

Women Line Administrators in Education:

A Study of Achievement

For many years, and perhaps more often since the advent of the current feminist movement, people have asked, "Why can't women achieve like men?" In many ways it is ironic that this question would even be asked. If we look at the achievement of girls and boys in schools we see that there are few differences in overall scores on standardized achievement tests (although skills may vary from one area to another) and that girls consistently get better grades than boys in all subjects, ~~In terms of grades, girls outscore boys from first grade through graduate school.~~ Females can achieve.

Yet, of course, one may say this doesn't last. When we look at the occupational world it is clear that men are much more likely than women to hold the most prestigious and highest paying jobs. For instance, 11% of all white men are owners and managers, but only 4% of all white women are. Within specific areas the sex differences are even more extreme.

I am going to focus on the area of administration in public education. I find this area most fascinating because the educational profession as a whole is predominately female; 63% of all professional educators in 1972-73 were women. Yet, there is sharp sex segregation among the various positions in education. Table 1 shows that 84% of all elementary teachers, ^{and} 46% of all secondary teachers were women. Yet only 20% of all elementary school principals, 35% of all staff administrators in central offices (e.g., curriculum coordinators, special education supervisors), 3% of all junior high principals, 1% of all secondary school principals, 6% of all assistant school superintendents, and only 0.1% of all school superintendents, the highest position

within a school district, were women in 1972-73 (Fishel and Pottker, 1974). Clearly women predominate in the lowest ranking or least prestigious areas and are least often found in the most authoritative and highest paying positions. Even though the profession is predominately female, the most prestigious and highly paid posts are held by males.

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Today I am going to present data about the few women who have "made it" in educational administration, focusing on the women line administrators: secondary school principals, assistant superintendents, and school superintendents, the women educators who have achieved in men's arena. First, I will briefly discuss the theoretical perspective that is generally most useful in looking within one profession, then present data on a sample of these women, examining their educational and family status and their career patterns; and finally discuss the implications of these data, both for developing theoretical understandings of women's occupational achievement and for implementing social change. I will use this last area as a means of expounding on my own particular views of the most useful areas for social change.

Theoretical Perspective

Many explanations of women's achievement (or lack of it) in the occupational world (e.g., neo-classical and labor segmentation theories) focus on the total economy. In contrast, for examining sex segregation within one profession or occupation, we may turn to the internal labor market analyses in economics and the somewhat related studies of organizations that are more

common in sociology. Using an internal labor market analysis one may examine the apparatus within a profession that influences ^{the} the different experiences of men and women and the sex segregation of the field. An important aspect of this internal labor market is career ladders. In education, as Table 1 implies, women most often begin as elementary teachers, men as secondary teachers. These two starting positions in turn point toward different career ladders: elementary teachers can aim toward elementary principalships, but generally this is an end point in the scale (Gaertner, 1978). In contrast, secondary teachers may become secondary principals then perhaps move to a central office administrative job, to assistant superintendent, and then to the post of superintendent. One of the reasons then that men are much more often found in the superintendent's post is that they more often fill the secondary teaching jobs.

Yet, this cannot be the only reason. Almost half of all secondary teachers are women. But only about 0.1% of all school superintendents are women. Something serves to sort most eligible women out of the career ladder toward the superintendency. ^{first} Certainly this involves discrimination--the sorting done by others--where encouragement for administrative careers is systematically directed more toward men than toward women and men are favored over women for jobs on the administrative career ladder. ^{second} Women may also opt out of the career ladder toward the superintendency. While the numbers of men and women educators with masters degrees is equivalent (Estler, 1975), women generally enroll in graduate programs in curriculum and instruction, special education or counseling (areas that are seen as appropriate for women) rather than in graduate programs in school administration.

