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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Larrissa Diana Henderson entitled "Women and power : a qualitative study of leadership experiences and perspectives of female principals in selected school systems of East Tennessee." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education, with a major in Educational Administration.

George W. Harris Jr., Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Charles Chance, Graby Bogue, Joy DeSensi, Kathleen DeMarrais

Accepted for the Council:


Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School




(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

To the Graduate Council:


I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Larrissa D. Henderson entitled "Women and Power: A Qualitative Study of Leadership Experiences and Perceptions of Female Principals in Selected School Systems in East Tennessee." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education, with a major in Leadership Studies in Education.

  
Dr. George W. Harris, Jr.,  
Major Professor

We have read this dissertation  
and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:

  
Associate Vice Chancellor and  
Dean of the Graduate School

**WOMEN AND POWER:  
A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCES  
AND  
PERSPECTIVES OF FEMALE PRINCIPALS IN SELECTED SCHOOL  
SYSTEMS OF EAST TENNESSEE**

A Dissertation  
Presented for the  
Doctor of Education  
Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Larrissa D. Henderson

August, 1997

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband

Jerome Henderson, Sr.

and

my mother

Clara M. Harris

who gave me invaluable support and confidence.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are so many people to whom I am grateful for making my time at the University of Tennessee so rewarding. I have benefited greatly from the faculty in the Department of Leadership Studies and hope that these relationships will endure. I am particularly grateful to my Dissertation Committee, Doctors George W. Harris, Charles Chance, Grady Bogue, Joy DeSensi and Kathleen DeMarrais for their support and encouragement. They have all read a number of revisions of the dissertation and the merit of this work is due in small part to their suggestions.

There are a number of other people whose guidance and assistance should be recognized. I would like to thank the Danforth Doctoral Cohort Group for their help, words of encouragement and support. I would also like to thank Mrs. Sandy Ammons, my secretary, for helping with the logistics of setting interview times.

Lastly, the greatest debt is owed to my family, especially my husband, Jerome. Without his patience, understanding and encouragement, I would have not been able to achieve this goal. To God, my Redeemer and Savior, thank you for helping me obtain this honor and to you I give all the glory and praise.

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the leadership experiences that female principals have concerning their career in education administration and to identify certain variables that females principals perceive as barriers. The study attempts to answer the following questions: What are the experiences of females in their pursuit to the principalship? What are the perceived obstacles/barriers female principals face when entering administrative positions? Are mentoring programs helpful to those aspiring to become successful principals? What role, if any, have mentors played in the experiences of these female principals? What are the perceived leadership challenges female principals face? What leadership qualities do female principals perceive important? The study will also be useful in recruiting more females to administrative positions and providing information for possible professional development of females who have already attained leadership positions.

Fourteen female principals from elementary, middle and high schools representing 5 selected counties and school systems in East Tennessee served as the data source for this study. These Principals participated in a taped interview session which was scheduled at their work site.

An interview approach utilizing semi-structured interviews as the main source of data was chosen for this study. The following predetermined categories, which were based upon the research questions, guided the analysis: career paths, leadership style, perceived barriers, leadership challenges and the role of mentors. Data gathered from the interview responses were coded according to those categories.



Patterns and themes were identified from the categories.

The Principals completed a demographic survey which provided data about the background of the participant. These questions included information on educational profiles, ethnicity, total years in the principalship as well as information on the school. The open-ended questions provided data on each Principals lived experiences and perceptions from their current principalship.

This data was collected through taped interview sessions that were scheduled with each participant. The interview sessions lasted approximately 45 minutes. The data collected from the demographic section of the interview instrument were compiled in tabular form. Data collected from the open-ended section of the interview instrument were analyzed for patterns. An exact test which is available with Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) could be used to conduct comparisons of the small representation of ethnic groups in the data.

The Principals in the study, although they represented varying levels of education (elementary, middle an high school levels), had leadership experiences that were very similar . They had a common starting ground for their educational experience. Their careers commenced in the classroom. The common goal of trying to make things better for students was another common theme shared by these female professionals. Other common patterns were noted and discussed.

The study concluded that female Principals do perceive challenges in leadership but in doing so have overcome the stereotypical boundaries that have disillusioned a lot of women from attaining the role of principal.

These females have grown from their experiences by making personal strides forward, breaking glass ceilings and dumping the “stereotypical baggage” of the past. They possess a high level of energy and enthusiasm for getting the job done.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

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

-Ella Flagg Young  
Superintendent of  
Chicago Public Schools,  
1909

In 1909, Ella Flagg Young, superintendent of schools in Chicago, made a confident prediction. At the time Young spoke, the facts of unequal opportunity for female administrators in public schools were apparent. Although women predominated as teachers--the pool from which administrators were drawn--they held nowhere near a proportionate number of leadership positions (Hansot, 1981).

It was not all outlandish for Ella Flagg Young to claim early in the twentieth century that women would become the key leaders in

public education. Women saw themselves as part of a social and political movement that sought greater equality for themselves as well as the betterment of society. Decision makers slowly seemed to be shifting from assuming that leaders should be men to admitting that women should be considered as potential administrators.

While many professional fields such as medicine, lawyer and corporate businesses show an increase in the numbers of women in managerial and executive positions, the same cannot be said for public education. Women are not moving rapidly up the career ladder and entry into administrative positions within our nation's public schools. The climb of females up this particular professional ladder is extremely slow.

Porat states that the North American culture remains largely male-oriented, and male principals continue to be the norm (Porat, 1991). Women have influenced and made notable contributions throughout the history of education. Although women continue to represent the majority of teachers, the representation of women in school administration continues to be disproportional (Restine, 1993).

Research is needed to examine the leadership and administrative experiences of female principals at the local school

and district level. Many people still expect school principals to be men. Women who choose to enter an administrative career and are successful in obtaining a position are defying these expectations. Women are demonstrating that they know the unwritten rules about accepted behaviors and experiences that are rewarded in the system. Through organization and networking, women are beginning to ask the right questions and learn what they need to know about career advancement and leadership (McGrath, 1992).

Historically, classroom teaching positions have been overwhelmingly populated by women and minorities, while the top administrative positions were held by white males. While the number of females is slowly on the rise again (Restine, 1993), women's representation in school administration is far from proportionate at all levels of education. In 1992, there were approximately 15,449 superintendents. Males comprised 93.4 % and females 6.6% (Johnson, 1991). In the field of education, women dominate in number but men dominate in formal power. Consequently, most of the research has focused on male leaders (Kanter, 1977; Doughty, 1980; Lightfoot, 1983; Calabrese, 1987; Lips, 1991). Now, however, since more and more females are reaching the top in educational administration, researchers are exploring the leadership perspectives and experiences of females.



Women have slowly been making advancements into some fields, including law, medicine, engineering, dentistry, space science, business and industry, but unfortunately not much progress has been witnessed in education. In 1928, 55 percent of all elementary principals were women. In the 11-year periods between the academic years, 1950-51 and 1961-62, the number of women serving as junior high and senior high school principals dropped from 18 percent to 3.8 percent for all secondary schools. By 1970 the percent of female high school principals was 2.6 and by 1972, 1.7 percent (Johnson, 1995). This decrease in female principals is largely due to men acquiring principalship positions upon their return home from the Vietnam War. This decrease also occurred in other workplaces where women had been hired to fill positions left vacant by men leaving to fight in war. According to a report by Mertz, Grossnickle and Tutcher (1980), women still held 67 percent of all public school teaching positions but less than 16 percent of administrative positions. Based on figures from the American Association of School Administrators (1990), women hold 42.5% of administrative positions.

Some research indicates that female principals do tend to possess leadership behaviors that are different from their traditional male role models. As Smith and Smits (1994) succinctly

point out, leadership experts have become increasingly sensitive to gender differences in leadership behaviors. They describe a transition from perceptions of male leadership behaviors to leadership behaviors perceived as those belonging to females. These leadership perceptions are exclusionary (divide and conquer) to inclusionary (power sharing, sense of family); from leader as master (leadership from above) to leader as colleague (leadership from within); from competitive norms (play hard) to cooperative norms (play fair); from individualism (by me, for me) to collectivism (team first) (Robertson, 1995). Educational researchers Gross and Trask (1976) found that "women offer the type of leadership that can revitalize instructional programs.....motivate teachers....and create an effective learning environment" (Gross, 1976). Feminine attributes and behaviors in leadership constitute such terms as nurturing, sensitive, empathetic, intuitive, compromising, caring, cooperative and accommodative (Porat, 1991). These leadership traits include caring, nurturing, being involved, helping and being responsible (Helgesen,1990,Kouzes & Posner,1987). Feminine attributes and behavior are exactly what is needed to nurture this era of human history (Restine, 1993). The time has come for educators to question the appropriateness of the traditional masculine model of leadership. The time has also come for women

in administration to capitalize on the effectiveness of feminine leadership traits (Ferguson, 1980).

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Inequalities in opportunity have resulted in too few women being hired for administrative positions at the local, state and national levels of public education even though women have always held the majority of teaching positions. Cracks in the male-controlled educational leadership establishment are also beginning to appear (Hill & Ragland, 1995). Opportunities for women to assume leadership positions within educational communities are beginning to emerge.

Despite a pool of applicants filled with qualified females and legislation designed to improve gender related employment opportunities, school leadership remains predominately male even today. Orgza states that women are absent from educational management. They are the exception to the rule when they might be expected to be the rule. Their absence is caused by structural, societal obstacles to their advancement (Orgza, 1993). Women form the majority of the teaching work force in education. They are underrepresented in its management (Orgza, 1993).

A 1992 publication by the American Association of School

Administrators, Women and Minorities in School Administration:

Facts and Figures 1989 -1990, strengthens the point that

Shakeshaft (1987) makes regarding the underrepresentation of women in educational administration. The facts and figures reveal modest representation of women and minorities in the superintendency (4.6%), assistant superintendency (17.3%) and principalship (20.6%). The number of minority women in these positions reflect an even greater disparity. Representation of minority women in the superintendency reflect .4% while representation in the assistant superintendency reflect 3.3% and the principalship reflect 6.4%. Only 5% of superintendents today are women, even though teaching remains a predominantly female profession (McGrath, 1992). Women should be contenders for these senior positions. Major change, however, is brewing. According to McGrath, smart, energetic women want to make a difference, and they are moving *up* not *out* of education to do it (McGrath, 1992). Working Woman magazine (1994) in an article entitled "The 25 Hottest Careers" cited educational leadership as a field holding tremendous opportunity for women. The article estimated that 62,000 educational administrators will be needed within the next few years. Since more than half of all doctoral students in administration are now women, they will be vying for top

administrative positions in the next decade (McGrath, 1992).

## **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of the study is to explore the leadership experiences of female principals in the school systems of Knox County, Lenoir City, Oak Ridge, Clinton City, and Monroe County. Unless we gain an understanding of the pressures they face, and provide those aspiring to leadership positions with the tools they need, they may find themselves in a "revolving door" looking for a way out of the influential positions they have worked so hard to achieve (Reisser, 1987).

The study attempts to answer the following questions: (1) What are the experiences of females in their move to the principalship? (2) What are the perceived obstacles/barriers female principals face when entering administrative positions? (3) Are mentoring programs helpful to those aspiring to become successful principals? (4) What role, if any, have mentors played in the experiences of these female principals? (5) What are the perceived leadership challenges female principals face? (6) What leadership qualities do female principals perceive important? Additionally, how do the response patterns to these five questions vary as a function of ethnicity or race, total years of administrative

experience and type of school and community.

Since little has been written on the topic of women principals, it is hoped this study would provide a better understanding of the experiences of women who aspire to or have already obtained principalships.

## **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

Researchers' interest in the study of women in public school administration has evolved over the past decade. While initial research documented the under representation of women in school administration, recent investigations have sought to answer the "why" questions or the reasons for their exclusion (Whitaker,1991). Hopefully the information gained from this study would provide insight for further research on the topic.

It is popular belief that the woman, especially the woman of color, has a corner on the employment market because she is satisfying a portion of affirmative action criterion. Supposedly females administrators are in great demand and short supply. Opportunities are supposed to flow her way because of the scarcity of females in school administration. Of course, such perceptions are merely myths if one looks carefully at the positions women hold in the educational administration corps. What one sees is based in part

on where one looks or what one wants to believe. Perhaps an important consideration for the woman administrative aspirer and practitioner is to understand the double status and to realize the negative and positive effects of such status.

To succeed in a male-dominated environment, women must understand the environment and behave in ways compatible with it (Albino, 1992). This does not mean they must behave exactly like their male colleagues all the time. After all, men do not all behave exactly alike all the time, but women need to behave more like men at least some of the time. These male behaviors encompass thinking ahead or setting goals, taking risks or competing well, having mentors to help them change behaviors or deal with the work environment. This should give them an enormous competitive edge since they have their own leadership methods and their own work style (Albino, 1992).

An administrative position can be a challenging but rewarding opportunity. Women who are involved in administration must begin to identify unique problems which they have in common and utilize support systems that are available to them. Efforts need to be made by female principals to communicate with other women within the field. Through these exchanges, women entering the profession can begin to gain insights and skills to increase their effectiveness and

enhance their overall professional growth.

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

As universities train and school districts hire more women for higher level administrative positions, the female administrator must be aware of the following factors: environmental issues, sociological issues, and psychological issues which relate positively or negatively to her individual success. According to Copeland (1979), women who are entering administrative positions must learn how to be effective, remain calm, render superior performance and remain sane. This statement is also true for men who are entering administrative positions. DePree (1992) states that leaders must act and they do so only in the context of their beliefs. He also states that without action or principles, no one can become a leader.

## **ASSUMPTIONS**

This study was based on the following assumptions:

1. The female principals would understand all questions during the taped interview.
2. All the participants in the study will supply the researcher with



information that reflects their leadership experiences and perceptions.

3. The female principals were aware of their professional needs and were willing to state them accurately and honestly.
4. An identified number of females who held a principalship position in selected East Tennessee counties would respond to the interview questionnaire.

Hopefully, the information gained from this study would provide answers to these assumptions or provide insight for further research on the topic.

## **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The participants in this study were limited to females in principalship positions in selected counties in East Tennessee. The subjects for this study were drawn from public schools in Knox County, Monroe County, Lenoir City, Clinton City, and Oak Ridge (Anderson County). The needs identified in this study were specific to this population and may be generalized to other populations with appropriate caveats.

It may not be possible to perform ethnic comparisons due to the low number of minority principals represented in the population. If the number of minority respondents is less than 20% of the total

number of respondents, minority comparisons will not be performed. However with an exact test which is available with Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), it is possible to conduct some comparisons with small ethnic group representation.

## **DEFINITIONS OF TERMS**

Specific terms used in this study are defined as follows:

Administrator: one who is the chief or head of an organization.

Affirmative Action: a program designed to remedy the effects of job discrimination of women, minority groups, religious groups, handicapped people and Vietnam War veterans.

