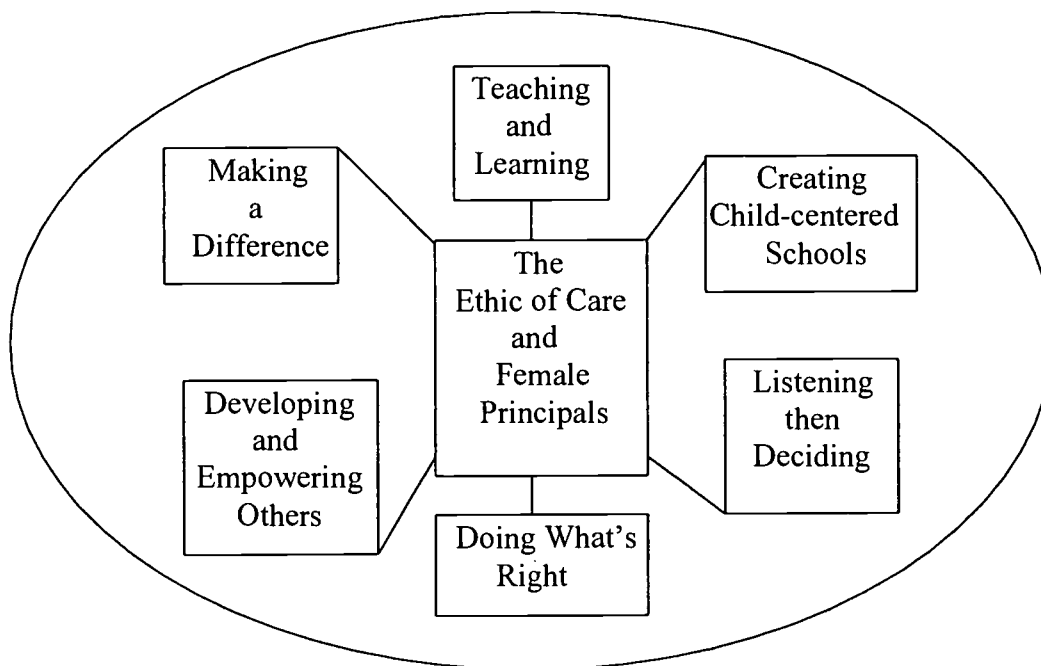


Figure 1. The ethic of care and female principals: Categorization of the data.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

In the initial stages of analysis, the background data provided by each principal were studied and compared. The similarities among the three principals were striking. These similarities were primarily centered around attributes and behaviors related to teaching, as well as beliefs and actions which demonstrated a commitment to learning; therefore teaching and learning emerged as a category of data.

Aside from the common demographic data, all three principals were white, upper middle class, and had worked in the field of education for approximately 27-28 years; all three had moved into administration after spending the majority of their years in education as teachers. This is typical of the career path for females who enter teaching and then move into administration (Shakeshaft, 1987). Sara had worked as a teacher for 17 years, Lee for 20 years and Anne for 19 years.

Their teaching experience lent credibility to their positions as building level principals. As one of the teachers in Sara's school stated, "She's taught the grades; she knows what you're trying to do." Their knowledge of teaching and insight about education were often described by the school employees as being a strength or an outstanding attribute possessed by each of the principals.

Each principal's strong background in teaching and knowledge of instruction are associated with the portrait of the caring practitioner with interest in continually learning (Beck, 1994). The three principals demonstrated their continuous learning by way of their active involvement in professional organizations, in their excitement at gaining new professional knowledge, and in their use of this knowledge to guide the initiation and implementation of new programs in their schools.

Sara's continuous work in early childhood by establishing preschool programs in each district she has worked in demonstrated her application of knowledge, as does her effort to revise the school's report card to be compatible with child development. Lee's support of inclusive programs and child-centered practices, and her enthusiasm for differentiated supervision after hearing a presentation by Glatthorn (1997), marked her on-going commitment to learning. Anne's research into block scheduling as a more effective way to teach and learn demonstrated her on-going learning.

