

Women in Educational Leadership in the U.S.: Reflections of a 50 Year Veteran

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Abstract

Little did I know when I first stepped into that ninth grade classroom as a very young, timid, first year teacher at Brooks County High School in Quitman, Georgia, that I'd still be plugging away in this profession almost 50 years later! The purpose of this paper is to provide a reflective perspective on the status of women in educational leadership in the United States and the progress they have made moving into and succeeding in the ranks of administrators and leaders since the mid 1900's. More specifically, the author will reflect on and review her own experiences and those of 150 female leaders in education in the 1990's who participated in a study at that time (1993) to discover the best advice and recommendations for prospective women leaders in the profession. The book, *Highly Successful Women Administrators: The Inside Stories of How They Got There* published in 1996, will be the primary source for the author's review and reflection.

Introduction

The nineties were predicted to be the decade in which women in the U.S. would move in large numbers to positions at the top of organizations—the enviable, mostly white, male-dominated position of CEO, chief executive officer. According to Naisbitt and Aburdene (1990) authors of *Megatrends 2000: Ten New Directions for the 1990's*, this would be the decade for women to shatter the glass ceiling which heretofore seemed to circumvent many capable women from moving up the career ladder all the way to the top.

Thus it was amid this national flurry of simultaneous hope and frustration about women's stunted careers in this country that Gloria Slick, a colleague, and I began our research on women's leadership careers in education. Our collaboration on the topic was stimulating and intense, especially since we had so much in common: we were about the same age and had just begun a new phase of our careers in higher education after many years as teachers and administrators in public school districts. We developed a questionnaire to glean information from practicing women administrators who had been successful in navigating their way to the top three administrative positions in public schools systems: superintendent, assistant superintendent, and high school principal. Using stratified random sampling, we sent 300 surveys to women in these three positions in all regions of the U.S. We heard from 151 respondents who graciously completed our tedious, fourteen-page questionnaire; some of them even added additional pages to their responses. It was evident that most of the questionnaire respondents were eager to share their experiences in order to help others aspiring to the roles that many of them assumed as pioneers, first-time females in the position. We knew we had found kindred souls with a “fire in their bellies” who were willing and excited to help shed more light on an important topic that was finally receiving greater attention and scrutiny. A wealth of data from the questionnaires led to many presentations around the country and then ultimately to the writing and publication of

our book in 1996 titled *Highly Successful Women Administrators: The Inside Stories of How They Got There*.

Fifteen years have fast-forwarded since then. My career in education now spans almost a half century of teaching and serving in various leadership roles in public schools and higher education. Although most of my research since that early study with co-researcher Gloria Slick has focused primarily on instructional leadership, I have maintained my interest in the issues of gender equity in educational leadership and continue to seek ways to incorporate this aspect into whatever leadership research project I may be pursuing. The invitation to attend the Oxford Roundtable on Women's Careers: Presumptions and Barriers re-ignited my interest in this topic. Accepting the invitation to attend and present a paper gave me the opportunity and incentive to focus more in depth on this issue again and to review in today's context the relevance of the earlier study's findings. . .the advice and conclusions drawn from the stories of the 151 women leaders who participated in that study and whose distant voices continue to inspire and to enhance my career and life (Gupton & Slick, 1996).

I begin my reflections on women in educational leadership with a look at the latest statistics. Tracking and looking at the numbers alone cannot tell us the *whole* truth, nothing but the truth, but—when interpreted well—they can be considerable assets in assessing the progress that women are making in the workplace.

Next I present the eight major categories of advice to women aspiring to educational leadership careers that were most prominent in the responses of the one-hundred and fifty female leaders (superintendents, assistant superintendents, and high school principals) of the early nineties who participated in our study. I also respond in this section to what I think is the relevance of that advice for today's women who are in or aspiring to educational leadership positions in this country.

The final section of the paper considers the evolution of issues related to women in the workplace, particularly in educational leadership, with the benefit of fifteen additional years of study, observation, and experience since I first began to research and study this topic in 1993.

Women in the Workplace in the U.S.: The New Millennium

Looking purely at the aggregated figures on the numbers of women workers in the United States, the profile of progress they have made moving into managerial positions in the last thirty years is impressive. Between 1972 and 2002 the percentage of managerial jobs held by women in this country increased from 20 to 46 percent. However, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that this progress is not consistent among the professions. Women are still underrepresented in certain professions (i.e., engineering, science, and technology) and overrepresented in others (i.e., nursing and retail). Despite the progression into the workplace that has been made in the last 40 years, women workers in general in the U. S. are concentrated in clerical and service jobs, not managerial and professional. And although women have come a long way since the vast wage gaps of the 1950s, the ratio of women-to-men earnings hovers around 78 percent with the disparity showing up in varying degrees in both professional and lay jobs (U.S. Department of

Labor-Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008, 28). For example, the median income of fully employed Harvard-educated women in 2005 was \$112,500; for men it was \$187,500. Even when education, time out of work, and occupation are accounted for, it seems there is still a “gap of substantial magnitude” between the earnings of men and women (Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars 2008).