Androgyny: a term that denotes the integration of both masculinity and femininity within a single individual (Bem, 1977).

Career: refers to progress through a sequence of positions: one's line of work or occupation.

Coping: the ability to contend, especially on equal terms; to deal with successfully.

Discrimination: a difference in treatment between person, things, etc.

EEOC: the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

Female Administrator Survey: an instrument developed by the

researcher for gathering data used in this study.

Leadership: the state or function of a leader; to guide; to show the way.

Mandate: an official order; a commission to act as representative of a body of people.

Mentor: a trusted and experienced counselor who influences the career development of an associate in a warm, caring and helping relationship (Dodgson, 1987).

Minority: anyone represented in this study who is not a member of the dominant group; opposite of the majority.

Power: According to Kanter (1977), the ability to get things done, influence behavior of others, to mobilize resources or to get and use whatever it is that a person needs for the goal he or she is attempting to meet.

Principal: the chief person in authority; a leader; the head of certain institutions, especially a school, who is formally appointed by the superintendent of the school district.

Urban: pertaining to or living in the city or town; characteristic of the city as distinguished from the country.

Token: a person who is hired for representation of a minority group in statistical data; the making of small, merely formal concessions to a demand, principle, etc.; specific., token integration of African Americans in schools, jobs, etc.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

A 1990 research project sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau, reported that although women have been in the labor force for a significant number of years, are more highly educated than ever, "have the necessary technical skills to succeed.....and occupy about one-third of all management positions, they are still clustered in the lower levels of management in positions of authority, status and pay than men" (Scandura, 1990).

Although women continue to represent the majority of teachers, the representation of women in school administration continues to be disproportional. According to Shakeshaft (1989), the career paths, personal characteristics, and motivational orientations of women who have broken through the "glass ceiling" of school administration are largely different from those of men.

For years, minimal attention has been focused on the female administrator who has labored in the nation's public school systems. Women principals are as rare as or perhaps more so than in 1974 (Shakeshaft, 1989). They may even be considered an endangered species. For the most part, females have been at the bottom of the administrative heap. The bottom of the administrative heap is

considered by some researchers to be the classroom since this is the beginning point of most educational careers. Generally, white men hold the top positions such as principal or superintendent, followed by black males, then white females and lastly black females. The black woman can be found in the elementary principalships in a so-called tough, predominately black, inner-city school. Rarely are females be found in the high school or the superintendency. Women superintendents are more often found in small districts, women assistant superintendents are more often in staff specialist or supervisory positions and women principals are more often found at the elementary school level (Restine, 1993). The perception that women are not tough enough to handle the political environment or the discipline problems of a high school remains strong (Restine, 1993). On the whole, females have spent more time in the classroom or handled nonadministrative tasks longer than her male counterparts.

This chapter contains 5 major sections: first, leadership styles of women; second, myths about women and leadership; third, career paths of female principals including the career dimensions of hierarchical, circumferential and radial movement; fourth, potential barriers and finally a summary of leadership perceptions for women.

Leadership has many definitions. Kouzes and Posner (1987) define leadership as a way of leading people, not merely managing them. Leadership begins where management ends, where the systems of rewards and punishments, control and scrutiny, give way to innovation, individual character and the courage of convictions. Leadership is not the private reserve of a few charismatic men and women but it is a process ordinary managers use when they are bringing forth the best from themselves and others. Leadership is less a matter of aggressive action than a way of thinking and feeling about ourselves, about our jobs and about the nature of the educational process (Mitchell & Tucker, 1992). True leadership is not an individual decision to exclude many but a commitment to include all in effort to fulfill human potential (Goin, 1992). DePree (1989) defines leadership as the art of liberating people to do what is required of them in the most effective and humane way possible.

Leadership is seen as many different things. It varies from situation to situation and from person to person. Leadership is evolving, emerging, watching for opportunities that one could not predict in advance. It is not one thing for all people in all situations. It is humanly created (Dunlap, 1995).

Researchers exploring the abilities and behaviors associated with school leadership have been unable to identify a distinct set of

individual characteristics that predict leadership. The relevant data on equality of opportunity in educational administration reveals that gender determines the role an individual will hold in education. Statistical evidence to support the under representation of women in educational administration is plentiful although somewhat conflicting.

Women are a significant resource for learning how to lead schools. Although studies of women and school leadership continue to be limited in comparison to men, a great deal of information exists about women and the world of schools. In 1928, women constituted 55% of all elementary school principals. By 1984-85, this proportion had fallen to 16.9 percent. In secondary principalships, women held 7.9 percent in 1928 and by 1984-85, that figure had decreased to 3.5 percent.

Recent figures show a slight improvement, especially among elementary school principals. In 1981-82, 16 percent of all elementary and secondary principalships were held by women. By 1984-85, that figure had increased to 21 percent (Whitaker, 1991). In 1990, the percentage of women in principalships had risen to 27% (American Association of School Administrators, 1990; Restine, 1993).



## **LEADERSHIP STYLES OF WOMEN**

Although there has been a growing preference for approaches and behaviors in school leadership typically associated with a female leadership perspective, these preferences are not held as strongly as are the convictions about what a principal should look like or act like.

When researching leadership styles of female principals, one word appeared frequently throughout the research. This term is capabilities. Women principals were perceived as "good leaders" if they were perceived as being "capable" of completing the task at hand. Research also shows successful women leaders demonstrating high levels of skill in communication, problem-solving, organizational savvy, team building, instruction and curriculum. Self-confidence is also a characteristic of women leaders (Gupton & Slick, 1996). Self-confidence affects the way women are perceived as well as the ways they perceive themselves. According to Andrews (1984), a woman's self-confidence has a substantial impact on an individual's chances of being perceived as a group's emergent leader. In spite of all the evidence documenting sex discrimination, women do not get hung up on gender (McGrath, 1992). Successful women do not "complain" but command equality through their actions.

Literature about today's reform efforts frequently references the need for leadership skill usually associate with women; systemic reform emphasizes team-building, interconnectedness, group problem-solving and shared decision making - concepts and skills often associated with female leadership (Anderson, 1993).

Norma Carr-Ruffino (1993), a professor of business at San Francisco State University, asked women in middle to top management what helped them reach their present positions. The factors that they rated very or extremely important are listed in the order of their importance and rating:

- 1) communication skills
- 2) problem-solving/decision making
- 3) understanding the organization and it people
- 4) personal power (poise, serenity, inner resources)
- 5) being a team player
- 6) knowledge of how to motivate people to perform
- 7) delegation/supervisory skills
- 8) political savvy
- 9) having a mentor
- 10) technical skills

Myths about women's leadership continue to be critical

aspects in the selection of school administrators. Although there has been a growing preference for approaches and behaviors in school leadership typically associated with a female leadership perspective, these preferences are not held as strongly as are the convictions about what a principal should look or act like. The issue becomes one of the politics of gender and the degree that women find legitimation in their ability to function in a dominant patriarchal organization (Restine, 1993).

The literature documents little or no difference in the competence or ability of men and women in administration. However, criteria used in examining competency or ability level were generated from what we have learned about the administrative behavior of men - predominately white men (Restine, 1993). Other research findings document the marked different ways in which men and women govern schools (Shakeshaft, 1992).

Male and female leaders are similar in many ways but very different in others. According to Schaefer (1985), men see leadership as leading while women see leadership as facilitating and enabling others to make a contribution while they simultaneously make their own. Kouzes and Posner (1987) state that leaders should have four major goals for enhancing their leadership capabilities. These goals involve the following:

- assessing their strengths and weaknesses as leaders
- learning how to inspire and motivate others toward a common purpose
- acquiring skills in building a cohesive and spirited team
- putting these lessons to use more regularly

It is unfair to say that men cannot be cooperative and intuitive just as it is to say it is unfair to say that women cannot be assertive and competitive. Each person brings a unique blend of traits to the leadership role. The person who makes the best use of all these traits will have the greatest value to educational administration in the future. Female leadership is characterized by a caring form of power and a highly developed sense for the heart of things (Porat, 1991). According to Karin Porat (1991), feminine values and behaviors are exactly what is needed to nurture this new era in human history. The time has come for women in administration to capitalize on the effectiveness of feminine leadership traits.

In Helgesen's book, (1990), Female Advantage: Women's Ways of Leadership, she refers to a "web of connection." The web structure emphasizes empowerment, affirms relationships, seeks ways to strengthen human bond, simplifies communications and gives and equal value with ends (Helgesen, 1990). Since school

leadership is currently moving from a strict hierarchical arrangement to a more supportive, inclusive structure, this concept is helpful. James Autry (1991) states a leader's words can work magic, can change the environment, the work, the morale and can create a whole new way of thinking. Greenleaf (1991) refers to leaders as servant leaders. He states that servant leaders differ from other persons of goodwill because they act on what they believe. This brings them, as individuals, constantly to examine the assumptions they live by. Their leadership by example sustains trust (Greenleaf, 1991).

Men and women achieve identity differently. O'Reilly (1988) stated that women achieve identity by establishing and maintaining relationships. For men, identity is derived from autonomy and achievement. As a result, men often compete while women cooperate. These differences imply that women should not try to assume the leadership styles of males but should develop their own style of leadership within the framework of their femininity. Many female traits that have been considered liabilities may prove to be valuable assets for 21st Century female principals.

Women's cooperativeness is a valuable asset in leadership. Cooperation is an essential element in team building and participatory management is a team building approach. Women's

emphasis on willing and open communication is also valuable in administration. Women do tend to be more vulnerable and open in their relationships than men. Weller (1988) states that women operate through mutual interest rather than through manipulation. Their approach to problem-solving is more likely to be win-win creating a sense of successful accomplishment and achievement rather than a sense of conquering which is the approach to problem-solving associated with men principals. Women have always been the nurturers in this society and this manifests itself in the desire to help others grow and develop (Weller, 1988) .

The Executive Development Center in association with the American Association of School principals and the University of Texas in Austin conducted a nationwide study that rated the skills required of an educational executive (Glass and Sclafani, 1988). Findings showed that both men and women demonstrate the skills of climate building and managing personnel. Male principals admitted feeling the greatest need for improvement in the areas of communication, implementation of new instructional systems curriculum development and teacher evaluation. Female principals admitted these same areas were areas of strength for them and not weaknesses.

In an age that is refocusing attention on the teaching process,

women in leadership will be a available asset. Research is supporting the growing belief that rather than lacking leadership skills, women have the "right stuff." The evidence appears to favor women if the job of principal is conceived in a way that values working with teachers and outsiders; being concerned with the objectives of teaching, pupil participation and the evaluation of learning; having knowledge of teaching methods and techniques; and gaining positive reactions from teachers and superiors (Frasher and Frasher, 1979). Men and women are capable of providing leadership and good management styles that can complement each other.

## **MYTHS ABOUT WOMEN AND LEADERSHIP**

Gardenswartz and Rowe (1987) found that many people are suspicious of females who have appeared to have "made it." To offset this suspicion, they learned that a set of popular myths were given about successful women. These myths are:

### **Myth 1: Women who have made it are Queen Bees.**

Women who have achieved success in the male-dominated world bucked enormous odds. They are not willing to make it easier for the women who follow. They are more competitive than supportive with other women.

**Myth 2: Successful women have become more like men.**

Common mythology holds that, to make it in a man's world, women have to play the game like men do. That means defying their feminine, nurturing side to play hardball. Some believe women are accepted only when they wear pinstripe suits with bow ties. They are listened to only when they are more logical and analytical than intuitive or when they pay more attention to tasks than relationships.

**Myth 3: To achieve power, women have to be aggressive.**

Society favors women who appear soft, demure, altruistic and domestic. Women who act otherwise are sometimes considered aggressive and emasculating. It is believed that women who get to the top can do so only by being excessively pushy.

**Myth 4: Women at the top are one-dimensional workaholics.**

In order to get to the top, it is thought one must wear blinders and have an all-work-no-play lifestyle.

**Myth 5: Ambitious strivers sacrifice everything for success.**

There was a time earlier in this century when women had to choose



between career and family. That is no longer the case but it doesn't mean the juggling act for today's successful woman is easy. In fact, yesterday's career woman may have had it easier because choices were clearer and options more limited. Women today can have their cake and eat it too but it requires vigilant balancing of competing priorities.

Gardenswartz and Rowe (1987) point out the importance of looking at these statements as myths, not as realities, because believing them gives you excuses for not succeeding.

## **RESEARCH MODELS RELATED TO WOMEN AND LEADERSHIP**

Despite a pool of applicants replete with qualified females, and despite legislation designed to improve the situation, school leadership remains predominately male. Why are there so few women in educational administration? Researchers have identified several explanatory models (Jones & Montenegro, 1983). One researcher (Estler, 1975) analyzed the barriers in terms of sex-role stereotyping, sex-role socialization, career socialization and organizational characteristics. Lyman and Spicer (1980) used the Woman's Place Model, which assumes that women's nonparticipation is based solely on social norms. This model discusses the idea that men and women are socialized in different ways. The Discrimination

Model (Lyman and Spicer, 1980) which assumes that institutional patterns in the hiring and training of administrators encourage the promotion of men rather than women and the Meritocracy Model (Lyman and Spicer, 1980), which assumes that the most competent people, men, are promoted (Estler, 1975). Estler (1975) proposed that the absence of women in leadership positions is due to the different ways men and women are socialized. Women were reared to defer to men and to be nurturing rather than aggressive. Old attitudes, prejudices and child-rearing patterns have conditioned men to assume leadership positions while women provide support (Jones & Montenegro, 1983).

Researchers Hansot and Tyack (1981) discussed three additional models. The first model focuses on women possessing internal barriers that keep them from advancing: socialization and sex stereotyping are seen as the guiding forces behind their behavior. Women were not socialized to pursue administrative careers. They were brought up believing that their primary role in life should be that of wife and mother. This concept blames the "victim" for her lack of achievement in school leadership.

The second approach describes an organizational structure that shapes the behavior of its members. Women behave in self-limiting ways not because they were socialized as females, but because they

are locked into low-power, low-visibility dead-end jobs (Hansot & Tyler, 1981). Remedying the situation requires the restructuring of opportunity so that women can have a chance to demonstrate and develop their competence. It requires the elimination of barriers to advancement that favor males and the hiring of women in sufficient numbers to cure the pathologies associated with token representation (Hansot & Tyack, 1981).

The third model described is a world that is male-defined and male-run. It is male dominance that has led to conditions that keep women from advancing into positions of power and prestige. It emphasizes the need for consciousness-raising, mobilization of women and coalitions pressing for legal and political change (Hansot & Tyack, 1981).

Historically, most school leaders have been male. Today, due to changing family structures and economic need, many women are striving for careers rather than jobs. As a result, women are increasingly interested in climbing career ladders and they are developing a new interest in administrative positions. These women have resources and talents that must be developed as they prepare for leadership in the 21st century.

