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Women's Representation in School Administration: Recent Trends¹

Earlier studies have noted sex discrimination in professional interactions, graduate school enrollments, and hiring in school administration. The results of this study indicate some changes in these areas. There has been an increase in women's representation on the programs of a state, but not the national, meetings of administrators; an increase in women's representation in educational administration graduate programs; and an increase in women's representation in administrative jobs. However, women graduate students are more often in degree rather than credential programs, and women administrators are more often in low-level as opposed to high-level positions. Thus, while ideological and legal changes may have prompted some alterations in women's representation in recent years, sex segregation remains and may be very difficult to alter. But, if the changes noted in this paper result in the liberalization of hiring officials' attitudes and greater pressure from women for further change, sex segregation may lessen.

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A number of authors have noted both the absence of women in school administration and extensive sex segregation in the field. During the last decade the feminist movement has resurged—emphasizing the importance of women entering roles once held by men, and laws have passed calling for the end of sex discrimination in employment and affirmative actions to redress past offenses. Yet, some theorists suggest that sex inequalities are so deeply embedded in the society that these laws and regulations will be difficult to enforce and changing ideologies may have little effect on

behavior. In this article we examine recent data that indicate changes in sex discrimination and sex segregation in educational administration. In addition, current trends in employment and training for the profession and in the representation of the sexes at professional meetings are examined and the implications of these results are discussed.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In contrast to education as a whole, educational administration is dominated by men. In 1972-73 over 95% of all junior and senior high school principals, assistant and deputy superintendents, and superintendents were male.² Women administrators are usually found in staff positions such as coordinator or consultant where they do not supervise other adults.³ Although the decline may be somewhat overestimated,⁴ the percentage of elementary principals who are women appears to have dropped from about 50% a half-century ago to about 20% in the early 1970's.⁵ Data from the Los Angeles School District indicate that there has also been a decline in women's representation in other areas of educational administration.⁶

Explanations for this situation focus both on women's training and aspirations, and on the gatekeepers to the profession. It is suggested that women fail to aspire to administration and especially the most prestigious jobs. As would be expected, then, the majority of students in educational administration training programs have been men. Although many women educators have master's degrees, their degrees are usually in fields such as curriculum, instruction, or special education, rather than in administration. It is also suggested that those who hold the power to hire women do not believe women should be administrators and are reluctant to hire them,⁷ and women may be excluded from day-to-day professional interactions of male administrators and thus be hindered in advancing in the profession.⁸

The current feminist movement has encouraged women to aspire to higher paying occupations that have traditionally been held by men. In addition, laws and regulations now call for the end of sex discrimination and sex segregation, both in the labor force as a whole and in education in particular.⁹ On the one hand, if these ideological pleas and legal changes have been effective, one would expect to see alterations in the patterns described above. Women inspired by the feminist movement would more often aspire to administration and enter administrative graduate programs and apply for jobs. Under the pressure of new laws and feminist activists, gatekeepers would change past practices and hire more women and more often include them in professional interactions.

On the other hand, some authors have suggested that patterns of sex discrimination and sex segregation are deeply embedded in social

institutions and the psyches of individuals.¹⁰ As well, feminists point to the difficulties of enforcing anti-discrimination laws and to the widening wage gap between women and men as evidence of the recalcitrant nature of sex inequality. If patterns of sex discrimination and sex segregation are so deeply ingrained, one would expect relatively little change in the education profession in the last few years.

METHODOLOGY

In order to study recent changes in educational administration, the authors examined data regarding women's representation in graduate schools of educational administration, in professional meetings of school administrators, and in the profession. It was assumed that these data would indicate alterations in the potential pool of candidates, in interactions within the profession, and in those actually getting administrative jobs. As more women complete educational administration training programs they will become eligible for consideration for administrative jobs, thus removing one of the barriers to women's advancement.¹¹ Increased representation of women at professional meetings may indicate that women are being admitted more often into professional interactions. Their presence may also, of course, indicate only window-dressing or token attempts to quiet complaining feminists. Thus, the ultimate test of change is the hiring of women in the field.

To obtain data about the representation of women at professional meetings, the convention programs for the regular yearly meetings of a western state group of administrators and the national group of school administrators were examined from 1976 through 1979. The number of women and men on the program in each year was counted and recorded.

Data regarding the enrollment of women in graduate programs in educational administration were obtained in the summer of 1979 through a short questionnaire sent to all departments of educational administration in the states of Oregon, California, Washington, Idaho, and Colorado that were listed in *The College Bluebook*. The questionnaire asked for the number of women and men enrolled in each level of the school's program from 1974-75 through 1978-79 and also asked if any of a variety of recruitment strategies had been employed by the department to attract women students. Thirteen of the 23 schools returned the questionnaire. Respondents included both public and private institutions, and there was no bias toward a larger return rate from any one type of school. With the exception of Colorado, where data were returned from only one of four schools, one-half to two-thirds of the schools contacted in each state reported data. Only one of the responding schools, a small private one, indicated the data were unavailable. One school had in-

formation available only on admissions and not on enrollments, and that school is excluded from this analysis. Separate data on those enrolled only for certification were available from only five schools, including one in each state. Data about those enrolled for degrees were available for all eleven schools that provided usable data.