In their interview responses related to future goals, the principals' answers focused on their commitment to lifelong learning. Sara's consideration of pursuing a doctorate; Lee's desire to become the high school principal in her district; and Anne's research on the possibility of going back to school, supported the premise that administrators should be "head learners" (Beck, 1994). Anne's response characterized all three principals, when she said, "Professionally that is the key--to keep growing."

In examining the background data, another striking similarity was that all three principals had children who were now adults. Because of the age and independence of these children, each principal had the necessary time to devote to their administrative careers. At this point in their lives, the three principals gave considerable time to their school and their careers. "Hard-working" and "dedicated" were adjectives repeatedly used to describe Lee and Anne. According to Lee and Anne, little time for self was an unspoken requirement of their jobs.

These principals' backgrounds were reflective of Shakeshaft's (1987) data indicating that women moved into administration later in their careers, after spending more time in teaching, than their male counterparts. According to Shakeshaft, in mid-life, these women had fewer demands as mothers, and could begin or renew career commitments.

All three principals made frequent references to their role as mothers, and spoke of their children with pride and admiration. Two of the principals, Lee and Anne, immediately credited their children as being their greatest accomplishment. Pictures of family members and references to their role as mother, and in Sara's case her new role as grandmother, were evident in the form of plaques and other gifts from family members which adorned their office walls and cabinets. The principals expressed pride in their accomplishment as mothers who raised "good kids," and proudly spoke of their children's successes in educational and personal endeavors.

The principals' successes as mothers inspired them to use these experiences as a guide in their professional encounters with students and parents. Anne stated that she frequently pictured her own children sitting in front of her when dealing with the students in her school. Interestingly, conversations and interviews with school employees often contained positive remarks about the background of Sara and Anne as mothers. The principals themselves, as well as the school employees' remarks, conveyed that the experience of motherhood made them more effective and understanding as leaders.

In comparing the principals' backgrounds, the specifics of each principal's teaching career varied, as did their reasons for moving into administration. Yet, it was a combination of internal qualities and external influences that triggered their move into administration. These influences included opportunities that arose in their districts, as well as encouragement from individuals who knew them and their abilities.

Lee was extremely self-motivated because of her strong dedication to influence individuals and organizations "to do what is best for kids." While she stated that, "education was a family career," she credited the strong influence of her father, who had worked as a supervising principal and later served as a school board member, for her drive to move into administration.

Sara entered administration because of an unexpected job offer from her superintendent. However, the job offer came because the superintendent had noticed Sara's interest in her own professional growth, as well as her desire to share her knowledge with colleagues through staff development. Sara also credited her husband, who had made the move into administration previously, as providing the support and encouragement for her to take the step down that career path.

Anne decided to pursue administration after repeated praise for her organizational abilities. The constant encouragement she received from those who knew her capabilities, and her own motivation to build upon and develop these strengths to benefit children, prompted her to take the step from teacher to administrator.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Strong inner motivation and dedication to children guided these principals to make the decision to enter teaching and then administration. This same motivation--to make a difference for children--is the reason for their continuing satisfaction with their jobs as principals. This desire, to make a difference, was strongly voiced by each principal. While expressed in different words, each carried the same meaning. Sara stated, "I have some influence on improving education for the children." Lee recognized, "You can make a difference by working with parents, teachers and the community for the kids." Anne's decision to work in public education was because, "I just thought I could make a difference at this level for the kids." All these statements echo the theme--to make a difference.

Examples of making a difference were found in Sara's actions pertaining to her involvement in early childhood, her initiative in the founding of a family center, and her work in

organizing a regional chapter of a national early childhood organization. Sara summed up her past work by stating, "I was an advocate for early childhood education. I felt I really made an effect--caused improvement."

Lee's greatest joy came from witnessing the successes of the students and teachers in her school. Her role in making this difference, by being a positive influence in education, was cited as the reason she became a principal. Lee assessed, "It [being a principal] carries more weight in the community."

Anne stated that, as an assistant principal, she worked primarily with students needing discipline. In regard to that role, Anne stated, "I didn't mind it. I actually enjoyed seeing the difference I could make in the students' lives." The theme, making a difference, was identified in the study of outstanding male and female administrators by Wendel, Hoke, and Joekel (1996) and of female principals by Carr (1995) and Hurty (1995).