America's population is changing. Americans are becoming older. More Americans are disadvantaged, more are members of

racial and ethnic minorities and family structures vary widely. Women are entering the work force at an accelerating rate. During an interview in 1986, Labor Secretary William Brock stated that by the year 2000, 80 percent of the new entrants into the work force will represent three categories: women, minorities and immigrants. The Hudson Report (1987) states only 15% of the new entrants into the labor force over the next 13 years will be native white males compared to 47% in that category today .

### **CAREER PATHS OF FEMALE PRINCIPALS**

Ascendancy for men in educational organizations has typically been a move-up or move-out orientation, whereas the teaching circumstances warranted. Women's paths into administration are often unplanned and serendipitous (Restine, 1993). Women appear to have a commitment to teaching at a very early age, unlike the commitment of men to teaching as a secondary career option (Shakeshaft, 1989).

Women are beginning to make employment gains in educational administration positions, but the pace of those gains is relatively slow. Women who aspire to leadership roles have usually been required to hold higher levels of certification than male candidates for the same position. According to Gupton & Slick (1996), an

increasing number of women hold certification and degrees to qualify them for administrative positions. Women received 11% of the doctoral degrees in educational administration in 1972, 20% in 1980, 39% in 1982 and 51% in 1990 (Gupton & Slick, 1996).

According to McGrath (1992), the primary reason for not considering women candidates for leadership positions has often been their lack of qualifications defined as "a track record" of successively more responsible administrative positions. Women have not been aware of this, nor have they known which career paths lead upward as opposed to those which dead-end.

The notion of a career and a career pattern is useful to understand work organizations and the movement of people in them. The word, career, may refer to one's line of work or occupation but the term, career, is also used to refer to progress through a sequence of positions. Merely holding a job or position does not constitute a career. A career pattern in education administration will most likely begin with entrance in the teaching profession and include several years as a vice principal, a principal, a central office position and lead to the superintendency.

The majority of women administrators currently hold central office staff positions as specialists, supervisors or elementary school principals. The typical woman in administration remains in

one of these positions without further promotion until retirement. Women who achieve top-level positions have career paths that resemble those of males: teacher, high school principal, eventually an appointment as assistant superintendent and finally superintendent (Shakeshaft, 1989). According to Crandall (1986), men visualize a career as a progression of jobs on a path leading upward with recognition and reward implied. Women visualize a career as personal growth self-fulfillment, satisfaction, contribution to others and doing what one wants to do. The discrepancy in career definition between men and women may account for some of the differences in roles of women and men in education administration.

The hierarchical structure of a career pattern in school administration typically involves straight line from teacher to principal to superintendent. Larger school districts may include additional positions of assistants, directors, supervisory coordinators and specialists. Movement up the hierarchy in larger school districts typically includes passage through one or more of these positions in the attainment of superintendency (Crandall, 1986).

A study completed by Paddock (1981) found women principals generally have career patterns that are similar to their male

colleagues, with the exception of later entry to administration. School administrators begin their careers by teaching. According to Paddock (1981), males teach 5-7 years and females teach 15 years before assuming their first administrative positions. Those who are tapped or who succeed in getting an administrative job in the first few tries generally move into one of two kinds of positions: the elementary principalship or a position as a subject matter specialist, particularly in reading, language or fine arts. The typical woman in administration remains at this level. If she moves the woman administrator will be promoted to a supervisory position in central office as director or coordinator of curriculum or some other district wide program and there the majority of women in administration stay (Shakeshaft, 1989). Research completed by Ortiz (1982) notes three distinct types of career patterns or paths for women in educational administration. In the first career pattern, the path is from specialist to administrator of instruction (also called supervisor) to assistant superintendent to superintendent. Ortiz (1982) and Gaertner (1981) found that the majority of administrators who complete this path are men and that women on this path usually stop at administrator of instruction.

A second career path pattern finds even fewer women along the way. This path moves from assistant secondary principal to

secondary principal to assistant or associate superintendent to superintendent. Women rarely achieve the superintendency in this manner (Ortiz, 1988).

The third career path pattern seldom led to the superintendency and is the one most likely to be held by women. This path began at the level as assistant elementary principal and moved to the elementary principalship. This path only ends in a superintendency in elementary districts and then almost always it is a male who becomes the elementary superintendent (Ortiz, 1989). This multi-career pattern concept theorizes that the specific position a woman holds in the educational system will determine the outcome of the type of career pattern the administrative woman will follow.

Pre-administrative career activities influence the movement into administrative careers. Women spend more time in teaching than men. Women who have been involved as coaches or co-curricular advisors are more likely to enter administration at a younger age than women who have served as counselors or specialists or coordinators (Shakeshaft, 1989).

Research conducted by Ortiz (1979, 1982) cites three dimensions that correspond to the three types of movement necessary in sustaining an administrative career. These dimensions



comprise hierarchical, circumferential and radial. Movement in the dimensions provide an opportunity to increase vertical rank (hierarchical movement), increase the function or level of responsibility (circumferential movement) and increase the proximity to the closeness to the organizational leaders (radial movement). The type or character of mobility within career patterns may determine the nature of the career pattern. For example, the individual who waits for an available or desirable position within the same school or district is place-bound. The individual who actively seeks a position, regardless of location, is career-bound.

The structure of the profession is pyramidal. The only way to substantially increase pay and status is to move into the apex of that pyramid. For those women in education who do decide that they want to move up, there is the so-called "glass ceiling", the invisible barrier to achievement (Adler, 1993). Whether this barrier is created by male assumptions of their right to advancement or female reticence and nonaggressive attitudes remains moot.

The study of dimensions which relate to individuals' mobility within career patterns in education administration was the focus of research conducted by Ortiz (1979, 1982). Ortiz (1979) cites 3 dimensions that correspond to the 3 types of movement necessary in

sustaining an administrative career. The dimensions include hierarchical, circumferential and radial movement.

### **Hierarchical Movement**

Career patterns in education administration generally recognize a hierarchical movement from teacher to principal to superintendent with possible passage through one or more of the positions of specialist, administrative assistant, director, coordinator or supervisor prior to reaching the superintendency. The hierarchical ranking begins with the position of vice principal and progresses vertically to principal, other central office staff, assistant superintendent with the position of superintendent at the top of the hierarchical rank (Shakeshaft, 1989). The rank of other central office staff may depend on the responsibilities of the position. Other central office staff are classified hierarchically above building level principals. The entry-level position of the hierarchy is that of classroom teacher, the lowest position of the hierarchical certificated ranking, followed by the non-certificated building support staff (Crandall, 1986).

### **Circumferential Movement**

Career patterns in education administration encompass circumferential movement as one's function or division in the organization is changed. Major circumferential movement is made when the individual pulls away from teaching, which involves children, to administration, which involves managing adults. Movement may be both circumferential and vertical, such as moving from teaching to a principalship (Crandall, 1986).

According to research conducted by Crandall (1986), elementary school principals have more limited career patterns in circumferential movement, especially in the area of changes in function. Elementary principals may be place-bound, which is characterized by individuals waiting in the same district or position until the position they want comes along.

### **Radial Movement**

Radial movement is indicated by the opportunity or situation which allows an individual to move to the center of the organization (Crandall, 1986). This type of movement will provide an opportunity for contact with the superintendent and the school

board. In education administration, there are two major ways to achieve this contact for basis of radial movement within the organization. One way would be attendance at school executive sessions of school board meetings which are by invitation of the superintendent and the school board. The second way is attendance at school board meetings which are public meetings open to all who wish to attend.

Participation in executive sessions and open meetings of the school board is an integral part of the role of the superintendent and are frequent activities of the assistant superintendent. Although other central office staff have limited opportunity to gain centrality through invitation to executive sessions of school board meetings, women in these positions regularly attend open school board meetings. However, attendance at open school board meetings is an opportunity women in administrative positions do not take advantage of to gain visibility with the superintendent and the school board.

## **POTENTIAL BARRIERS**

Women who currently hold administrative positions do caution female aspirants not to be too quick to blame lack of success on discrimination. Some women fail to look at themselves. Overcoming discrimination and succeeding in a career require hard work and persistence (Weller, 1988).

Jealousy, competition and lack of support from women educators are also seen as possible barriers for women entering administrative positions. Kanter (1977) stated that women in leadership positions often had difficulty with other women who did not perceive them to be power wielders.

Successful women indicate that they were often their own worst enemies in achieving success, although other factors may have had a bearing. Their lack of confidence is the greatest barrier they faced. Other barriers identified were classified into two categories: internal barriers and external barriers. Internal barriers include such factors as low career aspirations, self-limiting beliefs and attitude, lack of motivation and poor self image. External barriers include sex-role stereotyping, discrimination in schools and society, lack of adequate professional preparation, too few role models and the demands of home and life.

## **SUMMARY**

Women bring very valuable styles and characteristics to leadership. The research of Helgensen (1990) suggests that women's strengths as transformational leaders lie in the very differences they tend to play down in an attempt to clone male leadership styles. We need what women add to leadership and we need to encourage feminine styles of leadership, not to replace, but to balance masculine styles ( Smith & Smits, 1994).

Evidence is mounting that a paradigm shift is characterizing educational leadership as we approach the twenty-first century. An increasing number of women are assuming leadership positions in our schools. From this emerges the potential for new models, ones that synergize feminine (expressive) and masculine (instrumental) styles, ones that are better suited to the increasingly diverse student bodies and staffs in our schools and ones that are in harmony with current concepts of school leadership. Allowing women's leadership styles to flourish and become integrated into synergistic models of school leadership will enhance our schools' chances for success.

The "female" skills of participation, nurturing, communication, interpersonal support, and focus learning are needed at every level and by all administrators, just as "male" competitive,

fact-oriented behaviors are needed.

As the culture of educational administration changes from one dominated by authority and control to one accentuating participatory management, support, collegiality and cohesiveness, we will see many more women assume leadership roles in our schools.

The challenge for all educators is to appreciate and encourage the strengths of men and women who have the commitment and dedication to seek positions of educational leadership that are so desperately needed to nurture and guide the young people of this nation.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This study sought to explore leadership experiences of female principals during their career in education administration as principals, what they perceive as obstacles as they enter the field of administration, the leadership challenges they encounter, leadership qualities they perceive important and if a mentor or mentoring program had been helpful to them in their quest to the principalship. The study also provided data that will be useful in recruiting more females to administrative positions and provided information for possible professional development of females who have already attained leadership positions.

#### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

A qualitative interview was used to explore perceptions from this group of female principals. The interview survey contained two parts. Part I (Appendix C) included written demographic information from the respondents. Part II (Appendix C) of the interview contained a series of open-ended interview questions designed to elicit information about participants lived experiences and perceptions from their current principalship.



## **PARTICIPANTS**

The population for this study consists of 14 females in elementary, middle and high school principalships in the following selected counties and school systems in East Tennessee:

Knox County School System

Oak Ridge School System (Anderson County)

Clinton City School System (Anderson County)

Monroe County School System

Lenoir City School System (Loudon County)

These counties were selected since they represent a diverse school population and female principal group.

## **POPULATION DEFINITION**

A cover letter was sent to each superintendent in the school systems used in the study (Appendix A). After agreement to conduct the study had been granted by these officials, a list of all females in elementary, middle and high school principalships was obtained.

From the list of possible female participants, letters of participation and consent were mailed to 20 female principals. Of the 20 participation letters mailed, 15 consent letters were returned. One respondent who returned a letter of participation was a male principal who had recently been appointed to take the place

of his female predecessor. His survey was dropped from the study. A total of 14 female principals were identified and used in the study. Seven female principals in the Knox County School System, 2 from the Oak Ridge School System and 1 from each of the remaining selected counties comprised the respondent group for the research project.

## **TECHNIQUES FOR DATA COLLECTION**

### **Rationale for Qualitative Research**

The choice of utilizing quantitative or qualitative research methods is dependent upon the research questions, purposes of the study and interests of the researcher (Guba, 1990). Whereas in quantitative research the researcher attempts to report "what is" (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993), in qualitative research, the researcher attempts to answer the question-- "What is happening here?" (LeCompte & Priessle, 1994).

Qualitative research analyzes events, people and concepts rather than simply reporting what is observed (King, 1994). Qualitative research provides a description of social processes and patterns. According to LeCompte & Priessle (1994), it pays "attention to the unfolding of events in the natural flow of activity". Qualitative research is multi method in focus, involving

an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

Qualitative researchers in education can continually be found asking questions of people they are learning from to discover “what *they* are experiencing, how *they* interpret their experiences and how *they* themselves structure the social world in which they live” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Qualitative researchers set up strategies and procedures to enable them to consider experiences from the participants’ perspectives.

Qualitative research is considered to be descriptive. The data collected are in the form of words or pictures rather than numbers. The written results of the research contain quotations from the data to illustrate and substantiate the project. In their search for understanding, qualitative researchers do not reduce pages and pages of narration and other data to numerical symbols but they try to analyze the data with all of their richness as closely as possible to the form in which they were recorded or transcribed (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Nothing is taken as a given and no statement escapes scrutiny.

### **Rationale for the Interview Method**

Interviewing has a wide variety of forms and multiplicity of uses. The most common type of interviewing is individual, face-to-face verbal interchange, but it can also take the form of face-to-face group interviewing, mailed or self-administered questionnaires and telephone surveys (Fontana & Frey, 1994). Interviewing can be structured, semi structured or unstructured. Structured interviewing refers to a situation in which an interviewer asks each respondent a series of preestablished questions with a limited set of response categories. Unstructured interviewing provides a greater breadth than the other types, given its qualitative nature.

Interviews can figure in a research project in different ways. In the positivist tradition, interviews can be the basis for later data collection as in the form of a questionnaire. In the interpretive tradition, the interview can be the sole basis of a study or it can be used in conjunction with data from participation observation and documents (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

### **Rationale for the Semi-Structured Interview Method**

As Glesne and Peshkin (1992) note, when one interviews:

you pitch questions at your respondents with the intent of making words fly.... you toss questions which you want your respondents to "hit" and hit well in every corner of your data park (p. 63).

In qualitative research, interviews may be used in two ways. They may be the dominant strategy for data collection or they may be employed in conjunction with participant observation, document analysis or other techniques (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). In all these situations, the interview is used to gather descriptive data in the subjects' own words so that the researcher can develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world.

Qualitative interviews vary in the degree to which they are structured. Some interviews, although relatively open-ended, are focused around particular topics or may be guided by some general questions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Qualitative interviews offer the interviewer considerable latitude to pursue a range of topics and offer the subject a chance to shape the content of the interview. With semi structured interviews, you are confident of getting comparable data across subjects.

The rationale for using the interview approach is based upon many reasons. Through this process individuals can report masses of information about their feelings, beliefs, hopes, opinions, experiences and perceptions. Not only does the interview approach permit an in-depth analysis of the participant's perceptions but reasons for his/her perceptions are of issue. The participant is able to provide information that may not be enlisted by any other

approach except through the interview. The interview decreases the chance of misinterpretation by the interviewer and the participant, allows for probing of all topics and provides more complete data, especially regarding negative aspects.