Data regarding the representation of women in administrative positions were obtained from the state departments of education in Oregon, Colorado, and California.¹² To control for regional differences in the way the data were aggregated and in titles of positions, the job assignments were grouped into categories of (1) superintendents and assistant superintendents, (2) principals and assistant principals, and (3) directors, supervisors, coordinators, and consultants.

To analyze changes in women's representation in the field, the proportion of women on the convention programs, in graduate schools, and in administrative jobs were examined in each of the years studied. To examine changes in sex segregation in graduate programs and jobs, the distribution of women among program levels and types of jobs was compared to that of men in the first and last years for which data were available. If sex segregation has declined, the men's and women's distributions should be more alike in the later years. To simplify the analyses, data for all the states were grouped together.¹³

It is important to note two limitations to these data. First, there is a regional bias. Because the data were originally gathered in an evaluation study to compare changes in one state with those in similar states, the data on the graduate programs and hiring come only from the west. Comparing these hiring data with estimated national data for 1976¹⁴ indicated that this data set may have somewhat fewer women superintendents and assistant or deputy superintendents, but slightly more women principals and assistant principals. In general, however, the patterns of sex segregation and discrimination found nationally also appear in the states in our sample. Certainly, future studies should compare the results reported here with those found in other areas.

Second, the possibility remains that the questionnaires were only returned by graduate programs that had unusual success in attracting women students. This may be especially true of Colorado, which had only a 25% return rate. To examine this possibility we compared the results for each state. Two findings argue against the possibility that the sample is extremely biased. In the first place, with respect to the results from Colorado, while the proportion of women enrolled in the Colorado school is higher than the proportions for Oregon and Washington, it is substantially lower than that for Idaho and approximately equal to the combined figure for schools from California. Thus, the results from Colorado are similar to those from the other states. In the second respect, the returns from Idaho

and Oregon were from the largest institutions in those states and the nonresponding schools trained only a small fraction of the administration students. Thus, the data obtained for those states probably resemble their respective populations more closely than the results for the other states. If it is assumed that the population figures for all of the states should be relatively close, the figures for Idaho and Oregon would provide expectations for the figures from the other states. Idaho had the highest proportion of women students (50.4% in 1978-79); Oregon had the lowest (24.5% in 1978-79). The other states all reported data that were midway between these figures. The authors suspect, then, that the relatively high nonreturn rate for the questionnaires results more from the difficulty of compiling the data sought than from any reluctance of schools to reveal their enrollment patterns. Nevertheless, further research should attempt to obtain a more representative report of graduate school enrollments.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results generally indicate a recent increase of women in educational administration, although sex segregation remains and will probably persist into the future.

Professional Meetings—Data regarding the percentage of women on the programs of the annual meetings of the organization of school administrators in a western state and the national organization of school administrators from 1976 through 1979 are reported in Table 1. In the years

Table 1

The Representation of Women on the Programs of the Annual Meetings of a Western State and the National Organization of School Administrators*

Organization	Year							
	1976		1977		1978		1979	
	Percent Women	Total N	Percent Women	Total N	Percent Women	Total N	Percent Women	Total N
State	19	74	19	78	24	74	32	76
National	12	1047	12	1006	18	842	14	813

* Missing Data: State—7 (2.3 percent)

National—54 (1.4 percent)

Missing cases were omitted from the total figures and percentages in the body of the table. Cases were classified as missing if the sex of the participant could not be determined.

studied, the proportion of women on the programs of the national meetings was less than the proportion at the state meetings. In addition, while the representation of women in the state meetings increased from less than a fifth to almost a third four years later, there was not as large a change in the national group. Notably enough, the state organization made a commitment in the summer of 1977 to work for greater sex equity in the profession. This analysis suggests that the commitment was honored. Because the percentage of women on the program in 1979 (32%) was greater than the percentage of women in the profession in the state in 1978-79 (14.5%), the inclusion of women may also represent an attempt to appease feminists. Yet, including competent women on the program and exposing them to men already in the profession can help counter beliefs that women cannot be good administrators and in this way promote their hiring in the future.

Graduate Programs—Data regarding the percentage of women and men in the graduate programs of educational administration from 1974-75 through 1978-79 are reported in Table 2 for the responding schools from five states. Data for the five states are aggregated and those for credential and degree (masters and doctoral) programs are presented separately. Both types of programs revealed increases in their representation of women over the years studied, although the increase in the credentialing programs was somewhat larger than that in the degree programs.