CREATING CHILD-CENTERED SCHOOLS

The goal, to make schools exist to benefit students, was the most prevailing factor in almost every decision made by each of the principals--from personal career choices to professional decisions. The responses of the principals in this study reflected this theme time and time again. Lee's responses were the most resounding in this area. She affirmed all her beliefs and decisions with statements such as; "The bottom line is the kids. You do what is best for kids." Lee acknowledged, "I know that I say that over and over, but that is what we are here for." Lee enacts her belief by being a role model, both through her dedication as an educator and through her service to the community. She infuses her ethic of service into her junior high school through student activities and clubs that benefit and serve the community.

Lee's advocacy for inclusion was illustrated by the support she provides to teachers so these practices are successfully implemented. This enables Lee to work toward her goal of not allowing "kids to fall through the cracks anymore." The belief, that all children can learn, was heard not only from Lee, but also from Sara and Anne, and from the successful administrators identified in the study of Wendel et al. (1996).

Sara felt compelled to make her elementary school's environment positive--her role in that is "paramount." She is working to achieve this through the messages she transmits to students and teachers. At the beginning of the year, Sara communicates to students that one of her jobs as principal "is to keep them safe." She initiated changes to achieve this by establishing

student rights. One of the rights Sara emphasizes to students is that they are not to be verbally abused.

One of Sara's motivations in emphasizing student rights, and in particular this right, was to send a message to her staff that students are to be treated with respect and dignity. This enabled Sara to set the stage to address a teacher who regularly berated students without provocation. By establishing this right as a key attribute to an emotionally safe school environment, Sara was able to address this teacher and institute an improvement plan after her initial attempts at reaching this teacher failed. Sara summed up her stance by stating, "You are not doing your job if you let those things happen."

Anne stated that her primary role in maintaining the learning environment is to work with teachers and support them so they become more effective. Her responses often focused on meeting the specific and diverse needs of students in her high school through teamwork with the teachers, and an attitude of "we'll do what it takes."

By using a team approach and working with parents, teachers, and community service agencies to help students in need, each of the principals embodied the stance of child-centered advocacy. The responses to the hypothetical dilemma of the non-achieving student prompted the principals to call meetings that included parents, teachers, outside agencies, and even the student. Brainstorming together and developing mutually agreed upon plans of action enabled them to create "the best scenario to help this child," as stated by Sara.

Collaboration, as evidenced through inclusive behaviors and teamwork, is an attribute of relational leadership as described in the research of Regan and Brooks (1995). This attribute not only contributed to creating child-centered schools, but also to schools which empower others.

DEVELOPING AND EMPOWERING OTHERS

By becoming more involved with the community, and by making the community more involved with their school, each principal in this study created school environments of shared ownership. This ownership was extended to parents, as well as to staff members. Sara and Anne regularly invited parents and community members to serve on committees. Lee had an extremely active Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), rare in secondary schools, and student organizations to perform community service activities.

Sara's school had a large and active PTA, and an extensive parent volunteer program involving parents in instructional activities and programs within the school, such as the writing

center. Anne, through her school climate task force, found the vehicle to get parents, students, community members, and all levels of school personnel involved in her school.

These efforts, of outreach to school constituents at large, created a sense of "connectedness" (Regan & Brooks, 1995) within the school community. Anne, along with Lee, continued to work hard to develop connections between the diverse groups comprising their faculties. Through dinner meetings outside of school, as well as through staff get-togethers, Anne and Lee tried to foster bonds of connection.

Anne clearly recognized that collegiality is a powerful and necessary strategy for school improvement (Sergiovanni, 1990). She believed that by providing opportunities for social interaction, a sense of cohesiveness would be generated if the barriers that currently existed between faculty are broken down. Anne and her assistant principal were always trying to come up with ways "that will get them [faculty members] to work together and get to know each other as people." The intended result of these efforts was to generate a more caring and empowering climate for all in Anne's school.

Besides her school climate task force, Anne initiated and maintained a mentor program and an advisory committee. The advisory committee served as "problem solvers" as well as initiators for the school. Anne maintained this committee's empowerment by going to the meetings, not as the person who makes decisions, but as one who asks what is best for the school.