Semi-structured interviews are generally most appropriate for educational studies because they provide a desirable combination of objectivity and depth (Fontana & Frey, 1994). The semi structured interview usually includes some structured questions along with open-ended questions which allow for gathering more complete data, obtaining clarification and probing for expansive information (Ackroyd & Hughes, 1992). Open-ended questions are effective when the research design requires learning about the participant's level of experience and opinions. They allow for a richness of information and clarification (Ackroyd & Hughes, 1992). Close-ended questions are more appropriate when the research objectives correspond with identification of an individual's attitude or behavior (Ackroyd & Hughes, 1992). They allow for coding in predetermined categories and counting responses. Effective interview instruments have a combination of question types because the intent is to get a variety of information from those being interviewed.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT

After reviewing the literature, an interview guide was developed to explore the specific perceptions of leadership experiences of female principals. The interview guide (Appendix C) was constructed after reviewing the previous research and included specific items of interest. Individuals in higher education recognized for their knowledge in educational research, administration and leadership studies examined the instrument for clarity and content validity while making recommendations for improvement which was incorporated into the final interview instrument.

The interview instrument focused on the information/opinions gathered from the female principal participants regarding leadership. The interview instrument is divided into two parts.

- Part One, *Demographic Data and General Information*, contained the demographic data to identify the population and divided the sample into aggregates for comparative analysis. Eight questions designed to gather background information of each participant inclusive of ethnicity, age, level of education, experience, school type and enrollment and community type were reflected in this section of the instrument.

- Part Two, *Leadership Perceptions*, contained the interview questions to which participants responded regarding leadership. Fifteen open-ended questions were given for participant response in this section.

Open-ended questions were used to elicit detailed responses from the respondent's own frame of reference. These questions did not constrain or precondition responses made by the participants. The questions were ordered by an introductory question, broad-based questions and detailed questions which were preceded by and followed with informal dialogue. Ackroyd & Hughes (1992) refer to this approach as "funneling" because it encourages the expansion of ideas and the amplification of initial answers through moving from general questions to more specific ones. Routine, noncontroversial questions were asked at the beginning of the interview while more controversial questions were asked later.

## **THE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

The questions on the interview schedule collected information regarding the participants' perceptions of their own leadership skills, provided data needed to answer the research questions and served as a validity check for other questions on the interview. The questions and the rationale for their inclusion follow:



**Question 1: Tell me how you happened to become a principal. What was your journey like?**

This introductory question was devised to give the participants an opportunity to “ease” into the interview situation. The rationale is that most principals enjoy talking about their job, and therefore, would be more comfortable beginning with this question. This question would also give other information that the researcher could pull from to help with other questions in the interview.

**Question 2: Think of a specific experience you had that helped prepare you for the challenges you face as a principal. Tell me about it.**

This question moved the participant into a mode where she had to remember specific details that related to her current role as a principal. The purpose was to focus the participant’s attention on past and present experiences that may have helped her on her journey to the principalship.

**Question 3: Can you think of another experience? What happened?**

This question served as a probing device to help the participant focus on other experiences that may have been perceived as a challenge for her. It also gave the participant a chance to reflect on her previous response.

**Question 4: Which experiences stand out?**

This question helped the participant focus on the components of particular experiences that stand out more than others. It also produces a reflective mode for the participant as to the importance of the experience chosen.

**Question 5: Think of a leadership challenge you experienced as a female principal. Tell me about it.**

This question focused on leadership and the perceived challenge it might have associated with it in terms of experiences and the journey of the participant. This question was intended to gather information about the participant's perception of leadership and its perceived challenges.

**Question 6: What makes that time stand out? Can you think of another time and challenge you experienced?**

Question 6 provided more data to answer the previous research question. It also provided the participant with a focus of why her previous answer was given and why it was important.

**Question 7: Have there been times when you experienced challenges from your teachers, Central Office staff or other principals? What did you do?**

This question was included to gather data about the school culture,

relationships, day-to-day functioning and rapport with those associated in the school environment. The respondent could address positive and negative experiences encountered in the day to day operation of being a principal. It allowed the participant to address the issues of trust and climate. This question could also serve as a cross-check on previous questions.

**Question 8: Tell me how you lead. Give me an example that would illustrate your leadership style.**

This question was intended to focus the participant's attention on leadership styles by using specific examples as a reference base. The data gathered from this question would also give information concerning the importance of a particular leadership style over another style.

**Question 9: How do you feel about yourself as a principal?**

This question was intended to be a source of gratification where the participant could brag on accomplishments made and feel good about her role as a principal. It could also be used as a springboard for the next questions to follow.

**Question 10: How would you compare yourself to other female principals?**

This question gave data on networking skills of the participant. In

order to compare herself to her peers, she had to be aware of what they were accomplishing to hoping to accomplish. It also gave the participant a chance to focus on personal and professional attributes.

**Question 11: How would you compare yourself to male principals?**

This question served as a probe to the previous question. It also could gave data pertaining to networking with other principals regardless of gender.

**Question 12: Think of a time when you faced a setback or barrier during your principalship. Tell me about this setback or barrier.**

This question focused on the participant's perception of barriers or setbacks that related to the principalship. It allowed the participant to provide information on unpleasant experiences that were encountered during the participant's journey to the principalship.

**Question 13: Can you think of a time or times that are related to race that have been problematic for you? Tell me about this time/times.**

This question was intended to focus the participant's attention to a time which may bring unpleasant memories. This question provided data about relationships in the school environment as well.

**Question 14: I know there is not typical day for a principal. Can you go through your day in detail starting with your arrival to school and ending with your departure.**

This question served two purposes. The first purpose is to allow the participant to provide information not already given in the interview. The second purpose was to reassure rapport with the respondent a calming, humorous way toward the end of the questioning section of the interview. The participant could reflect

back and report information on any given day whether it be a "bad" day or a "good" day. The rationale here is that most principals would see the humor in talking about their "typical day at school".

**Question 15: Were you mentored during your principalship? Tell me about the experience or relationship developed with your mentor. What did that person do to mentor you?**

This question was intended to focus the participant's attention to their relationship with a mentor. The responses to this question would also provide data to support the current research on the importance of mentoring programs for females aspiring to become administrators.

## **BIAS EXPLORATION**

Qualitative researchers begin their study with their own assumptions and prejudices. According to Taylor & Bogdan (1984), it is impossible to avoid one's commitments and biases toward their research. As you ask people to share part of themselves with you, it is important that, the researcher, not be judgemental but strive to be positive and reflect on the responses given by the participants. One way to identify biases is to be submitted to the questions asked of the research participants. By doing so, the researcher's own biases will emerge. The biases that emerged concerning my research study included:

- Communities are not ready for female administrators.
- Women were promoted to principalships but given smaller schools than their male peers.
- Black females were promoted to small inner city schools while white females were promoted to large suburban schools.
- More males promoted to principalships than females.

As I realized and accepted my biases toward the study, I was able to listen more carefully to the responses of the participants without making gestures, verbal or nonverbal, during the interview session that would influence or demean the data given. Most of the biases

found here and in research literature do not hold true for women in leadership positions today. Society is beginning to accept female administrators and adopt their leadership behaviors. Women are proving they are and can be very capable leaders.

## **DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES**

Data analysis is a "systematic process of selecting, categorizing, comparing, synthesizing and interpreting to provide explanations of the phenomena of interest" (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993). Pattern seeking is a process of examining the data in numerous ways (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993). Patterns were generally reported as themes. Themes provide an explanation of the situation, contribute to knowledge by providing information on the phenomena under study, present the complexity of social events and enable others to anticipate what might occur in similar situations (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993).

Within this study, the interviews were analyzed by content analysis and thematic analysis. The process included interaction with the data, identifying categories which are related to the research questions, comparing the data for duplication, coding the data and tabulating frequencies, refining the coding system and synthesizing the data into patterns or themes.

Data from Part I, which contained demographic data, were analyzed with the assistance of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Data were analyzed according to ethnicity, total years of administrative experience, current position, school type and community type. The demographic data in Part One were used to describe the population of the female principals who responded to the questionnaire.

Part Two of the interview was analyzed through a process of analytic induction with commonalities noted by use of thematic headings. Each interview was transcribed and the transcripts from each respondent were read and reread. During this assessment, the researcher searched for common patterns and categories in the interviews. The data were grouped into the following pre-determined categories which came from the research questions: career paths, leadership style, perceived barriers, leadership challenges and mentors. The data were coded according to the above categories. Once the data had been organized into categories, the search for patterns or themes resulted. The techniques of pattern seeking used include gauging data trustworthiness, evaluating discrepant or negative evidence and sorting categories (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993).

The questions on the interview schedule for this study were



designed to answer the research questions:

- What are the professional experiences of females in their move to the principalship?
- Do female principals perceive as obstacles/barriers when entering administrative positions?
- What leadership qualities, if any, do female principals perceive as being important?
- What are the perceived leadership challenges facing female principals?
- What role, if any, have mentors played in your journey and/or success in administration?

## **METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION**

The primary qualitative data for this study were collected through the administration of a taped interview instrument (Appendix C). Selected participants were notified by a letter which explained the intent of the study and encouraged participants to participate in the study (Appendix B). The letter of intent and the demographic data section of the questionnaire were returned directly to the project director by inclusion an enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope. A follow-up telephone call was the basis of contact for scheduling times for the taped interview and to

clarify any questions any participant did have regarding the study. The school systems and the project director mutually assured the confidentiality of individual responses maintained for this survey.

## **SUMMARY**

The interview method was used to explore and identify specific perceptions female principals have regarding their career in education. Fourteen female administrators from 5 selected counties and school systems in East Tennessee. These participants held principalships at the elementary, middle and high school level. These administrators were chosen from a list given to the researcher by the superintendent of the school system.

The data were subjected to inductive analysis, content analysis and thematic analysis procedures. The pre-determined categories that guided the analysis were: career paths, leadership style, perceived barriers, leadership challenges, and the role of mentors. Patterns and themes were identified from the data.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **PRESENTATION OF DATA AND FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of the study was to explore the leadership experiences of female principals in the school systems of Knox County, Lenoir City, Oak Ridge, Clinton City and Monroe County. The study focused on experiences shared by female principals as they moved into principalship positions, what they perceived as obstacles as they entered administrative positions, the leadership challenges they faced, their leadership styles/qualities and if a mentor or mentoring program had been helpful to them in pursuing the principalship.

This chapter contains the data analysis and findings of the study. The data presented were collected through semi-structured taped interview sessions with each principal. Participation letters and a demographic survey were mailed to each respondent. Once letters of consent were returned, interview dates were set and the taped interviews were conducted at the interviewee's school. Of the twenty participation letters mailed, 15 consent letters were returned. A total of 14 principals were used in the study.

The interview instrument involved open-ended questions on the topics of how each principal came to hold the position, leadership challenges she faced as a principal, how she lead her staff, and who or what had helped her while in her administrative position. The interview instrument was developed by the researcher. The interviews were supplemented with survey forms providing demographic and professional data.

The data were analyzed inductively to identify the themes related to the purposes of the study. The data gathered from these female principals were funny, sad, moving and frustrating, but at the same time rich in experiences.

## **REPRESENTATION OF DEMOGRAPHIC DATA**

Data given in this section were collected from the demographic section of the interview guide given to the 14 principals. The data are displayed in tabular and expository form with interpretation given.

Table I shows the ethnicity of the female principals surveyed. Of those surveyed, 6 were of African-American descent and 8 were Caucasian.

Table II displays the number of years held in office of principalship by the respondents. Four of the respondents had been

TABLE I

A Comparison of the 14 Female Principals by Gender

As Reported by the Respondents

GENDER	FREQUENCY	PER CENT	CUMULATIVE FREQUENCY/PER CENT	
African American	6	42.9	6	42.9
Caucasian	8	57.1	14	100.0

TABLE II

A Comparison of the 14 Female Principals by Years in Position

As Reported by the Respondents

YRSPOS	FREQUENCY	PER CENT	CUMULATIVE FREQUENCY/PER CENT	
0-5	4	28.5	4	28.5
6-10	4	28.5	8	57.0
11-15	3	21.4	11	79.4
16-20	1	7.3	12	85.7
20 +	2	14.3	14	100.0

in the principalship 0-5 years, 4 more held the principalship 6-10 years, 3 held the principalship 11-15 years, 1 held the principalship 16-20 years and 2 respondents held the principalship for 20 years or more.

Table III displays the educational profile of the respondents. Seven held master's degrees, 4 held master's degrees plus 45 additional course hours, 2 held educational specialist degrees and 1 held a doctorate. All 14 respondents had had classroom teaching experience based on information gathered in during the taped interview.

Table IV displays the current ages of the respondents and their age when promoted to the principalship. Eight of the principals surveyed were in the 50 or above range and 6 were in the 40-49 age range. Ages reflected during promotion to principalship were displayed in the following ranges: 2 were 50 or above when promoted, 8 were in the 40-49 age range when promoted and 4 were in 30-39 age range when promoted.

Table V displays the representation of school types in which the respondents served as principals. Ten of the respondents were principals of elementary schools, 1 respondent was the principal of a middle school and 3 were high school principals.

Table VI shows the enrollment range of the

TABLE III

A Comparison of the 14 Female Principals by Educational Profile  
As Reported by the Respondents

DEGREE HELD	FREQUENCY	PER CENT	CUMULATIVE FREQUENCY/PER CENT	
Master's	7	.5	7	.50
Master's +45	4	.29	11	.79
EdS	2	.14	13	.93
Doctorate	1	.07	14	100

TABLE IV

A Comparison of 14 Female Principals by Current Age and  
Age Promoted to Current Position As Reported by the Respondents

CURRENT AGE	AGE PROMOTED*	FREQUENCY	PER CENT	CUMULATIVE FREQUENCY/ PER CENT	
20-29	20-29	0/0*	0/0*	0*	0
30-39	30-39	0/4*	0/.29*	4*	29
40-49	40-49	6/8*	.43/.57*	12*	86
50 +	50+	8/2*	.57/.14*	14*	100

\*Figures given for data representing age respondents were promoted to principalship.

TABLE V

A Comparison of the 14 Female Principals by School Types

As Reported by the Respondents

SCHOOL TYPE	FREQUENCY	PER CENT	CUMULATIVE FREQUENCY/PER CENT	
Elementary	10	7.14	10	7.14
Middle	1	0.71	11	7.85
High	3	2.14	14	9.99

TABLE VI

A Comparison of the 14 Female Principals by School Enrollment

As Reported by the Respondents

ENROLLMENT	FREQUENCY	PER CENT	CUMULATIVE FREQUENCY/PERCENT	
0-500	6	.43	6	.43
501-750	4	.29	10	.72
751-1000	1	.071	11	.791
1001-1500	2	.14	13	.931
1501 +	1	.071	14	1.00



respondents. Six of the principals were in schools whose enrollment ranged between 0-500, 4 were in schools whose enrollment ranged from 501-750, one principal was in a school whose enrollment ranged from 751-1000, 2 principals were in schools whose enrollment ranged from 1001-1500 and 1 principal was in a school whose enrollment ranged 1501 or above.