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Undoubtedly, their reluctance to pursue administrative programs stems from their realization that they would face discrimination if they attempted to pursue that area. It is seen as men's province, not as women's, and so it is avoided. This in turn promotes the view that school administration is a male arena. Thus, both the discrimination of others and women's reluctance to enter a field where they will face discrimination reinforce the extreme sex typing of school administration and are mutually self-perpetuating.

Women Line Administrators in Education

By examining the women who have "made it"--the relatively few women who have become superintendents or who are in the line positions of secondary principal or assistant superintendent--we may be able to come to some understanding of how to facilitate changes in the internal labor market of education to promote more women into the top positions. My data come from a nationwide mail survey conducted in 1977 of all women listed within the various state directories or state department of education lists as being in one of the three top line positions. A total population of 512 people was identified and 260³ of these women returned usable questionnaires. (These figures omit respondents incorrectly included in the population, e.g. those not in actual line positions, but instead holding posts such as coordinator or secretary to the superintendent, and men who were inadvertently included. See Paddock, 1978.)

An examination of the data on these women shows that even though we supposedly contacted the most highly achieving women in education, relatively few of them hold much power. This is especially true of the superintendents.

Eighty-one percent of these top school officials for whom information is available supervise schools that serve only elementary children. Eight-five percent of these superintendents also report that they serve districts that are smaller than most other districts in their state. The assistant superintendents are more likely to be in the larger districts, probably because only those larger districts include assistant superintendents on their staffs. *Women principals are found in district of all size* The average salary for the superintendents was about \$21,000, not overly high for 1977, and for assistant superintendents and principals was \$25,000 and \$22,000 respectively. There are wide variations in the numbers of people the respondents report to supervise. Twenty-nine percent of the superintendents, 30% of the assistant superintendents, and 19% of the principals report that they supervise less than 15 people. On the other end of the continuum, 36% of the superintendents, 25% of the assistant superintendents, and 18% of the principals report supervising more than 120 people.

Even though many of these women are in relatively small districts, each of them has a position of authority and achievement. What has facilitated their attaining these posts? Susan Paddock, in the original analysis of these data (1978) noted that in contrast to the situation with men, where most studies report finding very few black line administrators, especially since the end of segregated schools, 19% of the high school principals and 15% of the assistant superintendents in this sample were black. These black women administrators were more often in the larger communities and the black principals were more likely than their white counterparts to supervise a large number of people. While male administrators are disproportionately Protestant (Jennings and Zeigler, 1969), the women in the

sample represented a much wider range of religious affiliations. Similarly, while many more male administrators are Republicans than are found nationwide, the women administrators' political affiliations match the national trends fairly closely. In general, Paddock suggests that the largest barrier these women faced in becoming administrators was their sex. Once that was overcome, their race, religion, and political affiliation were not overly important.

Most closely related to one's sex is one's marital status and motherhood. While virtually all male administrators are married, 21% of the women in this sample had never married and an additional 17% were widowed or divorced. Most of the women who had children had older children either in high school or grown. This may indicate that women without the encumbrances of a family are more likely to embark upon a non-traditional career path. These findings also suggest, however, that these women may be the most likely to be considered by those who make the hiring decisions as being able to "handle the responsibilities." They may be seen as "exceptional" or "unusual" women. (I must note here the parallel with pre-industrial societies that allow only post-menopausal or barren women to assume positions of authority.) *-i.e. only those women whose "sex" doesn't matter.*

Ninety-four percent of the women did report that they received encouragement in pursuing their careers. The superintendents rated both encouragement of school officials and family members most important, while the assistant superintendents and principals overwhelmingly rated the encouragement of school officials such as that from supervisors, building administrators, and central office staff, as most important. The most common form of

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encouragement was suggestions regarding the career, giving confidence, and, for the principals, appointments to administrative posts and intern programs. Only 5% of the women said that this encouragement was not important in their career decisions and progress.