The Glass Ceiling Commission created as part of the Civil Rights Act of 1991 was charged to study and recommend ways to eliminate the barriers and discriminations faced by women and minorities as they attempt to advance into management positions. Even though the commission’s recommendations were supposedly implemented and its work completed in 1996, attitudinal barriers and organizational practices continue to exist and to limit opportunity and advancement in the twenty-first century, particularly for women (The Gale Group 2007).

Women in Educational Leadership in the U.S.

Women make up 57 percent of the undergraduates in U.S. colleges today, and they earn a majority of the doctoral degrees awarded in this country (States News Service 2009). Yet, men continue to dominate in the most coveted leadership positions throughout the profession of education. “It is clearly evident,” Arlton and Davis wrote fifteen years ago, “that the proportion of women administrators [in academic administration] decreases as the level of position and responsibility increases” (1993, 95). And today, they are still lagging far behind in their proportionate representation in administration in education at all levels. Sadly, while they proliferate the teaching force, women and minorities in higher education and in PK-12 school districts remain marginally represented in top-level positions, where most of the authority and the best salaries reside. In fact, figures from the Digest of Education Statistics show a decline in 2003 in the percentages of women and minority full-time faculty in higher education for the first time in fifteen years (U.S. Department of Education-National Center for Education Statistics 2003).

Year	1993	1995	1997	2003
# full-time faculty	545,706	550,822	568,719	631,596
% female faculty	33.40	34.60	41.00	39.94
% minority faculty	11.90	12.90	16.90	15.6

On U.S. higher education campuses, the vast majority of full professors, tenured faculty, and top level administrators are men. While the good news is that more women are being hired on college campuses, the down side is that they are being hired at higher numbers for non-tenure-track and part-time positions where their career prospects and salaries are significantly diminished. In its recent report on the most current data on women and gender equity in higher

education, *A Measure of Equity: Women's Progress in Higher Education*, the Association of American Colleges and Universities expresses serious concerns about a "significant pool of women trapped in contingent faculty positions without opportunity for advancement and the career disparities that face women faculty who are parents" (States News Service 2009, 1)

Roger Bowen summarized this particular aspect of the status of women in higher education with the following: "A perverse balance can be found at the lower ranks of the professoriate where women hold a solid majority of the positions (58 percent of instructorships, 54 percent of lectureships, and 51 percent of unranked position). It is important to understand the women remain poorly represented at the upper ranks, where only 23 percent of all full professors are women. Women faculty members, in brief, tend to suffer lower pay and rank than their male colleagues" (Bowen 2005). It is necessary to disaggregate figures and dig deeper into the numbers to interpret them most meaningfully.

Higher Education Leadership

For the leadership positions in academe, the situation is even less inclusive for women. Only 23 percent of college and university president posts in this country are held by women even though they are more likely than their male counterparts to have earned a doctorate (The American Council on Education 2007); however, this is double the percentage of women presidents reported by the ACE in 1986. Important too is the fact that the majority of these women presidents are at two-year institutions and liberal arts and women's colleges. Nationally, there are fewer women than men throughout higher education's upper level administrative positions (i.e., presidents, provosts, vice presidents, deans, and departmental chairpersons), particularly at four-year institutions. There are exceptions of course, but in the national landscape of institutions of higher education, males continue to dominate the leadership positions.

PK-12 School Leadership

Of the U.S.'s almost 14,000 school district superintendents, roughly 15 percent (approximately 2,000) are women (Glass, 2000). Although men still occupy the lion's share of these positions, women have tripled their percentage of them since the early nineties. Since serving as a principal is a key experience in the career track to the position of superintendent, statistics on gender at school-level leadership are a strong predictor of the gender of the top-level position in school districts. Only recently has the number of women principals in the U.S. about equaled those of men, up from 35 percent in 1993 and from 25 percent in 1987. However, the distribution of women across school levels is far from even. Secondary and middle schools have the fewest number of women principals, while elementary school principalships are about equally divided between women and men today. Similar to salaries of higher education faculty, the average salary of a principalship by levels is inversely related to the number of women who serve in those positions. In other words, high school principals' average salary is the highest followed by middle school principals, followed by elementary school principals, and followed by primary

level principals. As the numbers of women in a position increase, the average salary amount shrinks...in higher education and PK-12 school districts.