Table VII shows the community representation where the respondents worked in their perspective schools. The data showed 7 principals worked in schools located in urban (inner city) communities and 7 principals worked in schools located in suburban areas.

The female principals studied presented a professional profile of competent, professional, prepared and qualified for the position they hold. Many of them knew each other from meetings held in their local systems. The data related to each of the five research questions are presented within this chapter.

TABLE VII

A Comparison of 14 Female Principals by Community Representation  
Type As Reported by the Respondents

COMMUNITY REPRESENTED	FREQUENCY	PER CENT	CUMULATIVE FREQUENCY/PERCENT	
INNER CITY	7	.5	7	50
SUBURBAN	7	.5	14	100

## **PARTICIPANTS**

In this section, the female principals who participated in the study are introduced. Each principal had a story to tell and each story was unique to the person and their present principalship. To offer a clearer picture of each woman, personal descriptions are also provided. In order to maintain the anonymity of the female principals and their school systems, they were given fictitious names.

Katie is a white female who taught for 6 years before moving into administration. She was encouraged by her principal to go into administration and aspired to be a supervisor. When a principalship became available, she applied and was accepted for the position. She has been in her position for over 10 years and refers to herself as "one of the few women left in administration in my system".

Rose is an African American female who taught for a while, got frustrated with the leadership of her school and became a Career Ladder evaluator for the Tennessee State Department. She stated that being an evaluator gave her the break she needed to air her mind and think clearly. She stated that her heart was in the inner city and she felt she could make a difference in the lives of those boys and girls. With this in mind, she returned to the school system as a curriculum facilitator. She also took courses she needed to add on her administration certification. When this was completed, she

applied for a principalship and was finally promoted.

Ruby, an African American female, had been teaching for 6 years when an opportunity became available for her to move into administration. She considered herself the “new kid on the block” since she had just moved into the area and system where she taught. She felt there were others ahead of her who were just as capable for the position as she was. Being encouraged by fellow teachers and her principal, she applied for the position and got it.

Essence, an African American female, stated her ultimate goal was to become a principal. She taught at the high school level before pursuing a career as an administrator. She took courses to add the necessary certification she needed and 5 years later she was promoted to assistant principal. She held this position for several years before becoming a principal.

Sophie, a white female, began her career as a high school teacher and a middle school teacher in the state of North Carolina. She began working in on her Master’s degree in the area of administration. Shortly after, she applied for an assistant principalship and got the job. She was promoted to principal within 3 years. Due to her husband’s job transfer, she ended up in Tennessee and began her teaching career again. As various principalships became available, she applied for them. Sophie

stated, "being at the right place at the right time" helped her move into a principalship within a year.

Ellie, a white female, began her career as a teacher but her first goal was to become a curriculum generalist or supervisor. She had no intention of becoming a principal. As she completed courses in curriculum and instruction, she was approached by a school system and asked if she was interested in becoming an administrator. After conferring with her professors, she decided to try her hand at being a principal. This avenue has taken her into administration at the middle school and elementary school levels.

Martha, a white female, began her career as a regular classroom teacher. She was encouraged by her male principal to pursue courses in administration with a principalship as her outcome. She ended up becoming a traveling reading teacher and in her words, "I loved it so much that I put being a principal on the back burner." She also had seen how hard principals worked at the schools she traveled to and decided this was not what she wanted to do. After awhile, her attitude began to change. She felt she could make a difference if she was in charge of a school. So began to pursue a principalship. After interviewing for various principalships that were vacated due to retirements or promotions,

she obtained a principalship at a small elementary school in her system.

Dianne, a white female, also began her career as a teacher at the high school level. She became interested in administration when she was accepted into a special program at the University of Tennessee which dealt with administration. Her goal was to learn as much as she could about being an administrator. She compared her journey to her present position as a high school principal similar to the Cinderella story. She had godfathers who seemed to guide her in the right direction at the right time and doors of opportunity opened for her. She was appointed to an assistant principalship where she served for 3 years before being promoted for her current position as high school principal.

Minnie, a white female, started her career as a junior high school teacher who pursued a Master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction with no intentions of becoming an administrator. When she was moved to the high school level as a teacher, she began to think about being an administrator. She went back to school to add the administrative endorsement to her teaching certificate and was promoted to an assistant principalship at the high school where she had taught. She had been at this high school for awhile before she was promoted to a principalship at a middle school. She served in

that capacity for 13 years before accepting a principalship at another school - the high school where she taught for years and had served as assistant principal.

Jackie, a white female, is a principal whose career started out similar to the other participants. She was a classroom teacher whose ambitions were to go back to school to become a traveling reading teacher. Those around her persuaded her to pursue the principalship instead of the reading teacher position. She became involved in a Mastery Learning Program being offered at the University of Tennessee, went through the assessment center and became a principal. She states, "I just happened to be at the right place at the right time."

Shirley, a white female, is a principal whose career also began as an elementary classroom teacher. She went back to school to get her Master's degree and while in school she became interested in administration. She had a mentor who encouraged her to pursue administration. She did just that. She felt she could do things better as an administrator. The "things" she explained were situations her present principal had made decisions about regarding the school. She felt she could have handled the situation differently and more effectively. She was given tasks which also helped to sharpen her interest and skills in administration. She was

promoted to a principalship of an inner city elementary school where she served for 5 years before being moved to another principalship to a much larger elementary school in the same school system.

Tressa, an African American female, began her career as an elementary teacher. She taught in the classroom for 17 years before being promoted to an assistant principalship. She was encouraged by several mentors to pursue a career in administration while completing a Master's degree in Reading Education. Her principal often gave her administrative duties to do and often left her in charge when he was not in the building. She was encouraged by her elementary supervisor and principal to apply to a special program for administrators that was being offered at the University of Tennessee. During her participation in that program, she was promoted from the classroom to an assistant principal position. She served in that capacity for 3 years before being promoted to her current position of principal.

Florida, a white female, also began her career as a classroom teacher. She had taught for 5 years before she took a position as a traveling reading teacher. It was during this time period that she became interested in becoming a principal. She stated that her main goal for becoming a principal was to make a difference in improving the curriculum. She served as an assistant principal for 1 year



before being promoted to principal.

Nita, an African American female, began her career at the high school level as a teacher. She worked in this capacity for 23 years and loved being with students. She also believed she could make a difference if she were in an administrative position. She pursued certification and endorsement in administration by taking classes on a Master's level. Her first administrative assignment was in a middle school setting. She is currently serving in a principalship at the middle school level.

This section focused on background information given by the 14 female participants. In listening to each female participant report and recall her journey to the principalship, different patterns and themes emerged from the data. These female principals were similar in education and background. The professional profile they depict was one of competency, professionalism, experience and well qualified for the job of principal. The next section examined the recurring themes and patterns discovered in the data collected from the 14 female principals in the study.

## **ANALYSIS OF DATA**

### **Research Question 1**

#### **What are the professional experiences of females in their move to the principalship?**

All the female principal participants began their journey to the principalship as classroom teachers. Their classroom experience varied from the elementary level to the high school level. The number of years they taught also varied with each participant. Although most of the participants had more than 6 years of classroom experience before seeking administrative positions, one participant had 5 years of classroom experience. Most of the participants said they had not set out to become administrators. They reported they had not obtained administrative certification in order to obtain an administrative position but rather to further their education. Administrative training was available and fit into a program of graduate study. Six of the participants had participated in special graduate programs in which they took courses to prepare them for an administrative position. After becoming certified, these participants tended to seek out administrative positions. The 8 remaining participants did not seek out administrative positions but sought positions as traveling reading specialists and supervisor positions. One participant, explaining why she had not sought out

the principalship, reported, "I saw how hard other principals were working and I did not feel like I could do it. So I put that idea (the idea of being a principal) on the back burner." Another explained, "I wanted to become a traveling reading teacher and nothing seemed more satisfying to me at the time than that position."

A common phrase that tied all the responses together were the words, "I wanted to make a difference and believed I could by becoming a principal." Even those who had put the idea of being a principal "on the back burner" quoted several administrative decisions made by their principal that they remembered from their classroom experiences. They were not comfortable with the decision made and felt they could do better. Eleven of the participants were promoted from their teaching positions to assistant principalships before becoming principals. Of the remaining 4 participants, 2 were promoted from teaching positions to principalships, 1 was promoted from a teaching position to a traveling reading specialist and 1 was promoted from a teaching position to a supervisory position of a special project in her school district. All the participants stated they had been placed in leadership situations by their principals while they taught in the classroom. These leadership situations varied and included situations such as being left in charge when the principal was out of the building, being the head of a school or grade

level committee or being asked to head up a special project.

Analysis of the data collected revealed 5 common patterns. These patterns are: (1) all the participants began their journey to the principalship as classroom teachers, (2) all had obtained a Master's degree or better in furthering their education, (3) all had been given an opportunity to display leadership by being placed in a leadership situation by the building level principal and (4) 10 of the participants had been promoted from teaching positions to assistant principalships before being promoted to their current position of principals.

## **Research Question 2**

### **What do female principals perceive as barriers when entering administrative positions?**

The data collected from the interview instrument questions were analyzed to answer this question. All interview comments were coded and analyzed to determine patterns. They are reported thematically in a narrative format.

Many different responses were given to this research question. One participant perceived her movement from a small elementary school to a larger elementary school as a barrier. She stated that even though she was told by Central Office staff that the move was

a promotion for her good work at the smaller school, she felt that there was some hidden agenda. She did not feel comfortable with the move and expressed her dissent. Several participants perceived their staff, especially female teachers, as a barrier. They felt these teachers were not very understanding, did not accept them as authority figures and questioned them quite frequently on decisions the female principals made. Another participant perceived the parents of her students as a barrier. This participant was an African-American principal and the parents she perceived as a barrier were her minority parents. She commented that one parent said, "I don't want to talk to you. You're not in charge here. What happened to the white man that was here?" When this participant told the parent he had been promoted to another school and she was his replacement, the parent decided to discuss her child with her despite the fact that the female principal was the one who called about the student in the first place. She stated, "It really took be back. I don't know why I have to prove myself to my people all the time." When the researcher asked if this problem was improving, the principal reported, "Yes, a little but not as fast as I would like it to."

Three participants stated their perceived barriers to be the implementation of new programs. One had tried to implement a

foreign language immersion program and encountered opposition from the school staff, the parents and Central Office staff. Although this program had been approved by the local school board, her staff and parents did not feel it would work on the elementary level. Despite this opposition, she sought out those staff members who were willing to work to make this program work. So far it has been successful in one grade level and she is attempting to place it another grade level next Fall. Two other participants were struggling to make a new Magnet Program work. The barriers their perceived involved support from the staff and community. Their common problem had brought them together in a mutual network to help each other as a sounding board of ideas.

Other perceived barriers included teachers not being flexible to meet the changing needs of today's children, males in authority who do not understand that females are capable of doing a good job in administration, an inadequate level of trust that exists among female staff members toward a female administrator ,lack of support from school staff and Central Office staff, being selected for and obtaining a principalship in a school where several staff members had also applied. The pattern that was revealed in the data from the response to this question was the lack of trust among female staff members toward their female principal. Most

participants related this fact to gender since they had not encountered open opposition from males on their staff. One participant stated, "Females can be vicious especially toward other females who they feel have more power than they do. They question how you got your job and who you knew to get it. Some of them don't realize that you have worked hard, very hard, to get to this point. Some do but most don't."

### **Research Question 3**

#### **What role, if any, have mentors played in your journey and/or success in administration?**

The data for this research question were collected from several open-ended interview questions. Comments related to mentors or mentoring programs were coded and analyzed thematically. Patterns were identified which present information regarding mentors. Of the 14 female principals interviewed, 11 reported that they had mentors. The following narratives are responses of the participants in regards to their relationship and experiences with a mentor.

Katie referred to her mentor as a model. She retold how her mentor had encouraged her to take more supervisory roles during her classroom experience. She reported that they had developed a very

special relationship and remain close today even though her mentor has retired from education.

Sophie indicated that she had several mentors during her journey to her current principalship. Some of them were former colleagues who encouraged her along the way but the one that stands out in her memory is her principal. He encouraged her to apply for a position that took her out of his school. She stated, "I guess he saw something in me that I did not see myself."

Rose stated that she had a cohort of mentors. Being in a special graduate study program with other teachers gave her a camaraderie of mentors who encouraged each other. She stated this network of friends still exists today despite the different paths they have all taken in their careers. A special mentor was a male principal who helped her develop leadership skills by offering advice and giving her a chance to make decisions on her own. Another was a female principal who encouraged her to go into administration.

Tressa also reported having several individuals who mentored her during her journey to the principalship. She stated that their mentoring relationship still exists and she is in constant contact with them. Her mentors included her principal from her elementary teaching days, an elementary supervisor who was more of an encourager and another female principal who gave her an opportunity



to get completely soaked in the daily workings of a principalship when she became an assistant principal. She said, "I developed a special rapport with her that was uncanny. We seemed to know what each thought before the other could speak. She often told me I had the gift and should have been in administration years ago. I really learned a lot from her and we became very good friends. That friendship grows stronger each day."

Ellie named several male principals who she considers her mentors and her friends. "They helped me a lot, especially, when I got my own school," she reported. "They really gave me a lot of support and encouragement".

Minnie also named several male principals who had mentored her during her journey to the principalship. "They provided me with feedback and lots of leadership opportunity," she stated. "They gave me the encouragement I needed to pursue the principalship." One mentor was her father who always offered fatherly advice. She said, "I had to listen to him. After all he was my father."

Dianne also had mentors who encouraged her and guided her along her career path. "They are very dear friends who I can call and bounce ideas off of when I need to," she stated. "They let me know when I overreact to a situation, provide me with the encouragement I need during difficult situations".

“ I don’t know what I would have done without them.”

Nita stated that her mentors gave her a lot of responsibility when she became an assistant. “They offered encouragement, provided numerous experiences and never put me down when I made a mistake,” she reported. “I still keep in touch with them and treasure our friendship.”

Martha described her mentors as very caring , encouraging and positive. “They gave me the boost I needed to pursue a principalship. They helped me develop my leadership skills,” she stated “And I developed a professional friendship with them.”

Shirley’s mentors not only inspired her to go on to pursue a career as a principals but made sure she was given numerous opportunities to use her leadership skills. “My mentors kept pushing me and encouraging me to be a leader. One even told me,”she stated, “that I knew what to do no matter what the situation was.” One female mentor, she recalled, never went out of her way to help or lead anyone but she must have seen something special in me. “I was the first person she ever mentored and her way of mentoring was in a class all by itself. So I considered myself lucky to be mentored by her.”