Even with the more rapid advance of women in the credential programs, the sex segregation in enrollments in 1974-75 appears in 1978-79. In both years, men are overrepresented in the credential rather than the degree programs. A study of the careers of graduates of one administration program in the west found that women degree recipients were likely to enter areas other than public school administration,¹⁵ such as research. Although such research positions may be prestigious, they may not involve the actual administration of educational programs and personnel, and may involve only the studying of such processes. It is not necessarily true that these researchers will eventually become practicing administrators. Thus, to enhance women's representation in school administration, it may be important for women to enter credential programs with the same frequency as men.

Only five schools reported using either formal or informal recruiting efforts such as sending recruiters to educator's meetings and classes, advertising in publications, and personal contacts. There was no tendency for these schools to have either a greater representation of women students or a greater rate of increase over the years, even though one school reported that their results were "good." One respondent noted that while recruiting had generally been on a personal and informal basis, the growth in women's representation in recent years has been "phenomenal." In general, these results appear to indicate a growing interest, at least among women in

Table 2

Representation of Women and Men in Degree and Credential Programs in Educational Administration in Five Western States, 1974-75 to 1978-79.*

Credential Programs	Year				
	1974-75	1975-76	1976-77	1977-78	1978-79
Men (%)	75.8	77.3	69.9	71.0	69.6
Women (%)	24.2	22.7	30.1	29.0	30.4
Total (N)**	393	528	785	925	943
Degree Programs					
Men (%)	61.4	62.5	60.0	54.6	56.5
Women (%)	38.6	37.5	40.0	45.4	43.5
Total (N)***	516	542	685	658	616
Total					
Men (%)	67.7	69.8	65.3	64.2	64.4
Women (%)	32.3	30.2	34.7	35.8	35.6
Total (N)	909	1070	1470	1583	1559

*States sampled were Oregon, Washington, Idaho, California, and Colorado. Degree programs included both masters and Ph.D. programs.

**The data for one school with a large enrollment did not include credentialing students admitted prior to 1974. Thus, the figures for the early years are an underestimate of the actual enrollment. In addition, if the trend toward a greater representation of women is a long-term one, beginning before 1974-75, the representation of women in 1974-75 is probably slightly over-estimated above (because earlier, more male-dominated cohorts are not included to balance off the figures) and the long-term gain over the five years is actually a conservative estimate.

***One school had data on enrollment in degree programs for only 1977-78 and 1978-79.

these western states, in careers in educational administration.

Hiring—The percentage of women who hold administrative jobs in the states investigated from 1973-74 through 1978-79 is presented in Table 3. It is clear that the proportion of administrators who are women has grown over the years. This increase appears for all the position categories studied, but it is somewhat larger for the principals and assistant principals, and supervisors, directors, coordinators, and consultants than for the superintendents and assistant or deputy superintendents.

Sex segregation within administration remained essentially the same in 1978-79 as it was in 1973-74. In both years, less than 2% of all the women administrators, but over 14% of the men administrators, were super-

Table 3

Representation of Women in Administrative Jobs in
Public Schools in Three Western States, 1973-74 through 1978-79

Year	Superintendents and Assistant Superintendents		Principals and Vice Principals		Coordinators, Consultants, Directors, and Supervisors		Total	
	Women (%)	Total N	Women (%)	Total N	Women (%)	Total N	Women (%)	Total N
	1973-74	1.7	2159	14.1	11,436	22.9	3830	14.5
1974-75	2.1	2226	12.0	11,745	24.9	4234	13.8	18,205
1975-76	2.1	2196	13.0	11,935	25.1	4236	14.5	18,367
1976-77	2.5	2225	16.1	11,985	27.2	4474	17.1	18,684
1977-78	2.2	2229	17.6	12,198	28.4	4627	18.4	19,054
1978-79	2.7	2230	18.6	12,010	31.2	4541	19.8	18,781

intendents or assistant superintendents. Over a third of the women, but only a fifth of the men, were in staff positions such as supervisor, director, coordinator, or consultant. (These data are not presented in a table.)

The representation of women in administrative jobs is probably the hardest of all the areas studied to change. Decisions are made each year on convention programs and admissions to graduate schools, and large changes can occur in one year in convention programs and within two to three years in graduate school enrollments. Changes are not made, however, in the occupants of a job until a retirement or resignation occurs, or a new job is created. Thus, it is probably not surprising that the proportion of women in administrative jobs is smaller than the proportion in graduate school or on convention programs.