The disparity between who's leading schools and who's teaching the students is rather ironic since most teachers (72 %) are women (U.S. Department of Education 2008). The profession most populated by and best-known as the "women's profession" continues to be led by men. Contrary to what seems most logical, most principals do not have extensive teaching backgrounds, especially at the upper levels where the salaries are the best. Studies to uncover the best career tracks to the principal's position reveal that coaching experience is often more likely to facilitate one's ambition to become a principal than are many years of teaching in the classroom, especially at the middle and high school levels.

Advice from the Nineties' Women Leaders

Back in 1993, Gloria and I combed through our study's questionnaire data from the responding women administrative leaders to look for patterns of most repeated advice to pass along to other women who aspire to administrative careers in education (Gupton and Slick 1996). The results of our analysis yielded the following major categories into which the respondents' most frequent and passionate suggestions fell:

1. Be Prepared
2. Work Hard
3. Persevere;
4. Practice Good People Skills;
5. Develop and Maintain Strong Support Systems
6. Uphold and Protect Your Personal Integrity;
7. Believe in Yourself—Go for it!

This advice is quite relevant still today, and much of it is—as we knew back then that it was—applicable to both men and women entering educational leadership careers. If I were asked to provide career advice to any young person today, I would include most of these nuggets of sage advice with some fine-tuning to accommodate gender differences. The following is a summary of each area of advice and how each can be made more relevant and useful in particular for today's women educators who as a class remain under-represented in leadership within their profession, the "woman's profession"!

Advice for Prospective Women Leaders in Education

Be Prepared! This advice was the most often repeated in the 1993 study's survey responses. "Preparation" meant a variety of things besides having the *necessary degrees and credentials* from the best schools as well as keeping current and up-to-date by being well-read. Women today are quite aware of the importance of having the proper credentialing as evidenced by the preponderance of women now enrolled in and receiving educational leadership degrees. No longer do male students dominate the education leadership classes in higher education as they did in the 70's' and early 80's.

Today, 67% of doctoral degrees in educational leadership are earned by women (Branch-Brioso, 2009).

Women are seeking and earning the credentials in educational leadership in record numbers now.

An interesting dimension of preparedness advice, however, extended well beyond the traditional forms of qualifications to encompass more subtle, psychological aspects of readiness and political awareness which at the time of the study was a dimension of career preparation very common to men, but which women often either ignored or denied its importance. Women aspiring to leadership positions today are also much more aware and respectful of importance of the *political contexts* of school leadership and career development.

While the issue of preparedness with credentials and political awareness is no longer as relevant, the advice is fundamental still in pursuing careers in educational leadership. I am pleased to say, that the survey respondents' sage advice below is much more commonly practiced by today's education career woman:

Find out who is in power and is most influential in making promotions, then make sure that person knows you and your accomplishments.

Know the power bases in the organization and in the community.

Get the right people to know you and for the right reasons.

Put yourself in a system that will give women the opportunity to advance.

These women executives often mentioned the importance of taking the initiative and volunteering for jobs that would develop aspirants' skills and abilities for leadership. This is certainly no less important now than it was then. Volunteer efforts are a valuable way to learn leadership skills, demonstrate initiative, and enhance a vita. Oftentimes, the voluntary leadership experiences are the most powerful evidences a young or emerging administrative candidate has to offer prospective employers.

The Balancing Act

In this section on preparedness lies yet another, and perhaps the most important and *currently relevant* pieces of advice gleaned from the study: the many cautions voiced by the survey respondents that ring so true still today about being prepared to deal with the *consequences* of pursuing an administrative career...consequences that even today are often different from the male experience:

Consider the impact on personal goals.

Women can do anything they want to do providing they are willing to pay the costs.

Be aware of the challenges and time demands.

Be prepared to take on extra responsibilities and longer hours.

Know what's at stake, the high costs and the consequences.

The toughest and most critical barrier posed by the consequences that these women identified to their career climb was the tricky business of trying to balance responsibilities of family and career. "Being prepared" for these women included developing strong personal support systems and realizing early on the complexity of the problems an executive career presents for most women—professionally and personally. These respondents reinforced former research that persists in the literature on women's careers into the new millennium: a woman—more so than most men—must not only be qualified with credentials, but must also be tough-minded and persistent, and aware and prepared for the stiff demands of the job and the toll it can take on a family.

Work Hard. Not surprisingly, "Work hard and be qualified" were often repeated side by side in the survey responses as base-line expectations to administrative aspirants. Anyone interested in leadership in today's schools should anticipate hard work, of course. But for women, this advice meant needing to work harder than her male counterpart. Unfortunately, the 1993 study's women executives, similar to those in the eighties, knew that women were still having to prove their worth (as a gender) in roles which continued to be sanctioned by the culture of the organization and by society as more appropriately filled by males. Despite a track record of outstanding performance from pioneer women in educational administration from the 1980s, the best advice from the nineties' women leaders in education included the following remarks:

Excel in your work.