Lee's style, of always giving everyone that minute of her time to talk to her and voice their opinions, provided school personnel with a feeling of empowerment. Her continual verbal communication and her openness in sharing information, from administrative meetings to school board meetings, increased the staff's feeling of ownership in the school.

Both Lee and Anne evidenced their strong convictions of caring for and empowering staff in their responses to the hypothetical ethical dilemma on merit pay. Lee automatically and adamantly responded to this dilemma by stating that the classified staff members would get the rating they deserve, and hence, the merit pay increase forbidden by the superintendent. As she said, "Would my head be on the carpet? Yep." But extending care to the staff was more important to Lee than abiding by the superintendent's wishes. This was an issue she would not bend on, regardless of the consequences to herself.

Anne responded similarly when she stated, "I could not in all good conscience rate them less than what they were." She went on to say that she would struggle with the superintendent over it, but maintained that cutting costs over the expense of these people is unjustified.

Sara's response, when faced with the merit pay dilemma, was to abide by the superintendent's directive. This was similar to the reaction of the female high school principals in Mertz and McNeely's study (1998). Sara was not comfortable with the dilemma or the response she felt obligated to give in light of a directive from the superintendent, who she said is, "the boss." Therefore, she offered alternate ways to recognize the hard work of these individuals with letters of commendation, the granting of "perks," and communicating directly with these staff members about how much their work is appreciated. Her discomfort with the entire dilemma was visibly evident, in part due to the unfairness of the situation to the staff, but also because of the position in which it placed her.

In reality, Sara, Lee, and Anne do recognize and reward staff members in their schools. This practice illustrates their attempts to promote and empower others. These rewards are done both publicly and privately to transmit their value of work done well. Lee was observed doing this on a regular basis in her interactions with staff. Her praise for her staff and her description of her faculty, as "great teachers of great kids" was echoed often. Lee facilitates teacher learning is by keeping current files on various professional topics that help teachers in graduate course work or in achieving their professional goals.

Sara stated, "I try to encourage staff to find out what their strengths are and then lead their team." She attempts to get "those who will be most involved about a decision" involved in the process. Sara has grade group leaders and individuals responsible for various tasks in which they have strengths.

Anne continually works to develop teachers who demonstrate initiative and leadership potential. She creates avenues for them to speak up and share their opinions. Opportunities for leadership are offered through membership on committees, presentations at in-services, and department head positions. Conference and workshop attendance is encouraged by Anne, as is the sharing of this knowledge at faculty meetings.

The importance each principal in this study placed on their role in developing the effectiveness of the teachers in their schools was evident throughout the data. Sara described her role of principal as "being a leader of leaders." Anne called herself "a teacher of teachers." Lee

paralleled the feeling of satisfaction she gets from seeing teachers succeed, to the feeling of satisfaction she experienced as a teacher when students achieved. Beck (1994) found that caring principals "define success as growth, and definitions of both growth and success were developed by involved parties in a collaborative manner" (p. 94).

LISTENING THEN DECIDING

Each principal's desire, to receive and understand the perspectives of others and formulate responses after gathering information, was reflective of Noddings' (1984) premise that a behavior of care is "stepping out of one's personal frame of reference into the other's" (p. 24). This goal of care (Beck, 1992; Regan & Brooks, 1995) generated the category, listening then deciding, which emerged from multiple data sources.

Sara illustrated this behavior when she described her decision making process as being dependent on the situation. In elaborating Sara said, "I try to spend time collecting the information and I never try to do the first story scenario."

Data, related to the category of listening then deciding, were found in each principal's response to the name-calling dilemma. Rather than reprimand the student and leave the situation, each principal stated that they would investigate the situation further by discussing it with the teacher. All three carefully considered the various factors that could be revealed in their investigation. Their responses characterized the situational nature of their decision making that resulted from listening then deciding. In this dilemma, each principal weighed their options with the teacher based on the outcome of whether this was a one-time incident or a series of common behaviors needing to be addressed.