A LOOK TO THE FUTURE

Studies of other occupations indicate that very few are without some type of sex segregation and sex discrimination. If jobs in a given area are not predominately held by men or women, there tends to be fairly extensive sex segregation *within* the field (positional segregation) with women holding some positions and responsibilities and men holding others.¹⁶ This suggests two possibilities other than equity for the future of educational administration. The profession could become a female profession by rapidly changing its sex composition. This has happened in medical related fields in several European countries.¹⁷ Perhaps, more likely, women may become common in educational administration, but positional sex segre-

gation will remain. Men will hold the more powerful line positions of superintendent and principal, and women will hold staff administrative positions at lower levels. Although the data from this analysis do not permit such a detailed analysis, a study of hiring patterns in Oregon in 1978 indicated that while women were hired for elementary principalships more often than would be expected given their representation in the pool of candidates, they were hired much less often as secondary principals.¹⁸ Thus, even within the broad categories used in our analysis there is probably further sex segregation. Most of the women principals and assistant principals probably work at the elementary level.

Still there is the possibility that equity will occur. As more women enter administration and demonstrate their competence, attitudes of gatekeepers that have prevented their advancement in the past may change, thereby allowing even more women to enter.¹⁹ The changes in the state professional meetings noted above may be a sign of such attitude change. In addition, as more women become trained for administrative posts and experienced in lower level positions, they may pressure superiors and school boards for advancement to higher positions, and they will eventually move up the career ladder. Finally, if the general climate in the society remains favorable towards women moving into nontraditional occupational areas, equity in administration may be more apt to become a reality.

SUMMARY

In the last decade the feminist movement has encouraged individual women to enter jobs traditionally held by men, and laws have been passed that call for the end of sex discrimination and sex segregation in occupations. While these ideological and legal changes may influence the extent of sex discrimination, some theorists suggest that patterns of sex inequality are so deeply embedded that laws and regulations may be subverted. The authors explored changes in school administration by looking at women's representation on the programs of professional meetings of school administrators, in graduate schools of educational administration, and in administrative jobs in five western states. The results indicate that there has been (1) an increase in women's representation on the programs of the state, but not the national, meetings of administrators; (2) an increase in women's representation in educational administration graduate programs, and (3) an increase in women's representation in administrative jobs. However, women graduate students are more often in degree than credential programs, and women administrators are more often in low-level than in high-level positions. Thus, while the ideological and legal changes may have prompted some alterations in recent years, sex

inequalities remain. These are especially apparent in the differential representation of women in various administrative positions, suggesting that sex segregation within a field may be very difficult to alter. But, if the changes noted in this paper result in the more liberal attitudes of hiring officials and greater pressure from women for further change, sex segregation may lessen.

NOTES

1. The authors wish to thank W. W. Charters, Jr., and Richard O. Carlson for their help with the early phases of the research reported in this article. Partial support for the work was provided by the Women's Educational Equity Act Program, U.S. Office of Education. Conclusions are those of the authors.
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9. P. Williams, "Laws Prohibiting Sex Discrimination in the Schools," in Stockard, *Sex Equity in Education*.
10. J. Stockard and M. Johnson, "The Social Origins of Male Dominance," *Sex Roles* 5 (1979): 199-218.
11. See especially Van Meir, "Sexual Discrimination," for a discussion of the impact of lack of training on women's advancement.

12. To insure that the comparisons reported below are valid, data gathered from the state of Washington for 1973-74 through 1976-77 were not included in this analysis. A discussion of the results with Washington included is in K. M. Kempner, "A Conceptual Framework for the Evaluation of Planned Social Change" (Doctoral dissertation, University of Oregon, 1979); and in J. Stockard, *Sex Equity in Educational Leadership: An Analysis of a Planned Social Change Project* (Newton, Mass.: Education Development Center, 1980). The trends reported here are also found with the Washington data.
13. A discussion of the results for each state is included in Kempner, "A Conceptual Framework;" and Stockard, *Sex Equity in Educational Leadership*.
14. B. Foster and J. Carpenter, *Statistics of Public Elementary and Secondary Day Schools* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1976), p. 20.
15. S. K. Edson, "Differential Experiences of Male and Female Aspirants for Public School Administration: A Closer Look at Perceptions in the Field," Paper presented to the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, April, 1979.
16. See J. Stockard and M. Johnson, *Sex Roles: Sex Inequality and Sex Role Development* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1980), p. 28-30, for a fuller discussion of this phenomenon.
17. M. Galenson, *Women and Work: An International Comparison* (Ithaca, New York: Publications Division, New York School of Industrial Relations, Cornell University, 1973); also, see Stockard and Johnson, *Sex Roles*, pp. 81-82.
18. W. W. Charters, Jr., personal communication, 1980.
19. See J. Stockard, "Public Prejudice Against Women Administrators: the Possibility of Change," *Educational Administration Quarterly* 15 (Fall 1980): 83-96, for a discussion of the association between attitudes and women's representation in educational administration.