I made sure that I knew more and produced more!

Do whatever you do well; don't be afraid to do more and to take on more responsibility.

Women can lead just as well as men, but they must work much harder to get to the same level.

Do the best job possible and respect will come.

Be the best you can be.

Prove your worth! Men don't always need to do this; just being a male is sufficient!!

While not only working hard, but excelling on the job was clearly perceived as a "must" to advance in this profession, not one of these successful women administrators indicated that hard work alone was sufficient to achieve top-level positions in education

for women. The "hard work" advice was always coupled with other, more strategic suggestions.

Even into the 21st century, this advice remains relevant and probably will be for many years to come. Until the disparities between the expectations on the job for men and women are obliterated, or at least more blurred than they continue to be, a woman will need to understand and deal with the possibility of having her performance scrutinized and judged more stringently than her male peers in most leadership positions in this country.

Persevere. In various forms, many of the study's women administrators emphasized the important role of perseverance in pursuing administrative career goals. It was obvious from the comments made that these women were no shrinking violets. They were not easily discouraged and met obstacles with determination and optimism. Advice was frequently given similar to the following quotes from survey respondents:

Be persistent!

Do not give up! Keep pushing for the position **you'd** like to have.

Be strong and independent.

Be firm, strong, and fair.

The Importance of Mobility

Several of the respondents mentioned the likelihood of having to relocate in order to achieve administrative career goals. One wrote, "Be willing to relocate, at least initially." And another offered, "Being place-bound limited many women who came to me for advice." Still another, a high school principal, wrote, "I changed jobs often to move up."

Being persistent for many of these female executives clearly meant not being immobilized by geographic boundaries or by failures. These women accepted adversity as a necessary part of striving for and attaining their career goals; however, strategic and selective persistence was frequently implied. In other words, don't bloody your brow trying to break through a brick wall when you can get to the other side in a less painful, more effective way. Choose your battles carefully. Learn to be strategic!

This piece of the nineties study's advice is timeless and applicable to anyone with worthwhile goals and an achievement orientation. Without perseverance, no one can expect to be successful in preparing for, acquiring, or staying for long in leadership positions in today's complex world of education. Successful women educational leaders in the nineties expected to have to work hard and persevere to overcome adversities that they at least suspected, even if they did not fully understand, came with aspiring to jobs that were not usually filled by women. Today's leadership aspirants, especially the women, are more aware and conscious of the realities of challenges that today's

leadership positions present. Women now are more likely to understand and be better prepared than their nineties' predecessors to manage additional challenges on the job caused by discrimination hurdles that—although less explicit now—continue to be a stubborn reality in many organizations.

Mobility issues remain relevant, but at least women now are more aware of this fact and often negotiate with their spouses to decide together what is best for the family when faced with career issues of both partners. It is no longer unusual to find a family that has moved for the mother's career advancement, with the father's career taking a back seat to hers. In fact, in the last couple of years since the economic downturn and the dramatic increase in unemployment in the U.S., role reversal of responsibilities with regard to domestic duties and employment has been widespread in this nation.

Many families are experiencing for the first time having the “head of the household” and major wage earner to be mom, not dad. Situations where the husband lose their jobs and the working wife does not, or the female home-maker has been forced to look for work outside the home or in some cases is able to find a more lucrative job than her husband so she becomes the bread-winner while he tends to the children and runs the house are decidedly more common now than in the nineties. I am optimistic about the long-term effect of the economic depression the U.S. has been experiencing for the last several years. I suspect

it may have a silver lining with regard to women's overall status in the workplace in this country. I believe it could possibly do more to facilitate women's progress including their status in leadership positions, than any phenomenon since Rosie-the-Riveter emerged from World War I and II or the Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964. Necessity and hard times are often the mothers of invention . . . and the needed catalyst for change! The roles have frequently been reversed in the last three years because of financial necessity in families throughout this country; and while there are few of us who escaped the negative impact of the troubled economy, it clearly is not without some benefit. One such positive outcome just may be that it inadvertently weakened the stubborn toe-hold of stereotypes that branded women as “bottle washers” and men as “bread winners.” This prospect helps diminish the pain of what the economy has done to my own meager retirement funds.

Practice Good People Skills. Obviously, any administrator's success—and especially in educational leadership—is dependent to a great degree on how well she gets along and works with people. This advice is timeless. Suggestions regarding interpersonal skills from the surveys remain sound advice for anyone pursuing an administrative career:

Listen and show genuine interest in the concerns of others.