Table 3

Examining the stages of career ladders of these women can perhaps lend more insight into their achievements. Table 4 shows the educational background of these women. At the bachelor's level, the superintendents are most likely to have degrees in education. This probably occurs because they often entered elementary education, and eventually became superintendents in elementary districts. Secondary teaching usually requires a degree in a subject area. Thus, it is not surprising that the vast majority of the high school principals received BAs in non-educational fields. Their bachelor degrees were most common in the humanities, a typically female teaching field. At the higher educational levels, all the respondents tended to get degrees in either an educational field or in educational administration. Perhaps because their responsibilities may involve curriculum or other areas, the assistant superintendents were somewhat less likely than those in the other two posts to have degrees in administration.

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Table 5 summarizes the steps in the careers that the women have taken to this point. Clearly most of the women (71%) began their careers as teachers. The next largest group started with professional jobs outside education. While a few women moved in their first career change to a line administrative post or to a staff administrative post, most of these teachers (44%) took another teaching job. About 6% of the teachers moved to jobs out of education, and 8%

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left education to work at home with their families. In the second step of career moves, the largest group of women still began as teachers and almost half of these women remain as teachers, but a third move to staff administrative positions and 8% of these teachers go to line administrative posts. About a third of those in staff positions move to line positions. In the third stage, the most common beginning post is still that of teachers (50%), with staff administrative positions next most common (28%). Only 34% of the teachers move to another teaching post, 39% go to staff administrative positions, and 22% to line posts. Forty-one percent of those beginning in staff positions at this stage move to line positions. The moves in the later stages are similar, with the most common move being from teaching to staff positions and then to line administrative positions of superintendent, assistant superintendent, or secondary principal:

The above data suggest that many of these women ^{appear to} have moved in a career pattern typical of males in administration from teaching to a staff administrative position to their line posts. A small number have also moved from one line position to another. A fair sized minority have left education for other jobs or to stay at home for a few years and then have returned to their educational careers. In contrast to male administrators, however, these women have had a much longer period of classroom experience before entering administration. Paddock (1978) has also noted that the time between deciding to enter administration and actually getting a job was only about one year for these women, in contrast to a time that is estimated to be several times longer for men (Carlson, 1972). This may indicate that many women really did not conceive of entering administration until they were encouraged to do so.

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see last table marked as P-11 (from another paper)

This is supported by the comment of one of the school principals in the study:

I hadn't thought of being a principal until the superintendent asked me to take the post. If my husband hadn't encouraged me to do so, I probably wouldn't have accepted the job.

It must be remembered that these women are a very small minority of all line administrators in education. They generally appear to have achieved their positions not from fighting the system as much as from a fortuitous combination of circumstances and the support of those in strategic positions. School officials and often families have encouraged their career progress. Studies of attitudes of school officials toward women administrators consistently show intense opposition to their hiring (see Stockard, et al, 1977; and Stockard, forthcoming). This underscores the importance of this encouragement for these women's success and also helps account for its probably rare occurrence.

Implications

What can these findings about exceptional women in education who manage to attain posts usually held by men tell us about the possibilities for women achieving in the male occupational world in general? First, it must be admitted that these women are truly exceptional. If women were to be represented in the top rung of the career ladder as fully as they are represented at the bottom they would compose about half of all the top administrators instead of less than 5%. The reasons they do not may be traced to the officials who do the hiring and selection and screening process and, some suggest, to women themselves for not aspiring to those positions.

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I prefer to stress more the impact of those who control the selection process rather than the motivations of women themselves. This is because women do achieve in education. They are exemplary teachers, librarians, counselors, curriculum coordinators, and (if they are hired) they are also excellent administrators (comparisons of male and female elementary school principals suggest that on most scales females are actually better than males, Fishel and Pottker, 1975). Women do achieve in education; but they achieve in areas that are deemed suitable for women. The line administrative posts are defined as appropriate only for men, and so women are represented only as tokens, at best.