The data contained in the responses of the school employees were crucial in identifying the category of listening then deciding. Lee's employees regarded her as fair and thorough. As one said, "Lee calls in all the parties to get things resolved. She could just make the decisions; it would take less of her time, but she listens to everyone's side." While Lee, as well as Anne, was viewed as sometimes making too many quick decisions, they were conversely described as taking the time to hear all sides and to listen, especially to kids.

One staff member reported that Lee "takes time with the kids, even the kids with reputations, . . . and gives them the benefit of the doubt." In the immediacy of dealing with a tragic situation at her school, a school employee stated that Anne took the time to call a meeting "where we came together to decide what we wanted to do. . . . We all had a say in it even though

it had to be done quickly." This confirmed Anne's statement that her preference is for shared decision-making.

School employees described Anne as "listening open-mindedly," and as giving a school employee advice "to sit back and reflect and think of different ways to solve a problem." Anne was characterized as possessing a "willingness to listen and hear every side of a problem. She doesn't jump to a conclusion right away. She researches what she's got to do before she makes a decision. She goes into every aspect of a problem."

Anne's own account of her decision making process reflected an awareness that caution is necessary when making solo decisions, and to "think of the end result, so I think very carefully about the impact of what I do." One way she does this is to put herself in the other person's position when making a decision which will directly affect them, or to picture her sons as her students and ask herself what she would want for them.

Through committee work and surveying staff for their opinions, Anne and Sara communicated to their staff that they valued their opinions. Anne's message is, "If you have an opinion, state it. . . . Your opinion is important. If I totally disagree with it, that's okay." Lee's style of continuously exchanging information with her staff, and her openness to always give someone "a minute" of her time, transmits her value of the staff's opinions. The school employees characterized the three principals with terminology such as being open, having an open door, and being willing to listen.

DOING WHAT'S RIGHT

In dealing with difficult dilemmas, as those presented in the hypothetical ethical dilemmas or in the recounting of their real-life ethical dilemma, each principal was guided by a strong belief system. It became apparent that each of these principals acted out a strong sense of doing what's right. Identical to the outstanding administrators in Wendel et al. (1996), the principals in this study had explicit value systems.

Regan & Brooks (1995) found that "a leader is a person who operates by a strong belief or value system" (p. 39). Lee's value system was defined and named by her as "doing what's best for kids." The essence of her leadership and decision making is guided by this belief. As she stated, "If I feel my decision is the best one and the right one for students, I will stand by it."

While Anne and Sara could not give their values a name, they both responded by doing what they believed to be right. In Sara's closing remarks to her real-life dilemma, she stated,

"There are just some things that there is no decision to be made. You just do what's right and let the chips fall as they may. If that meant that by doing the right thing, I didn't get a good rating and I didn't get renewed, then so be it. You don't want to work at a place where they don't respect ethics anyway."

Anne echoed a similar response in her resolution of the merit pay dilemma. "I think there are times when you should never ask someone to compromise their values." When discussing how she dealt with a demeaning superintendent in a previous position, she relayed that stood her ground and told that superintendent, "My dignity is worth much more than this job." In an emotionally frustrating real-life ethical dilemma that Anne recounted, she held onto her beliefs in spite of the volatile nature of the situation. She summed up her response with, "Even though it was a nightmare, . . . I would have never done anything else."

The three principals in this study, by doing what's right, acted out of their ethic of care for others. Their responses emerged from a belief system of care, "where the dignity of each person is honored; this ethic propels them into action of behalf of others" (Regan & Brooks, 1995, p. 42). Their actions were indicative of the value each placed on maintaining human relationships, on recognizing different needs, and in responding with care towards others (Gilligan, 1982).

CONCLUSIONS

The research reviewed on female principals (Carr, 1995; Hurty, 1995; Marshall, 1992; Mertz & McNeely, 1998; Regan & Brooks, 1995; Schmuck & Schubert, 1995; Sernak, 1998) documents that female leaders tend to utilize ethical perspectives of care and responsibility, with varying degrees of intensity and focus, when dealing with children and adults within their school. These ethical perspectives extend to the female principals in this study. The act of caring for others was central to the participants' responses. Yet the participants did care about ideas and causes, but primarily in a relational context--as the ideas and causes related to the people they affected. The principals valued ideas related to education that promoted student-centered learning, respectful classroom management practices, and caring behaviors toward students and staff. They had causes they believed in and defended, as illustrated in their real-life ethical dilemmas, but again, it was in the context of making their schools better learning environments and more caring for students as well as staff.