Be patient; be fair.

Be ready to work with others and adapt to different personalities.

Learn how to communicate with others, staff members, administrators, parents, and community.

Develop excellent interpersonal skills and have enthusiasm.

Encourage others, male and female.

Back in the 1970s, researcher Catherine Marshall, using interview data collected from female executives in education at that time, explored how administrative women must often adapt their behaviors to make people feel comfortable with their level of power in male-dominated, stereotyped roles (Ortiz and Marshall 1985). Twenty years later, similar advice was still given by the nineties women leaders of our study who warned female aspirants about coming on too strong and thereby alienating people, especially males:

People will be intimidated by you. You must put them at ease.

Remember, society must learn to accept you.

There are a great many people who will not accept the leadership of a woman.

It was as though women were being ask to “remain humble” and “walk on eggshells” in the workplace. But that was the reality of what it took to be successful in what clearly at that time was a “man’s world.” The results of our study indicated, though, that some progress since Marshall’s study had indeed been made. The nineties’ women leaders seemed to be suggesting that women be more bold and willing to be themselves in the role...a suggestion that Marshall’s study did not reveal. Unlike the 1970s study, our study’s respondents gave advice that suggested less modification of one's natural style with comments such as the following:

Women need to become more comfortable in the role [as administrator] and realize they can be **themselves** and be leaders rather than adopt a set of male-stereotyped behavior.

Keep your sense of self.

Don't try to be "an old boy."

Catherine Marshall also deduced from her 1970's study that women learn to use humor as a way of making men feel comfortable with their executive power (Ortiz and Marshall 1988). The 90's female executives also gave ample regard to keeping a good sense of humor and not taking oneself too seriously to succeed best with people of both genders:

Remember to laugh.

Don't whine.

Don't sweat the small stuff.

Be serious, be professional, but keep your sense of humor.

Humor and a good-natured personality remain powerful, positive assets in advancing careers in leadership for both women and men, but women may need more of it to succeed even in today's "enlightened" new millennium

Develop and Maintain Strong Support Systems. Respondents indicated that both women and men may serve as administrative mentors for women seeking administrative positions in education, especially since there were so few women in leadership roles at that time to serve as mentors. They also frequently stated that support for their efforts was needed not only in the professional arena, but in their personal lives as well. These women were sensitive to the fact that their desires to advance professionally were out of the ordinary in traditional terms, and that an integral part of their success was having support from their families or other close, personal relationships.

Characteristic to the nurturing dispositions of most women was the general advice not only to find a mentor for personal guidance and assistance, but also to be a mentor for other women. There seemed to be an underlying tone that if women are to be successful both individually and as a whole, then they must strive to help each other. Although there has been some progress toward women's equity, the advancement has been slow and painful with numerous steps backward. This may be because women are generally less combative than men and would prefer that their worth and value in the marketplace be recognized for its merit as opposed to being accepted reluctantly through quota compliance and/or legislation.

The 1993 women in the survey responded to the need for networking and mentoring in the following ways:

...we must first support other women who have high aspirations for the top positions.

Help other women, even those who may be your competition.

Be a nurturer and supporter of others.

Establish both professional and personal support systems.

Marry someone who can handle your success.

Maintaining strong, supportive personal relationships and support systems—marriage, family are absolutely essential.

Tend to your personal relationships as astutely as you do your professional ones.

Don't go it alone anymore than you'd walk through Central Park at night.

Network, not just for job advancement, but also to learn, to share, and to maintain professional friends.

Select organizations that have a history of mentoring women for positions of power.

The respondents indicated that establishing networks was important within one's immediate work environment, as well as through professional organizations. Some general areas of advice with regard to support systems emerged overall. First, survey respondents encouraged others aspiring to be administrators to find mentors to assist them along their paths to the top. Second, they entreated women in administrative positions to become active members of networks that support women. Third, they emphasized the need for both personal as well as professional support as key factors in their success as administrators. Fourth and last, they suggested that all women should nurture and support other women for the betterment of all concerned.

Even though women have made progress in this area, their networking and mentoring on the job remains less evident than that of males. Current literature and research on mentoring still indicates that women are often not supportive of other women in the workplace, and are more likely to prefer having male supervisors over female supervisors. I was once told by a black male student who was a local principal that although ethnic discrimination clearly existed in the district and state, black men and women were in his opinion much more likely to advance in the leadership hierarchy in the area than were white females who were, in his opinion, the most discriminated of all in pursuing administration careers in Mississippi in the early nineties.

Mentoring and networking continue to be powerful dimensions of advancing one's career, regardless of race or gender. It seems ironic that the gender known as the "nurturer" of others, seems less capable or unwilling to reach out to each other and network, mentor, and seek mentors as naturally and eagerly as their male constituents.