Because women are represented in all the basic beginning posts in education, the internal labor market analysis can not adequately explain their absence in the higher ranks. Both males and females start on the same ladder and in largely the same spots. (In contrast to popular stereotypes of the former coach becoming the principal, the women principals in our sample did not have an overabundance of male-typed undergraduate specialties. Instead, the largest single group majored in the humanities for their bachelor's degrees.) Probably then it is necessary to turn to studies of organizations to determine why women are not advanced as men are. Here the evidence points to discrimination. ^{As well received} Organizational studies of several organizations show ^{al} that women are not treated as men are. Even when having the same organizational authority, women are accorded less respect and given less encouragement than men are (e.g. Miller, et al, 1975). It is no wonder then that many women do not "fight their way to the top" and that those who

have made it often note that the encouragement of others in their work organizations was important in their progress. Unfortunately, this encouragement is extremely rare.

How then do we achieve change? Do we encourage women to strive harder? Or do we try to get those who control the selection processes to admit more women? While probably we must do both, I suspect that it is the latter task that is more important and actually much harder to accomplish. Once it is apparent that those who control the selection process will admit women, then I believe that women will aspire to those posts. Certainly now that women ~~coaches~~ and athletes are actively solicited there is no problem in finding them, and I am sure that this could be the case with women administrators also.

However, how do we deal with the selectors? Most of those who control the selection process are men. Studies of the attitudes of male administrators show them generally quite opposed to the hiring of women administrators, and a survey of teachers found that men who had once been administrators held the most negative attitudes of all (Mansergh, 1975). I frankly think that it will be an uphill battle to cope with these selectors.

One important aspect is that the law is now on the side of sex equity. Selection committees are forced by various affirmative action regulations to try to get women into the hiring pool. Watch-dog committees in individual school districts are raising the cry for more women administrators. Individual women can file legal actions if they believe they have been the victims of discrimination.

Yet these means are costly and time-consuming. The regulations are also open to a good deal of abuse. We have no way of telling how many of the assistant superintendents in our sample hold positions with no real authority over others, but simply have figurehead posts created to show that a woman is indeed part of the administrative structure. Certainly the fact that 30% of the assistant superintendents supervise less than 15 people indicates that at least those women may have relatively little power. Frances Lear (1977) reported in the Washington Post two years ago of her attempt to find women who had been headlined in newspaper articles as being in top administrative and decision making positions in corporations and government around the country. In case after case, she found that these women actually had very little authority and simply held ineffectual positions that they were given to inflate the company's image. No doubt large school districts have not been immune from this practice.

I believe that the final solution then must rest on changing the motivations that ultimately underlie the practices of sex segregation and discrimination. In another paper written with my colleague Miriam Johnson (Stockard and Johnson, 1979), I reviewed literature from psychoanalysis that points to the underlying source of the motives for male dominance. Basically, this literature suggests that because boys' early childhood experiences mainly involve close relations with women, their definition of what it means to be masculine comes to mean "not feminine." To concretely support this view they separate what they do from what women do and depreciate women's activities in favor of their own. Thus, we find the

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sharp segregation of men's and women's tasks in education and the large pay differentials between the teaching positions, mainly held by women, and the administrative posts, generally held by men. From this analysis I suggest that ultimately ending male dominance, allowing women to achieve, and also recognizing the achievement they now make will require changes in not just the economy, but also in the family, incorporating both men and women into early infant care. Even with all the various laws calling for equal representation in employment, if we do not somehow cope with the psychological motives that underlie sex segregation and sex discrimination, efforts to subvert these laws will continue. Ultimately then we must move beyond education and beyond the economic world and also strive for changes in the family.

The women in this sample who were encouraged to become school administrators were probably seen as "exceptional women." The superintendents in elementary districts may be seen as simply doing "women's work," extending the role of elementary teacher and bring no real threat to men's status. As long as those in other positions remain only a small proportion of the total set of administrators they too may be seen as exceptional and do not threaten the total system. If my thoughts are correct, systematic and extensive efforts will be necessary to break down discrimination against women educators and open the career ladders to more women.