Based on these findings, care as defined by Gilligan (1982) and Noddings (1984), as the act of caring for others rather than caring about ideas, causes, or objects, needs to be qualified based on the findings of this study. Care as evidenced by the principals in this study extends to caring for ideas and causes as they advance or promote care for others.

It is noteworthy to conclude that the personal ethic of care, as it related to their roles as mothers of their own children, was reflected in each principal's behaviors as administrators to varying degrees. References, relative to dealing with students as if dealing with own children, or remarks such as, caring for their own children better prepared them for their role as teacher and now as administrator, were evident in Anne's and Lee's responses. In Sara's case, personal references of care relating to her new role as grandmother were evident.

For all three principals, the ethic of care was central to their ethical stance as teachers and was now a guiding ethic in the enactment of their role as principal. This act of caring, which is other-directed and promotes the development of others by responding to their needs (Noddings, 1984, 1992), describes much of what these principals do in their leadership roles. Each of the principals in this study focused their thoughts and energies throughout the day on activities and decisions that responded to the needs of various individuals--both adults and children--in their schools. These principals were primarily in the role of one-caring, and the recipients of their responses, defined as the cared-for, were students and school employees (Noddings, 1992).

Caring for the welfare of others, and in particular children entrusted to them, was of primary concern for Lee, Sara, and Anne. Based on their backgrounds, it has always been that way. Their strong sense of care and responsibility for others has its roots in their roles as mothers. This response of care was transferred to their roles as teachers, and is now extended to their positions as principals. Based on the data, it was concluded that caring is an on-going activity and ethic in their lives.

"Doing what is best for kids" is the essence of Lee. It guides her responses and behaviors as principal. Sara's goal, to make a difference by reshaping her school to be more child-centered, compels her to make decisions and model actions that convey this message to students, staff and community. Anne's joy, in the knowledge that she makes a difference in the lives of students, motivates her to direct her leadership energies toward promoting child-centered practices and collegial relationships in her school.

The three principals in this study extended their care and responsibility to their staff members by using their knowledge of education and teaching experiences to develop the teachers in their faculty. They found satisfaction in this role and conveyed that this was their chance to continue to teach. In addition, they promoted and valued professionalism within their teaching staffs by offering opportunities for professional development and leadership.

Each of the female principals empowered others through shared ownership in the decision making process of the school, as was found of female leaders in studies by Haskin (1995) and Shakeshaft, Nowell, and Perry (1991). This was seen extensively in Anne's school, as every individual in the school had the opportunity to serve on the school climate task force and have their voices heard. Anne extended this opportunity to students as well, which Anfara and Miron (1996) cite as an essential element of school reform.

In observing the principals, each modeled the behaviors they expected of others within their schools, and transmitted the value of learning by continuing to be learners themselves. All three principals regularly engaged in productive teacher-principal interactions that focused on discussions of pedagogy. They emulated the qualities of caring instructional leaders as described by Beck (1994), "Administrators, committed to caring and effective instructional leadership, would encourage the ongoing professional development of all within their school" (p. 92).

Each of the principals valued and celebrated professional development and growth, and within this exchange, there was reciprocity between the principals and their teachers. In these interactions the principals, acting as one-caring, demonstrated great delight in the growth of their teachers, as the cared-for (Noddings, 1984). The principals also delighted in their own growth and learning through interactions related to discussions of pedagogy with their teachers. This was reciprocal. The teachers felt a sense of reward in that their learning was valued by their principals and was used to educate the staff or influence new practices in the school.

From the data, it can be concluded that each principal's beliefs and behaviors as professionals reflected their strong personal beliefs and values. This affirmed Stefkovich and Shapiro's (1999) premise that the "development of individual professional codes [of ethics] are likely to be strongly influenced by personal codes of ethics" (p. 15). For these principals, an ethic of care has a strong influence in both their personal and professional lives. Their behaviors, beliefs, and ethics reflect the focus on children which concurs with Stefkovich and Shapiro's

(1999) statement, "In educational administration, we believe that if there is a moral imperative for the profession, it is to serve the 'best interests of the student'" (p. 16).