Uphold and Protect Your Personal Integrity. Repeatedly, the women in the study stressed the significance of maintaining personal integrity (i.e., being honest, down-to-earth, principled, respectful, fair-minded, courageous, and forthright) while aspiring to and functioning in high-level administration. This category of advice was one of the most often mentioned by the nineties women leaders from our study as illustrated by the following comments:

Be honest.

Maintain personal ethics and values—nothing is worth losing them.

Being oneself, modeling what one values, and having the courage and confidence to follow one's value system are critical components to survival in the quest and attainment of top leadership positions.

Work to maintain calm, trusting relationships.

Never compromise your principles.

Show love.

Accept responsibility for self.

Set personal goals.

Know your professional ethics and maintain them.

Be firm, strong and fair.

Be an example for peers.

...have a breadth to you.

Remember, be yourself, not what others think you ought to or should be.

Be able to stand up against diversity.

Don't expect special treatment; expect to pull your own weight.

Know what you stand for so that decisions come quickly and with consistency and fairness.

Much of the advice in this section encouraged women to be their own, unique individual, to clarify their values and live them, as well as to respect the values of others. There was a certain sense of idealism expressed by the nineties' women leaders that challenged women in administration to model the best of the best . . . perhaps to prove that women could not only do the job, but could indeed excel in leadership positions. This advice presents a dichotomy of suggestions that bespeak strength and softness at the same time. The female leader is advised to demonstrate strength and determination, yet be human and responsive to others.

No less is expected of women leaders today. Women today should be more assured of their abilities based on better credentialing, more opportunities to have had leadership experiences, and on their predecessors' accomplishments, but many of today's female leaders continue to feel that more is expected of them than of their male counterparts who often are paid better. It is really discouraging to see how much damage only one indiscriminate, incompetent, or even mediocre female administrator in a high profile position can do to set back women's progress despite the outstanding performances of countless other women in similar positions in an organization or region. Most women leaders today are usually very well aware that the negative impact of any failure or poor performance on the job (or in their personal lives) may be blown way out of proportion and extend well beyond themselves to the "female gender" as a whole. A well-known case in point, if President Bill Clinton had been *Jill* Clinton, and the intern had been *Jonathan* rather than Monica, would consequences of their Oval Office trysts been viewed and treated the same? And what would the impact of Jill's conduct in the White House have had on her, her family, future female presidential candidates, and her political party?

Believe in Yourself and Go for it! During the nineties, many women found themselves well-suited to the leadership style that was emerging as the most effective for the necessary changes that must occur in educational reform initiatives that had the schools turned upside down looking for ways to improve. The nineties was indeed a decade poised for women to move into leadership positions in education. Schools and organizations across the country were calling for more integrative, collaborative style leadership—the skills generally ascribed to and practiced by women. In giving advice, our respondents contributed suggestions that directed women to focus on believing in themselves and boosting their self-esteem so that they would choose to accept the challenges of pursuing leadership positions, even though they would likely face more hurdles than their male peers seeking these positions. The following are some of the comments they made that remain relevant today:

Believe in yourself.
Never compromise your principles.
Dream high dreams.
Think positively; create an atmosphere of success.
Present yourself well—smile; use eye contact.
...hold your head high.
Have a positive attitude and exhibit enthusiasm.

On Being Courageous

Time and time again respondents simply stated "go for it" as their advice to women aspiring to become educational administrators. These women expressed repeatedly the belief that everything is possible, just "do it."

Needless to say, it took a great deal of courage for a woman to step forward in the male-dominated world of educational administration in the nineties and prove herself, much less take credit for it. Respondents indicated that women must work harder and longer than their male counterparts to achieve the recognition and respect that they merit for jobs well done. To encourage women aspiring to become educational administrators, survey respondents replied:

Remember it's up to you—decide what you want and then strive for it.
Be a risk taker.
Keep trying, but mostly, do whatever you do well, don't be afraid to do more and to take on more responsibility.
It's a complex playing field, not for the faint hearted.
GO FOR IT.
Be willing to take risks.
...be ahead of the trends.

If you stumble or fall on hard times, pick yourself up and carry on—don't give up.

Courage and integrity are hallmarks of real leaders.

Be open to new opportunities, challenges and experiences.

Dare to be different.

Dare to be great!