Jackie replied with an emphatic “Yes” when asked if she had been mentored. She stated, “I had a wonderful mentor! She was the

best. She encouraged me, consoled me when I felt down and became a very good friend.” Jackie stated that the relationship that developed with her and her mentor was special. So special that they still keep in touch today by going out to lunch and talking on the phone. “Even though she (her mentor) is no longer a principal, she is still in the system and we stay in touch,” she said.

Words such as encouraging, supportive and friendship were patterns found in the data provided by the 11 female principals who had mentors. The participants also stated they were given numerous opportunities to display their leadership skills. The professional relationship that developed between the principals and their mentors were deemed as special and positive. None of the participants recalled a mentor who was not helpful or supportive. They recalled their mentorship as a positive part of their journey to the principalship. The participants also stated they still network with their mentor and call on them frequently for ideas, assistance and guidance.

#### **Research Question 4**

##### **What are the perceived leadership challenges facing female principals?**

Data collected from the participants in regard to this research

question yielded a variety of responses. Each response was unique to the participant and her present principalship. The leadership challenges perceived by the participants are: (1) females were not perceived as leaders or principals, (2) females were perceived as weak and not able to handle discipline or other administrative duties, (3) females were not accepted by other females on staff as an authority figure, (4) females had to overcome stereotypes, (5) females needed to possess the ability to express themselves without coming across as pushy.

The first perceived challenge was females were not being perceived as leaders or principals. This response was elaborated on by several of the participants in reference to other staff members and parents. Several of the participants recalled an incident which involved someone coming in asking for the principal and when she appeared, the response from the individual was, "You can't be the principal. You're a woman." One participant stated a parent stated, "Oh, he's a she! She can't deal with these big kids." Another participant was told by a parent that she was too small to be a principal. Another stated how people were surprised to see a female in charge of a high school. Another participant remarked, "No one is surprised to see a female in the classroom no matter whether it is an elementary, middle or high school classroom but they are amazed

to see females in principalships in these schools.” The participants stated they felt they had to prove, daily, they could handle their jobs as principals and get positive results.

Being perceived as weak and unable to handle discipline and other administrative tasks was another challenge faced by most of the participants. One participant said she felt like she was on the firing line each day. “Each day was a test,” she stated. “I felt as though I had to constantly prove myself to the staff, the students and the parents. The only one who believed in me was me but I feel that attitude is changing.” Making the right decisions and being able to perform the long list of administrative tasks was a challenge all the participants agreed upon. They considered this to be an on-going challenge that was faced daily by female principals on all levels.

Unaccepting female staff members was another leadership challenge experienced by a majority of the female principals. Several participants cited situations in which female staff members had challenged them on decisions they made and in other authoritative situations. Several situations involved anonymous letters, written by female staff members, being sent to Central Office staff or supervisors questioning techniques used by the administrator or decisions made by the female principal. When Central Office staff and/or supervisors supported the female

principal and her techniques, the female staff members backed down. One participant stated, "I know they(staff) did not like it but they knew I had the support of the higher ups. Some are coming around but I they are still others that resent me."

Another leadership challenge perceived by female principals was overcoming the stereotypes perceived by others. Sophie remarked, "People feel female administrators are like women teachers who can be flattered and condoled but not talked to directly." She stated she feels insulted when this happens to her but has learned to get beyond that level of thinking and dwell more on her own personal strengths. Dianne listed several stereotypes that she felt were leadership challenges. Some of them were given previously but included people being surprised that she was principal of a large high school. She also stated that she was asked how she got her job and who she knew to get the job. Katie also felt that people do not feel women can be a disciplinarian or an authority figure in a school setting. She remarked, "We(women) have to work extra hard at our job to prove that we are capable of doing the job. We have to prove ourselves more than our male counterparts do." Another stereotype stated by the participants was the perception that females are weak. Participants again agreed that they(female principals) are perceived as being incapable of handling the job. As

one participant stated, "If we(female principals) are incapable, tell me why are we being promoted into these positions and being successful?"

Another leadership challenge that was found to be common with the participants was communication. When asked to explain this in more detail, one participant stated, " the ability to express oneself without coming across as pushy or too aggressive". All the participants felt communication was an area that challenged them everyday. To communicate effectively with staff, parents and students was an everyday challenge. The challenge being in making sure your message was well understood more so than being well received.

Some of the female participants yielded responses that were not common to the rest of the group but unique to the individual's position and their school situations. One participant stated following a male principal as a leadership challenge. When probed to explain this statement, she responded by saying, "women lead differently than men and I guess the faculty had been used to a man in authority for so long that when I came into this position they saw me as the enemy. I was constantly in their rooms observing, informally of course, very visible and out in the building." She further stated, "I'm not saying he was a bad principal but evidently

what I did in comparison to his leadership style made them (the staff) feel a bit uneasy". Two other participants listed working with male principals as a leadership challenge. Both said that some of their male counterparts did not take them seriously or felt they could handle the job of a principal. Katie said she felt as if she was always being scrutinized by her male counterparts. She stated she felt like they were putting her through a test to see if she made the grade or could be considered one of their equals.

Another participant listed the different roles principals have to assume as a leadership challenge. She stated that she did not realize all the situations that cause you to become a different player. "You come in the building as a principal with a set agenda for the day," she replied, "but before the day is over, hey, before noon, you have become a lawyer, a counselor, a judge, a mediator, a confidant and a secretary". She recalled the courses taken on the graduate level for administration but none prepared her for the different roles she had to assume each day.

Another participant cited positive parental and community support as a leadership challenge. Dealing with the public who don't understand the daily program of the educational system was seen as a problem. Although this participant named several things she was doing at her school to change the public viewpoint, she still



admitted that she felt challenged by questions presented to her by the community. "I answer or try to answer their questions as best I can but I still feel they feel this is not good enough," she replied.

Other responses from the female participants cited as perceived leadership challenges were dealing with male custodians and dealing with behavior problems of special education students.

### **Research Question #5**

#### **What leadership qualities, if any, do female principals perceive as being important?**

The data for this research question were collected from several open-ended interview questions. All interview comments were coded and analyzed to determine patterns. They are reported thematically in a narrative format.

Rose listed encouragement of others as a leadership quality she felt important. She stated that she often encourages others to do what she wants done and enjoys having input from all staff members. She reported that encouragement was her way of gently nudging others to get a job done.

Sophie also thought encouragement was a great leadership quality but included skills in collaboration equally important. When asked by the researcher which of the two she used the most, she

replied, "It depends on the situation. I guess I'm kinda a situational leader. If I feel collaboration will work best, I collaborate with whoever I need too but if encouragement will get the job done then I do a lot of encouraging and praising."

Essence felt every leader needed a good sense of humor and needed to learn how to nurture others. She stated that she did a lot of nurturing with her staff and students. She stated, "Although I feel every leader should abide by the rules, I like to nurture those around me like a mother. Sometimes that (nurturing) goes against the rules."

Florida felt the involvement of others was a leadership quality she heavily relied on when dealing with her staff. She stated that she like to involve them in all decisions. "I like to empower my staff," she stated, "and share leadership whenever I can. Involving them gives them ownership in what we decide to do or not do."

Katie expressed a strong servant attitude toward her staff. She perceived this to be a leadership quality that she practiced every day. She gave examples of how she "serves" her staff. These examples included removing things that teachers perceived as interruptions in their classrooms, she listened to their concerns about the curriculum, parents, students, etc. and tried to let them know she was there to help them as a servant would help his/her

leader. She felt it was important that her staff saw this leadership trait in her as she modeled it each day.

Ellie perceived cooperation and being a team player as a leadership quality. She stated that she does try to model these behaviors for her staff. She stated that being a good organizer comes in handy when you are trying to be a team player. "Every one needs to feel a part of the team by cooperating together", she remarked, "You can't be a team without cooperation. I mean total cooperation from everyone." When asked by the researcher if she had total cooperation from everyone, she replied, "Yes, sometimes I do but it depends on what we are working on. There have been situations when I knew I did not have everyone pulling together but you do what you have to do and hope it turns out okay."

Minnie felt a leader should be a good facilitator. She stated that she set high expectations and helped the staff through these expectations by giving them room to try new ideas. "I helped when I was asked to help and I gave constructive advice as need." she stated. She remarked that her staff sees her more as being a facilitator than an authoritative power.

Dianne also felt a leader should model desired behavior expected, use team building and incorporate shared leadership in his/her school. Her perspective was "I plant the seed, they take the

seed and we share it.” This is one way she tries to involve everyone in the leadership process but it is important to her that she models this first. She stated, “I have to show them what I want to happen and gently guide them in that direction. Once there, we celebrate together.”

Nita also perceived modeling desired leadership behaviors was important. She stated that her open door policy was one way to achieve this behavior. She felt that every leader should take time to listen to his/her people to see what they really needed. “Sometimes as I listen to teachers talk about a particular student and the problems they are having with that student, I try to put myself in the teacher’s place before I give a suggestion or recommendation to the problem. I try very hard not to be condescending or take sides.”, she replied, “which is extremely hard, especially, when you know the teacher has messed up or what they did to solve the problem goes against your own level of thinking to solve the problem. That’s hard, real hard.” She also felt involving others was a good leadership quality for leaders to possess.

Shirley described the leadership quality of leading by example as one she perceived as important. She reported, “I lead by example. If the plumbing goes out, I go get a mop to help mop it up. I am always there to help. In fact, I do some of my best thinking with my

hands in dishwater.” Another leadership quality she felt leaders should have is a good sense of humor. “With all we (principals) have to deal with if you don’t find humor in what you do, you lose your touch with reality and things get blown out of proportion as far as their order of importance. Everything becomes important”, she remarked.

Jackie perceived the qualities of leadership as being team building and shared leadership. She felt it was important to make sure every staff member was on a team offering input to help solve school-based problems. By sharing her leadership power with each team, she felt her staff had developed a sense of unity and camaraderie when making decisions that affected them.

Tressa’s perceived leadership qualities of modeling, being an encourager and being a servant leader as being important. “I lead by modeling and example, doing things that they (my staff) don’t think principals do. If the custodian or cafeteria workers need help, I pitch in and help. If I can’t find someone to watch a class for a teacher who has gotten ill and needs to go to the lounge for a few minutes, I teach the class until the teacher returns,” she reported. She also stated that she tries to help her staff by being there when needed and trying to meet the needs of the student as well as the needs of the teacher. “This is no easy task,” she said, “ and

sometimes I wonder if I need to switch gears and be more demanding about the things we need to accomplish but then I look at what we have accomplished. We've done quite well so I continue to model and encourage and serve." She remarked that teachers need to know and feel that their principal cares about them. By being a model, an encourager and a server, she feels she is telling her staff, students and parents that she does care.

Martha also perceived the qualities of modeling and encourager as important leadership traits. She stated that she wanted her staff to know she cares about the school. She also stated that she tries to include the staff as much as possible in decision making that involved the school as a whole.

Ruby's perception of leadership qualities that were important included the team approach and modeling. She stated she was more comfortable with modeling than she is with the team approach. She said, "I try to be very open and receptive to ideas from the staff. I am trying to get them to see the faculty as a team but it's going to take some work." She explained later that she had followed a male principal who made the decisions without consulting the faculty. When she came and tried to implement a team approach, she was perceived as being weak and not capable of handling the principalship. "It's getting better," she remarked, "and the faculty

is getting better about providing input, suggestions and being receptive to me decisions.”

Through an analysis of the data, several themes were identified by the participants in regard to leadership. Modeling, encouragement, shared leadership, and team player were the terms used by most of the participants when referring to leadership. They felt these traits were important for all leaders, especially females, to possess. Modeling was the trait which was referred to by most of the participants. To model or lead by example was a leadership trait felt to be very important. To have people observe the desired behavior was one way to get the same desired behavior from those watching.

Other themes that surfaced in the data were the leadership qualities of collaboration, good sense of humor, involvement of theirs, nurturing, servant leaders, cooperation and facilitator. All qualities listed seemed synonymous with leadership. Although the participants remarked these qualities were important for female principals to possess, they also stated all leaders regardless of gender should possess these same leadership qualities.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter consists of a summary of the study and the conclusions reached upon its completion. A discussion of specific findings and recommendations for further research and study are included as well. This chapter is organized into 4 sections. Section I includes a summary of the study. Section II provides a summary of the findings. Conclusions are presented in Section III. The final section contains recommendations for future research.

#### **SUMMARY OF THE STUDY**

Even though the numbers of females administrators in education are greater than they have ever been, they remain significantly underrepresented as a gender - especially when you consider that they make up more than 70% of the whole profession (Gupton & Slick, 1996). Research conducted by Fishel and Pottker (1974), reports that excluding elementary school principals, 95% of the remaining positions in school administration were held by white



males. While females in school administration most commonly held the positions of elementary school principals, female representation in that position also declined dramatically over a 50 year period -- from roughly 50% in the 1920's to 20% in the early 1970's (Pottker and Fishel, 1977). Historically, explanations offered for the underrepresentation of women in educational administration include women's lack of aspiration for administrative positions and the inadequate preparation and qualification of many women for administration coupled with their lack as a gender of natural leadership ability (Gupton & Slick, 1996).

The culture of educational administration is dominated by white males and their orientations. Women and minorities have not had the access to networks or sponsors that frequently help males gain entry into this culture, nor have they had access to on-the-job nurturing that network and support systems afford many male administrators which contribute to their career success and longevity in a position. Current research and literature on the topic indicate a growing interest for career women to develop and maintain a strong support system among themselves as well as the male networks in order to succeed. According to many of today's successful female administrators, the potential for career success seems greatly enhanced with the help of a mentor (Gupton & Slick,

1994; Meyers, 1992). Women, unlike men, traditionally have not benefited from having mentors to encourage and support their career advancement.

### **SUMMARY OF THE PROBLEM**

Unfortunately, many women never seek administrative positions simply because they do not see themselves in positions of leadership. Administration in public education is male dominated and generally accepted by both males and females. As a result, it never occurs to many talented women that they should seek positions of leadership. Women who have achieved their goals of becoming administrators seem to understand that other women might need and want a cheering section to support their quest to the top. These women repeatedly expressed the persistent belief that everything is possible, just "do it" (Gupton & Slick, 1994).

The purpose of this study was to explore the leadership experiences of female principals in the school systems of Knox County, Lenoir City, Oak Ridge, Clinton City and Monroe County. The study focused on experiences shared by female principals as they moved into principalship positions, their perceptions of obstacles encountered as they entered administrative positions, the perceived leadership challenges they faced, their leadership styles/qualities and their reflection on a mentor who had been helpful to them in

pursuing the principalship. The study was designed to obtain this information, reach conclusions and add to the limited amount of literature on this topic. The following research questions guided this study:

Question 1: What are the professional experiences of females in their move to the principalship?