It became apparent that each principal enacted care by seeking and considering the opinions of the stakeholders in their schools through committees, surveys, and conversations. It was the norm for each principal to investigate all sides of an issue by conversing with staff and students. These responses typified the behaviors taken by administrators who seek "to understand the perspectives and values of others, something that may require temporarily suspending their own understanding of a situation" (Beck, 1994, p. 91).

The decision making behaviors enacted by the principals was illustrative of situational decision making (Beck, 1994; Noddings, 1984; Regan & Brooks, 1995; Sernak, 1998). Noddings (1984) defined situational decision making as a female-related approach to resolving dilemmas that is done primarily in the context of the situation. This behavior was conveyed by each principal as they placed themselves "as nearly as possible in concrete situations and assumed personal responsibility for the choices to be made" (Noddings, 1984, p. 8). Noddings maintained that this response initiates actions that are specifically fitted to the needs of the individual in the situation at hand.

In the maintenance of disciplinary codes, each principal favored the inclusion of facts and feelings that molded their decisions to the uniqueness of individuals and situations. While one may express concern that this practice may result in inconsistency, the principals were described as fair and thorough in their investigations, and as following through when dealing with issues regarding students. School employees described the principals as compassionate, concerned, and caring when dealing with students, as well as adults.

The female principals in this study infused their decision making process with an on-going regard for the welfare of others. Regan and Brooks (1995) attribute this behavior, which they noted in the female leaders in their study, to the socialization process of women. Regan and Brooks stated that, "Women . . . grow into adulthood with only one set of rules, the set that guides life . . . according to the values of care and collaboration" (p. 73).

In spite of the hierarchical structure existing in their school districts, each principal in this study maintained a sense of autonomy from this bureaucracy within the operation of their own schools. In the school environment, each worked at establishing and maintaining connectedness with their staff and students. Through the promotion of teacher development and the exploration

and initiation of new programs, all three principals also demonstrated the relational leadership attribute of courage, defined by Regan and Brooks (1995) as "the capacity to move ahead into the unknown, testing new ideas in the world of practice" (pp. 29-30).

Maintaining relationships and connections with others, characteristic of these principals, correlates with a notable research finding of Gilligan (1982), reporting that highly successful achieving professional women describe themselves in terms of relationships. References related to the enactment of care as it related directly or indirectly to students were contained in each of the six categories presented in the findings of this study. All three principals focused their decisions and practices on performing in the best interests of their students. The principals measured their worth in terms of activities that maintained connections and supported attachments with others, including work and social interactions that involved staff members, administrative colleagues and other educators.

In the findings of Gilligan (1982), relationships served as the foundation of personal integrity for professional women. In examining the principals' responses in this study, this held true. Each of the principals identified one or two staff members, and/or colleagues in administration with whom they could discuss issues and "bounce ideas off." All three female principals maintained active roles in various professional organizations by regularly attending meetings and conferences. These principals maintained a strong sense of professionalism and personal integrity from these contacts, and stated they come back from these meetings and conferences energized.

None of the three principals expressed any feeling of isolation, as was found of female principals in Hart's (1995) and Marshall's (1981) studies. The outlets the principals in this study described, and the contacts they maintain with colleagues within their school district and/or from professional organizations, alleviate this isolation. These activities and contacts provide the kind of personal connections valued and needed by these principals.

This study's findings illustrate the enactment of the ethic of care in school leadership by the three female principals. These principals exemplify care as it is embedded within the relational leadership model of Regan & Brooks (1995) who state, "Relational leadership reflects care and concern for colleagues, male and female, and is central to our conduct of our schools. Care for children undergirds almost all our actions as leaders" (p. 27).

As Beck (1992) states, "I place caring at the top of the values hierarchy. I propose that a number of ethics have a place in educational leadership, but each needs to be informed and guided by caring" (p. 488). This study's findings and conclusions concur with Beck's premise. As demonstrated in the responses and behaviors of the female principals in this study, caring can indeed be such a guide.

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