The nineties' woman who aspired to the top positions professionally had to generate courage from within, defy the status quo, believe in herself and work diligently toward focused goals in order to move into administrative leadership in education. Thanks to these pioneer women of the past, today's women generally have far more confidence about pursuing leadership careers. That is not to say that the road is all paved now for women aspiring to leadership or that their gender is no longer an issue in securing and succeeding in 21st century leadership positions. However, the hurdles are usually not as high, as many, or as explicit now—although subtle forms of discrimination can be harder to handle and even more insidious than blatant bias. Still, today's young women have the benefit that the nineties' women were less privy to: ample role models of successful women in varied leadership roles whose outstanding achievement and courage give hope, support, and example for younger generations of both men and women to emulate in advancing their career goals for leadership positions in education.

The Evolution of Issues Related to Leadership and Gender

As a part of the 1993 study, an analysis was made of the evolution of the issues pertaining to educational leadership and gender that included four major shifts in the issues over the past thirty years (Gupton and Slick 1996):

1. A shift from women's lack of aspiration for administrative positions to their need for better support systems
2. A shift from women's lack of necessary qualifications and leadership ability to a greater concern about the quality of their preparation and recognition of their leadership talents
3. A shift from focusing solely on too few women acquiring positions in educational administration expanding to include on-the-job maintenance and retention issues
4. The ultimate shift - from access to equity

How relevant are these issues today? Although the issues have morphed some in the past fifteen years, most of them deserve attention even yet, despite the progress that has been made for women in educational leadership careers. More women are in positions of administration in education today. Women are seeking and acquiring credentials to qualify them best for these positions in record numbers, outnumbering the males. They no longer feel marginalized as

students of leadership as they once did; the preparation is better and more sensitive to issues of diversity and gender unlike the quality of leadership preparation when I was a student back in the 1970s in classes where males, white males, dominated the classrooms and curriculum. There is much wider acceptance of women's leadership skill and greater appreciation of the kind of leadership that many women bring to the workplace. Still, gender inequities are far from a thing of the past. Men continue to earn more than women even when position, experience, education, and tenure are taken into account, especially in higher education, and women clearly lag disproportionately behind men in securing the plum positions in education.

The Complexity of the Most Lingering and Significant Issue

However, reasons for these gender disparities are not fully understood. Reasons vary and are many, but very often they are related to *family responsibilities*—a complex, but critical dimension of women's career advancement that has yet to be fully brought into the light and given the deliberation that it deserves and must have if true "equity" in the workplace is ever to emerge. Too often professional women are accused of not being as committed as men to career advancement when, in fact, it has less to do with a woman's lack of commitment or desire for a career and more to do with her wanting to have or needing to care for a family. Unfortunately, the two paths for many women are mutually exclusive choices. The way the system now works, most career women must choose. Something's got to give if women are to have and provide the best care for their children. That something, for many women who have the luxury of choosing, becomes the career which is back-burnered during child-bearing and raising years, and then perhaps resumed later. However, most women in such situations never manage to "catch up" with their male contemporaries who rarely have such set-backs in their careers. Thus, the issue that seems to me to be most in need of illumination, discussion, and action is how to keep these choices from being either-or, mutually exclusive choices for women. And how can the many career women who *must* work and care for children simultaneously, be better enabled to meet their obligations at work and at home without short-changing either? How can we as a nation help to take care of our most precious resources, our children, without penalizing our mothers who work?

Conclusion: Where To From Here

What then can be done to deal with the most problematic of today's issues regarding career women in education and all professions in this country: the issue of work and family, oftentimes referred to as women's "balancing act"? **We must work to change the conceptions of work and family that posit the two as either-or propositions.** Parenting should not automatically be thought of as necessarily posing a threat to a woman's career. For certain, progress has been made over the years with this conundrum. Unlike when I was a working mother in the 70s and 80s, many educational institutions now have **policies that allow time off**

for parenting—by men or women. But there is much more that must occur at the policy level to improve this situation. For example:

1. The delinquent institutions that do not have work-family policies should make developing such policies a high priority.
2. The institutions that already have such policies must be certain that they are “user-friendly” and truly beneficial to parenting. The best work-family policies offer multiple options to meet varied needs of both men and women with children, are highly visible and understood by employees, and are put into practice in a supportive fashion with the reassurance that employees can take advantage of them without fear of reprisal. Then, perhaps, more parents will take advantage of them since, to no one’s surprise, studies have found that work-family policies are quite under-used today.
3. One approach to making work-family policies more attractive and practical is the “integrative model” that offers not one, but a series of policies that may be used in a variety of combinations to meet the wide variance of employees’ parenting needs. Such a model would truly be more in sync with and sensitive to the needs of today’s working parent and would demonstrate more forcibly the high value that society—and education institutions as exemplars—should place on caring for children and the preservation of healthy families.