Question 2: What do female principals perceive as barriers when entering administrative positions?

Question 3: What role, if any, have mentors played in your journey and/or success in administration?

Question 4: What are the perceived leadership challenges facing female principals?

Question 5: What leadership qualities, if any, do female principals perceive as being important?

A descriptive case study approach utilizing semi-structured interviews as the main source of data was chosen for this study. Fourteen female principals agreed to participate in the study. They represented female principals in the following 5 selected school systems of Knox County, Oak Ridge, Lenoir City, Clinton City and Monroe County. The research instrument, Female Administrator Survey, was used to collect the data needed for the study. This instrument contained 2 parts. Part I contained the demographic data

and Part 2 contained 15 open-ended interview questions.

Semi-structured interviews were used to obtain the perceptions of females who were in principalship positions. The open-ended question format was used to provide in-depth responses from the participants. The interview questions were designed by the researcher and a professor in qualitative studies. The instrument was pilot tested with 4 female principals who were from the total population. Following the pilot of the interview, revisions were made. Interview data were collected during October, 1996.

The interview data were analyzed to answer the research questions posed in the study. Content analysis and thematic analysis were utilized to analyze the data. The following predetermined categories, which were based upon the research questions, guided the analysis: career paths, leadership style, perceived barriers, perceived leadership challenges and role of mentors. The interview comments were coded according to those categories. No significant differences were found in the data in relation to age, race, school enrollment, community type or age when promoted to principalship.

## **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

### **Research Question 1: What are the professional experiences of female principals in their move to the principalship?**

All the female principals in the study began their professional careers to the principalship as classroom teachers. Nine of the participants began their professional experiences as elementary classroom teachers, 1 began in the middle school classroom and the remaining 4 began at the high school level. Only 1 participant stated she began her career with the principalship as her main focus. The others stated they had not set out to become administrators but did add the administrative certification later on in their teaching career.

Once they became certified, they tended to seek out administrative positions. Eight of the participants sought positions as traveling reading specialists and supervisor positions before actively seeking positions as principals.

The career path taken by 11 of the female principals was one of teacher, promotion to assistant principal and promotion to principalship. Two participants's career path included teaching and promotion straight to the principalship from the classroom. Another participant went from a teaching position to a traveling reading

specialist to promotion as principal. The last participant's career path began as a teacher with promotion to a supervisory position of a special system wide project to promotion as principal.

All the participants stated they had been placed in situations as teachers where they had leadership experience. Some served as grade level representatives where they had to talk with peers on topics presented to them by the principal. Some had headed committees or special projects at the school level. All had been given the responsibility of being in charge when the principal was out of the building due to illness or a meeting.

Another commonality among the participants was their terminal degrees. Master's degrees in administration was held by all the participants. Four had obtained additional course work hours passed the Master's degree, 2 held specialist degrees in administration and 1 had obtained her doctorate. For this group of female leaders pursuing degrees was the single most common option after their experiences as classroom teachers. This is different from research findings conducted by Pavan and D'Angelo (1990).

**Research Question 2: What do female principals perceive as barriers when entering administrative positions?**

Barriers exist for anyone when pursuing lofty careers or positions perceived as prominent. No one expects the road to be gilded or have a crystal staircase leading to the top. However, neither should one expect to find the path loaded with unforeseen land mines and traps. The responses given by the female principals concerning perceived career barriers were filled with unnecessary problems created more often than not by the mere fact they were of a particular gender.

Although the participants's responses varied on this question, one common theme that most of them perceived as a barrier was the mistrust they found against them from females on their staff. They felt this was gender related since they had not encountered visible opposition from their male staff members. They felt that females who have another female as a leader tend to question her ability to perform the job well, become jealous of the female in charge and display animosity and don't believe their female counterpart was able to get the principalship based on her hard working merits.

Other perceived career barriers included male administrators who do not understand their female counterparts or perceive them as capable of handling their job well, inflexibility of teachers to meet the changing needs of today's children, lack of support from Central

Office staff, implementation of new programs and parental/community support.

**Research Question 3: What role, if any, have mentors played in your journey and/or success in administration?**

Recent literature focuses on the importance of women having mentors, either male or female, in order to make significant advances in administrative careers. This concept is closely allied with networking as an important part of building support systems for women aspiring to and those in positions of administration. Eleven of the 14 female principals in the study indicated having a mentor during their journey to the principalship. The relationships that developed were very positive. The participants described their relationship with their mentors as encouraging, special and supportive. This networking relationship still exists with the principals calling on their mentors for advice, support, ideas and information on administrative tasks. These female principals felt their mentorship was an important part of their success. They also believed all administrators should have someone they could call on to seek advice, bounce ideas off and share successes and failures. The relationship and friendship that develops is beyond comparison.



Mentorships have the capacity to provide information that has been especially scarce in the orientation of women breaking ground in a new area or along a new path in a leadership role (Hill & Ragland, 1995). Mentors become invaluable in explaining other essentials to advancement, such as how to increase one's visibility within the school setting. Mentors can explain power structures and the carefully hidden movers and shakers. Mentoring is a natural vehicle for generative leadership. It facilitates learned pride in being a woman (Hill & Ragland, 1995). Nannerl Keohane (1991), President of Wellesley College calls this a "sense of connectedness with other women".

**Research Question 4: What are the perceived leadership challenges facing female principals?**

Leadership challenges were faced by all the female principals in the study but each challenge was unique to the participant and her present leadership role. Although the responses varied, some of them had a common thread that was woven throughout. One part of this common thread was the fact the participants felt that females were not perceived as leaders when placed in administrative roles. They were perceived as being weak and unable to handle discipline,

especially at the high school level, or able to complete other administrative tasks. Another common response was the fact that other females on their staff did not accept them as authority figures. Female staff members questioned their decisions and inquired as to how they (female principal) were able to achieve the promotion of principal. One participant stated this was even worse when you were promoted from within the school you taught , especially when they are other females there with the same qualifications and certification who are probably just as good. Guyton & Slick (1996) report women who aspire to or assume an administrative position are often not well supported by other women in the profession. They are also found that female administrators reported more reluctant acceptance from their female staff members than from male members (Guyton & Slick, 1994). Traditionally oriented women often harbor resentment for and even openly defy women who break the tradition and assume positions usually occupied by males (Woo, 1985).

**Research Question 5: What leadership qualities, if any, do female principals perceive as being important?**

The female principals in the study possessed an interactive style of leadership. Words such as encouraging, involvement of

others, sharing leadership, collaboration, nurturing, being a team player, serving others, being a facilitator and modeling were expressed by the female principals. In an article published in the Harvard Business Review (1990), Dr. Judy Rosener argued that women are more likely than men to lead in an interactive style - encouraging participation, sharing power and information and enhancing self-worth. Rosener (1990) claimed that women tend to use "transformational" leadership, motivating others by transforming their self-interest into the goals of the organization while men use "transactional" leadership, doling out rewards for good work and punishment for bad.

The female principals felt it was important to them as female leaders to be open, trusting, compassionate, understanding and supportive. Being a team player and leading by example were other leadership qualities these female principals felt were important leadership qualities. Responses also substantiated the participatory style that encourages inclusiveness rather than exclusiveness in schools. Female principals involved themselves more with staff and students and asked for greater participation from staff.

## CONCLUSIONS

Female principals are a significant resource for learning how to lead schools. Although studies of women and school leadership continue to be limited in comparison to studies of men, a great deal of information exists about women and the world of schools. Women continue to represent the majority of teachers but the representation of women in school administration continues to be disproportional. This study focused on women who had been successful in securing principalship positions in their prominent school systems. It sought to learn about their experiences, their perceived challenges, the barriers they faced, what they perceive to be important leadership qualities and the role a mentor had played in their journey to the principalship. Although these women were in different school settings with different student populations, their leadership experiences were very similar in nature. They all had the common starting point of the classroom. Some had the goal of attaining a supervisory position while others were content, at that time, to remain in the teaching atmosphere. The common goal of trying to make things better for students was the call that seemed to awaken them from the classroom with a focus on attaining the principalship. They all felt they could make a difference which seemed to be the dominant factor in pursuing administrative

certification and position. These females seemed very focused on what their goal was - the principalship. Some took a slight diversion by pursuing a traveling specialist position or a supervisory position by their paths led back to the goal of administration and being a principal. Although none of the female principals spoke to perseverance as an important quality for a leader to possess, it was very prominent in their stories of their journeys to the principalship. Without perseverance and the aspirations of achieving their goal, many would have perhaps fallen by the wayside and given up.

Although stereotypes and barriers do exist for females aspiring to be administrators, females can overcome them and be successful in leadership positions. The female principals in the study seemed to disregard the stereotypes and reach for positions of administrators through competence and valid experiences. They have grown from these experiences by making personal strides forward, breaking glass ceilings, climbing old walls and dumping the baggage of stereotypes of the past. They possess a high level of energy to get the job done.

The role of a mentor in the female's journey to an administrative position was felt to be an important asset by those who had experienced this relationship. This relationship also proved

to be helpful in creating a network among the female principals and enabled them to create networks with other females in administrative positions outside their schools and school systems. They also felt more comfortable in being a mentor to other females to encourage them to look into pursuing administrative positions outside the classroom. The female principals consistently cited mentors who had been important in helping them reach their goals, who stated she could do it against all odds and who demonstrated to her how it could be done.

By mentoring and encouraging other females to pursue administrative positions, the "Queen Bee Syndrome" would hopefully become non-existent. Mentors in the higher career echelons should be made aware of this syndrome and be encouraged to find ways of helping other females arrive at these top positions. Lack of access to women as mentors or roles models can seriously limit the potential of those with aspirations to become administrators.

The challenge for our society is to appreciate and encourage the strengths of men and women who have the commitment and dedication to seek positions of educational leadership that are so desperately needed to nurture and guide the young people of this nation. Leadership in dynamic organizations and schools is a shared phenomenon (Restine, 1993). Real leadership is the use of power not

to dominate but to empower. The greatest gifts we can hope to give are new and more positive ways of seeing the possibilities in others. Good leaders create meaning in a common cause through vision and reflection.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Although there has been a growing preference for approaches and behaviors in school leadership typically associated with a female leadership perspective, it then appears logical and necessary that female beliefs, thoughts and feelings be heard, shared and discussed; practice and research integrating female life experiences, values and perceptions be recognized in administration in education.

The findings and conclusions from this research generated several recommendations for future research. They include:

1. Continued research on experiences of women in school administration.
2. An ethnographical case study of one identified female principal similar to Wolcott's study of the Man in the Principal's Office.
3. Higher institutions of learning should look more closely

at their administrator training programs by incorporating and implementing more studies of female leadership and women studies into these programs.

4. Development of cohort groups for females aspiring to become administrators and those already in leadership positions.
5. Internships for women to be placed with women administrators.
6. Future studies regarding this area might better clarify the areas of race and ethnicity in the demographic data.

There is no freeway to the future. No paved highway from here to tomorrow. There is only wilderness. Only uncertain terrain. There are no roadmaps. No signposts. So pioneering leaders rely upon a compass and a dream.

-James M. Kouzes & Barry Z. Posner  
The Leadership Challenge, 1987



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## **APPENDICES**

APPENDIX A  
STUDY APPROVAL LETTERS

**Larrissa D. Henderson**  
7816 West Acres Drive  
Knoxville, Tennessee 37919

Superintendent Patricia Smith  
Lenoir City Schools  
2145 Harrison Street  
Lenoir City, Tennessee 37771

Dear Superintendent Smith,

I am a doctoral student at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, where I am conducting a study on the leadership experiences and perceptions of female principals. I am very interested in gaining data for my study from practicing female principals within your school system. Although the number on females entering the field of education administration is increasing, research on this topic is very limited. It is my hope the information gained from this will aid and encourage females to pursue leadership roles in education administration and provide insight to female principals who have attained leadership positions. In addition, results of this study could be used to provide ideas for staff development programs for qualified females who are interested in pursuing administrative positions in your system.

I am requesting your approval for the study to be conducted with female principals in your system. Any data collected in the performance of this survey will be strictly confidential and will not be released in any individually identifiable form to Lenoir City Schools, unless required by law. Data collected will not be used for any other purposes and will be maintained in confidential files by me. Employee participation will be voluntary and each questionnaire mailed out will contain a cover letter stating the purpose of the study.

Upon your approval for the conduction of the study, I will need a list of names all female principals currently in your system as well as school addresses to which the Female Administrator Demographic Survey and cover letter can be mailed.

I appreciate your cooperation in this study. I will be happy to provide you with a summary of the study if you desire. I will call you in a couple of days following this letter to set up an appointment to discuss the study. Thank you for your participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Larrissa D. Henderson  
Doctoral Candidate  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville





2145 HARRISON AVENUE  
LENOIR CITY, TENNESSEE 37771

*Lenoir City Schools*

August 5, 1995

Phone (615) 966-8066  
Fax (615) 966-6732

Larrissa D. Henderson  
7816 West Acres Drive  
Knoxville, TN 37919

Dear Ms. Henderson:

In response to your letter regarding your research on female administrators in education, approval is granted for you to conduct the study in Lenoir City Schools. We only have one female administrator who is Ms. Pam Clark, the principal of the high school. I have talked with her and, she is pleased to participate in this project. You may contact Ms. Clark via telephone at 986-2072.

Sincerely,

*Patricia L. Smith*

Patricia L. Smith, Superintendent  
Lenoir City Schools

**Larrissa D. Henderson**

7816 West Acres Drive  
Knoxville, Tennessee 37919

Superintendent Bob Lovingood  
Monroe County Schools  
103 College Street, Kennedy Bldg., Suite 6  
Madisonville, Tennessee 37354

Dear Superintendent Lovingood,

I am a doctoral student at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, where I am conducting a study on the leadership experiences and perceptions of female principals. I am very interested in gaining data for my study from practicing female principals within your school system. Although the number on females entering the field of education administration is increasing, research on this topic is very limited. It is my hope the information gained from this will aid and encourage females to pursue leadership roles in education administration and provide insight to female principals who have attained leadership positions. In addition, results of this study could be used to provide ideas for staff development programs for qualified females who are interested in pursuing administrative positions in your system.

I am requesting your approval for the study to be conducted with female principals in your system. Any data collected in the performance of this survey will be strictly confidential and will not be released in any individually identifiable form to Monroe County Schools, unless required by law. Data collected will not be used for any other purposes and will be maintained in confidential files by me. Employee participation will be voluntary and each questionnaire mailed out will contain a cover letter stating the purpose of the study.

Upon your approval for the conduction of the study, I will need a list of names all female principals currently in your system as well as school addresses to which the Female Administrator Demographic Survey and cover letter can be mailed.

I appreciate your cooperation in this study. I will be happy to provide you with a summary of the study if you desire. I will call you in a couple of days following this letter to set up an appointment to discuss the study. Thank you for your participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Larrissa D. Henderson  
Doctoral Candidate  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Board of Education

Dr. JAMES DASH, Vice-Chairman  
302 College St.  
Madisonville, Tennessee  
2nd District

JOHN W. HAMMONTREE  
102 Hammontree Lane  
Maryville, Tennessee  
2nd District

MARTY ALLEN  
313 Sunset Drive  
Sweetwater, Tennessee  
1st District

BUDDY PERRY  
409 Sunset Drive  
Sweetwater, Tennessee  
1st District

Monroe County  
Department of Education

BOB LOVINGOOD, Superintendent  
103 College Street  
Madisonville, Tennessee 37354  
Telephone: 442-2373  
Fax: 442-1389

Chairperson of School Board  
JEAN B. ALLISON  
312 Povo Road  
Madisonville, Tennessee  
2nd District

DEWITT UPTON  
236 Washington Street  
Sweetwater, Tennessee  
1st District

JAMES E. MONGER  
184 Mount Harmony Road  
Tellico Plains, Tennessee  
3rd District

KEITH SITZLER  
848 County Farm Road  
Madisonville, Tennessee  
3rd District

A.C. WILSON  
680 Reliance Road  
Tellico Plains, Tennessee  
3rd District

October 12, 1995

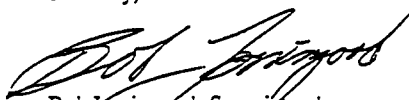
Ms. Larissa D. Henderson  
7816 West Acres Drive  
Knoxville, Tennessee 37919

Dear Ms. Henderson:

I am giving permission for you to conduct a research project in the Monroe County School System. It is my understanding that you will interview selected administrators as part of your research study.

I am glad to assist in your studies at the University of Tennessee. If you need further information, please contact me.

Sincerely,



Bob Lovingood, Superintendent  
Monroe County Schools

BL/gs

**Larrissa D. Henderson**  
7816 West Acres Drive  
Knoxville, Tennessee 37919

Superintendent Lana C. Seivers  
Clinton City Schools  
209A North Hicks Street  
Clinton, Tennessee 37716

Dear Superintendent Seivers,

I am a doctoral student at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, where I am conducting a study on the leadership experiences and perceptions of female principals. I am very interested in gaining data for my study from practicing female principals within your school system. Although the number on females entering the field of education administration is increasing, research on this topic is very limited. It is my hope the information gained from this will aid and encourage females to pursue leadership roles in education administration and provide insight to female principals who have attained leadership positions. In addition, results of this study could be used to provide ideas for staff development programs for qualified females who are interested in pursuing administrative positions in your system.

I am requesting your approval for the study to be conducted with female principals in your system. Any data collected in the performance of this survey will be strictly confidential and will not be released in any individually identifiable form to Clinton City Schools, unless required by law. Data collected will not be used for any other purposes and will be maintained in confidential files by me. Employee participation will be voluntary and each questionnaire mailed out will contain a cover letter stating the purpose of the study.

Upon your approval for the conduction of the study, I will need a list of names all female principals currently in your system as well as school addresses to which the Female Administrator Demographic Survey and cover letter can be mailed.

I appreciate your cooperation in this study. I will be happy to provide you with a summary of the study if you desire. I will call you in a couple of days following this letter to set up an appointment to discuss the study. Thank you for your participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Larrissa D. Henderson  
Doctoral Candidate  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

# CLINTON CITY SCHOOLS

209 NORTH HICKS STREET • CLINTON, TENNESSEE 37716 • (615) 457-0225 / 457-0159



October 12, 1995

Larrissa D. Henderson  
7816 West Acres Drive  
Knoxville, Tennessee 37919  
(423) 691-0810

Dear Larrissa,

The purpose of this letter is to confirm the Clinton City Schools' agreement to participate in the research project you are conducting in fulfillment of your EdD. The female administrators in our system are aware of your study and have expressed their willingness to assist you.

Sincerely,

Lana C. Seivers  
Superintendent

**Larrissa D. Henderson**

7816 West Acres Drive  
Knoxville, Tennessee 37919

Superintendent Dr. Robert J. Smallridge  
Oak Ridge City Schools  
New York Ave., P. O. Box 6588  
Oak Ridge, Tennessee 37831-6588

Dear Superintendent Smallridge,

I am a doctoral student at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, where I am conducting a study on the leadership experiences and perceptions of female principals. I am very interested in gaining data for my study from practicing female principals within your school system. Although the number on females entering the field of education administration is increasing, research on this topic is very limited. It is my hope the information gained from this will aid and encourage females to pursue leadership roles in education administration and provide insight to female principals who have attained leadership positions. In addition, results of this study could be used to provide ideas for staff development programs for qualified females who are interested in pursuing administrative positions in your system.

I am requesting your approval for the study to be conducted with female principals in your system. Any data collected in the performance of this survey will be strictly confidential and will not be released in any individually identifiable form to Oak Ridge City Schools, unless required by law. Data collected will not be used for any other purposes and will be maintained in confidential files by me. Employee participation will be voluntary and each questionnaire mailed out will contain a cover letter stating the purpose of the study.

Upon your approval for the conduction of the study, I will need a list of names all female principals currently in your system as well as school addresses to which the Female Administrator Demographic Survey and cover letter can be mailed.

I appreciate your cooperation in this study. I will be happy to provide you with a summary of the study if you desire. I will call you in a couple of days following this letter to set up an appointment to discuss the study. Thank you for your participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Larrissa D. Henderson  
Doctoral Candidate  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

OAK RIDGE SCHOOLS  
Oak Ridge, Tennessee

APPROVAL AND FOLLOW-UP RECORD DISSERTATION/RESEARCH STUDY

DATE Nov. 6, 1969

NAME OF RESEARCHER Larissa D. Henderson COLLEGE Education (UT Knoxville)

ADDRESS 7816 West Acres Drive TELEPHONE 621-0810  
Knoxville, Tenn. 37919

TYPE OF STUDY - DISSERTATION xy THESIS          OTHER         

TITLE OF STUDY Women and Power: A Study of Leadership Experiences and Perspectives of  
Female Administrators in Selected School Systems in East Tennessee

DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT See attached information sheet

APPROVAL FOR SUBMISSION TO SUPERINTENDENT:

<p>COMMENTS:</p> <p><i>Richard W. W. D.</i></p> <p>Director, Pupil Personnel Services</p>
---

<p>COMMENTS:</p> <p><i>Ass.</i></p> <p>Assist. Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction</p>
--

APPROVED BY SUPERINTENDENT

<p>COMMENTS:</p> <p><i>Approved. I would like to rec a copy of the results of this study.</i></p> <p><i>[Signature]</i></p> <p>Superintendent</p>
---

REFERRED TO THE FOLLOWING SCHOOLS:                                 

FOLLOW-UP:

Date Completed	Copy Received	Copy Circulated To	Copy filed At	For Publication
				APPROVED:
				Superintendent
				Date:

ORS September 1975

**Larrissa D. Henderson**  
7816 West Acres Drive  
Knoxville, Tennessee 37919

Superintendent Allen Morgan  
Knox County Schools  
P. O. Box 2188  
Knoxville, Tennessee 37902

Dear Superintendent Morgan,

I am a doctoral student at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, where I am conducting a study on the leadership experiences and perceptions of female principals. I am very interested in gaining data for my study from practicing female principals within your school system. Although the number on females entering the field of education administration is increasing, research on this topic is very limited. It is my hope the information gained from this will aid and encourage females to pursue leadership roles in education administration and provide insight to female principals who have attained leadership positions. In addition, results of this study could be used to provide ideas for staff development programs for qualified females who are interested in pursuing administrative positions in your system.

I am requesting your approval for the study to be conducted with female principals in your system. Any data collected in the performance of this survey will be strictly confidential and will not be released in any individually identifiable form to Knox County Schools, unless required by law. Data collected will not be used for any other purposes and will be maintained in confidential files by me. Employee participation will be voluntary and each questionnaire mailed out will contain a cover letter stating the purpose of the study.

Upon your approval for the conduction of the study, I will need a list of names all female principals currently in your system as well as school addresses to which the Female Administrator Demographic Survey and cover letter can be mailed.

I appreciate your cooperation in this study. I will be happy to provide you with a summary of the study if you desire. I will call you in a couple of days following this letter to set up an appointment to discuss the study. Thank you for your participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Larrissa D. Henderson  
Doctoral Candidate  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville



KNOX COUNTY SCHOOLS  
ANDREW JOHNSON BUILDING

Allen Morgan, Superintendent

December 6, 1995



Ms. Larissa D. Henderson  
7816 West Acres Drive  
Knoxville, Tennessee 37919

Dear Ms. Henderson:

You are granted permission to contact female principals, assistant principals and supervisors concerning the conduct of your proposed research study entitled, "Women and Power: A Study of Leadership Experiences and Perspectives of Female Administrators in Selected School Systems of East Tennessee."

In all research studies names of individuals, groups, or schools may not appear in the text of the study unless *specific* permission has been granted through this office. The principal researcher is required to furnish this office with one copy of the completed research document.

Good luck with your study. Do not hesitate to contact me if you need further assistance or clarification.

Yours truly,

*Samuel E. Bratton, Jr.*

Samuel E. Bratton, Jr., Ed.D.  
Coordinator of Research and Evaluation  
Phone: (423) 594-1740  
Fax: (423) 594-1709

Project No. 618

**APPENDIX B**  
**INTERVIEW GUIDE COVER LETTER**

**Larrissa D. Henderson**

7816 West Acres Drive  
Knoxville, Tennessee 37919

Dear Colleague,

I am a doctoral student at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville where I am conducting a study on the leadership experiences and perceptions of female administrators. As a doctoral student in the unit of Educational Leadership studies, I am very interested in gaining this information from the perspective of practicing female administrators. Although the number of females entering the field of education administration is increasing, research on this topic is very limited and is very crucial. Middle and West Tennessee have already surpassed East Tennessee in the number of females promoted to leadership roles in educational institutions. East Tennessee is making progress but the progress is very slow.

Information gained from this study will hopefully encourage other females to pursue leadership roles in education administration while assisting those in leadership positions with helpful insight to the barriers that may exist in this leadership role. Once these barriers have been identified, this study will provide recommendations on how to successfully overcome them.

I am requesting your participation in a survey of the leadership experiences and perceptions of female administrators. I will be contacting you within the next 2-3 days to set up a convenient time for the taped interview. The taped interview will take approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour.

Your responses will be kept strictly confidential and will be only analyzed in combination with other responses. Participation is voluntary. The returned completed demographic survey and consent form constitutes consent to participate.

I would appreciate your response at your earliest possible convenience. Please fill out the questionnaire and mail it back to me as soon as possible. Enclosed is a stamped, return address envelope for your convenience. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated. I will be happy to provide you with a summary of this study if you desire. Thank you for your participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Larrissa D. Henderson  
Doctoral Candidate  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

\_\_\_\_ I would like a copy of the findings from this study to be sent to me.

**APPENDIX C**  
**INTERVIEW GUIDE**

## Part I - Demographic Data & General Information

1. Ethnic Background: \_\_\_\_\_

- ### 3. Level of Education: Highest Degree Earned

Other \_\_\_\_\_

5. Type of school:

6. School Enrollment: 0-500    501-750    751-1000    1001-1500  
1501 or above

8. Age when promoted to principalship: 20-29      30-39      40-49  
50 or above

**Female Administrator Survey  
Part II - Leadership Perceptions**

1. Tell me how you happened to become a principal. What was your journey like?
2. Think of a specific experience you had that helped prepare you for the challenges you face as a principal. Tell me about it.
3. Can you think of another experience? What happened?
4. Which experiences stand out?
5. Think of a leadership challenge you experienced as a female principal. Tell me about it.
6. What makes that time stand out ? Can you think of another time and challenge you experienced?
7. Have there been times when you experienced challenges from your teachers, Central Office staff, students or other principals?  
What did you do?
8. Tell me how you lead. Give me an example that would illustrate your leadership style?
9. How do you feel about yourself as a principal?
10. How would you compare yourself to other female principals?
11. How would you compare yourself to male principals?
12. Think of a time when you faced a setback or barrier during your principalship. Tell me about this setback or barrier.

13. Can you think of a time or times that are related to race that have been problematic for you? Tell me about this time/times.
14. I know there is no typical day for a principal. Can you go through your day in detail starting with your arrival to school and ending with your departure.
15. Were you mentored during your principalship? Tell me about the experience or relationship developed with your mentor. What did that person do to mentor you?

VITA



## VITA

Larrissa Diana Henderson was born on September 28, 1951, in Knoxville, Tennessee, to Harry C. and Clara Mae Harris. Her formative years of education began at Sam E. Hill Elementary School, proceeded to Beardsley Junior High and Christenberry Junior High and culminated in graduation from Fulton High School in 1969. She pursued a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Her teaching career began immediately following graduation from the University in 1973 when she was hired by Knox County Schools as a 4th/5th grade teacher at Farragut Intermediate and Middle Schools. She served in this capacity for 17 years. She taught for 10 years and then proceeded to further her education by obtaining a Master's Degree in Reading Education from the University of Tennessee in 1985. During 1990-1991, she served as as administrative intern at Beaumont Elementary. In 1992, she was promoted to assistant principal at Beaumont and served in that capacity for 2 years. In 1993, she was promoted to the prinicpalship at West View Elementary.

When the opportunity came along, in 1990, to expand her knowledge base again, Larrissa applied for and was accepted into a Master's Degree level program sponsored by the Danforth Foundation

with the University of Tennessee and Knox County Schools becoming a collaborative team. Since she had already obtained a Master's degree, Larrissa opted for the Education Specialist Degree in Educational Administration and Supervision. This degree was conferred during the summer of 1991. She is currently enrolled in the Danforth Doctoral Program at the University of Tennessee.

Her professional affiliations include: Knox County Elementary Principals Association, The National Association of Elementary Principals, Knox County Education Association, Tennessee Education Association, East Tennessee Education Association, National Educational Association, The International Reading Association, Smoky Mountain Reading Association, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Tennessee Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, and Tennessee Association of Elementary School Principals.

She is a member of Phi Delta Kappa, professional organization of educators, Pi Lambda Theta, International Honor and Professional Association in Education, Delta Kappa Gamma, professional organization of female educators, Beaumont-Northwest Lions Club, and Mechanicsville Community Development Corporation. She is a member of the Roseberry City Baptist Church where she serves as Superintendent of the Sunday School, teacher of the Adult Sunday

School Class and Youth Director Assistant. She has been employed with the Knox County School System for 24 years and is presently serving as principal at West View Elementary School in Knox County. She has also served as an assistant principal at Beaumont Elementary and Honors Magnet where she worked for 3 years prior to her promotion to a principalship at West View.