Finally, while better, more frequently applied policies to support working parents would be an obvious, significant form of institutional support in higher education as well as in PK-12 schools, there are other, more subtle forms of support systems for women that, if strengthened, would greatly improve career advancement for women. For example, **informal mentoring of the junior faculty by senior members** can greatly enhance the career tracks of the lower ranking faculty, where women in higher education are clustered. Kelly Ward and LisaWolf-Wendel’s article on this topic includes the suggestion that “Senior faculty can be mentors to junior colleagues who are raising young children, helping them learn about and make use of available policies” (2004, 4). They make another valid recommendation and one rarely discussed: “Junior colleagues are no less important. Fellow junior faculty members who begrudge their colleagues for using work-family policies create a negative climate for those combining work and family.”

More assertive strategies in the PK-12 school districts for selecting and mentoring of female teachers (at all levels, including primary and elementary) **who show leadership potential** by their supervisors, principals, and superintendents are needed to encourage more women teachers to move into administrative careers where they have been so poorly represented for so long. Very few administrators, proportionately, come from the ranks of veteran classroom teachers, the most obvious breeding ground for education’s leaders.

More flexible working arrangements should be developed and made available for career women *and* men to be able to have and care for children without having to fear being marginalized or “left behind” on the ladder of career ascent. A greater acceptance of and support for its employees’ parenting roles seem not only the right things for the education profession to champion, but could very well strengthen its fledgling leadership pool. In their response to the acclaimed administrator shortage in education, Marilyn Tallerico and Suzanne Tingley write, “We take an alternative view of the administrator shortage that plagues some districts and states. In fact, we argue that prospective leaders already exist in the educational system and the only thing needed is to remove the obstacles in the paths of these emerging leaders” (Tallerico and Tingley 2001, 1). Their suggestions include **revamping states’ administrative certification processes to eliminate discriminatory consequences** as well as **better recruiting of and incentives for experienced teachers’ entry into administrative leadership**.

In writing about the disparities in academe in treatment of women and men, Ernst Benjamin makes an important observation that is apparent throughout all levels of education: “Any comprehensive explanation of why women are more likely than men to accept less attractive professional opportunities must in the end recognize the social practices that differentiate the market situation of women and men” (1998, 3). Indisputably, women have always been and remain today more often constrained than men by child-rearing responsibilities and the impact of unaffordable or inadequate child care. Of all the hurdles facing women aspiring to positions of leadership in education, this one is certainly the most complex.

The Association of American Colleges and Universities’ 2009 *Measure of Equity Report* notes among its identified “serious concerns” that the “progress women have made has not been consistent across all groups of women” and that “national and institutional policies that address the negative impact of family obligations on career progress are spotty at best” (States News Service 2009, 2). The **most urgent current call to action in behalf of today’s education career woman—especially those aspiring to leadership positions who also want to have and care for a family (which happens to be the majority of young working women)—must be more deliberate, open-minded, creative explorations of ways to allow them the opportunity to do both without unfairly penalizing their careers**. Many of today’s policies and ways of thinking about work are obsolete and do not serve many of its employees (especially women) or the organization well anymore. Unfortunately, as Tallerico and Tingley admonish, “. . . [L]ongstanding tenure and retirement policies survive as sacred cows, particularly resistant to change in the near term” (2001, 5). Dismantling them will take courage and conviction that very few in policy-making positions in the profession have demonstrated with regard to this issue to date.

The challenges facing America’s schools at all levels have been significantly heightened by the economic crisis of the last two years. In such desperate times, unusual strides are often made in changing stubbornly persistent prejudices and obsolete practices. Perhaps America’s desperate need for unusually outstanding, dynamic leadership not only in education, but across all professions and in our government to see us through the black cloud of economic crisis may,

indeed, prove to have that silver lining: the facilitation of our society's evolution to a greater acceptance and appreciation of the leadership talents and abilities of women and minorities, many of whom—if given a chance—are capable, qualified, and eager to help with the hard work of leading us back through recovery to a better, more stabilized, less prejudiced state of the union. How sweet it would be to experience that in my lifetime.

Epilogue: If Not We, Then Who?

Who is better equipped to take a strong stand on the issue of childcare, write about it, talk about it, creatively help the organization of schools to deal with childcare issues in its own workplace as an example to the rest of the nation and world than today's cadre of women administrators in education? As more and more women—many of them parents as well—move into executive ranks in schools and districts where the decision-making power for the day-to-day operation of schools as organizations primarily rests, the opportunity increases for female educators' traditional nurturing role in society to be actualized at a different level, positively impacting significant numbers of children and their working parents and setting in motion models of support for families sorely missing in our society today. Let us rally round our children (our own and others) and their parents, be a force to be reckoned with on their behalf, and let our voices be heard throughout this nation while our hearts and accumulated wisdom guide the way (Gupton 1998).

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