

An issue of present personal and political concern in education is the under-representation of women in administrative positions within the public and separate school systems. Two usual explanations for this problem — discrimination against female applicants and failure of women to apply for such positions — are discussed. Particular reference is made to the implications of the “motivation to avoid success” syndrome and possible intervention programmes which might be implemented by school boards or teachers’ associations.

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## Women and School Administration

This article is intended to discuss some of the social and psychological difficulties faced by women with an interest in advancement to administrative positions in the teaching profession. In particular, it is concerned with the effects of sex-role definitions and motivation to avoid success on the application rates of female teachers for such positions and with possible remedial efforts by the school boards or the teachers’ associations concerned.

Over the last decade, the women’s liberation movement has again achieved the prominence which characterised it early in the 20th century. One result of this seeming rejuvenation has been the investigation of women’s roles in society by government commissions, both in Canada and the United States. The Royal Commission on the Status of Women, reporting in October, 1970, documented numerous examples of discrimination, pay differentials based on sex, and limitations on the professional opportunities offered to women. The Commission found that the range of occupational choice is much narrower for women than for men — primarily due to many occupations being sex-typed and relatively few being considered suitable for women. Even a well-qualified woman, the Commission suggested, would find it difficult to enter a field not traditionally regarded as female, a problem which has been compounded by the apparent preference of most employers for hiring males to fill jobs which involve decision-making.

Once a competent woman does enter the labour force, her advancement is usually limited to intermediate levels of her chosen profession. Teaching, the Commission states, is a good example of this problem:

In British Columbia, in 1967, of the 245 principals in one area, only 5 were women.

In Alberta in 1966, a man was 7.5 times more likely to become a principal than a woman, although he was 2.5 times as likely to have higher qualifications than a woman.<sup>1</sup>

Other provinces are represented in further examples of the same imbalance cited in the Commission report.

A more recent study of the deployment of women in positions of administrative responsibility in Alberta schools found that the percentage of women holding administrative positions is, in fact, declining. The same study found that:

Women accounted for 54 per cent of the total in-school personnel in the responding school districts, but held only 18 per cent of the total in-school administrative designations. Whereas 23 per cent of

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<sup>1</sup>F. Bird et al., *Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada* (Ottawa: Information Canada, 1970), p. 92.

male teachers held administrative responsibility, only 4 per cent of female teachers were similarly designated. The survey indicated that, in general, the more administrative responsibility attached to a position, the less the probability that the position would be held by a woman. The proportion of administrative positions held by women decreased from 5.5 per cent to 3.6 per cent between 1961-62 and 1970-71.

As a group, the women holding administrative positions had less formal education than male administrators but female applicants in 1971-72 possessed more education than male applicants. Women applied for less than 10 per cent of the available in-school administrative positions for the school year 1972-73. Of those women who did make such application, 70 per cent had four or more years of teacher education. Only 56 per cent of the male applicants satisfied this criterion. Less than 30 per cent of the women who applied had previous administrative experience and 47 per cent of the male applicants had previous experience in administration. Less than 9 per cent of all applicants for administrative positions were women.<sup>2</sup>

Tables 1 and 2 indicate the distribution of male and female teachers in Alberta for the years 1968-69, 1969-70, and 1970-71. Tables 3 and 4 contain the same information for the Calgary Public and the Calgary Separate School Systems for 1972-73, broken down into elementary and secondary divisions. Table 3 also contains figures descriptive of the application and acceptance rates of male and female teachers for the Public School System Leadership Potential Programme. Acceptance into this programme is intended to lead to future administrative appointments, but it is not the sole route to such appointments. Rather, all of the administrators and teachers with whom the programme was discussed viewed it as supplementary to the more traditional approach of nomination and selection of candidates through less specific methods. This latter procedure was considered as the more powerful and frequent one, and as something less than objective. No figures comparable to those for the Public School System Leadership Potential Programme could be obtained from the Calgary Separate School Board.

**Table 1<sup>1</sup> — Deployment of Female Teaching Force<sup>2</sup> In The Province of Alberta For School Years 1968-69, 1969-70, 1970-71**

Position	1968-69		1969-70		1970-71	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Teachers	10,816	93.4	11,287	93.4	11,372	94.1
Principals	207	1.8	169	1.4	155	1.3
Vice-Principals	265	2.3	278	2.3	273	2.3
Total female teaching force	11,579		12,065		12,089	

<sup>1</sup>Based on *The Alberta Teaching Force, September 1968*, Research Monograph No. 15 (June, 1969); *The Alberta Teaching Force, September, 1969* (May 1970), Supplement to Research Monograph No. 15; and *The Alberta Teaching Force, September, 1970* (June 1971), Supplement to Research Monograph No. 15.

<sup>2</sup>Table does not show the number and percentage of the female teaching force deployed in supervisory capacities outside the schools.

<sup>3</sup>M. Nixon and N. Hrynyk, "Women in School Administration," *Occasional Papers*, The Alberta Teachers Association, March, 1973, p. 1.

**Table 2<sup>1</sup> — Deployment of Male Teaching Force<sup>2</sup> In The Province of Alberta For School Years 1968-69, 1969-70, 1970-71**

Position	1968-69		1969-70		1970-71	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Teachers	5,183	69.1	5,572	69.5	6,034	70.9
Principals	986	12.9	994	12.4	1,020	12.0
Vice-Principals	825	11.0	866	10.8	850	9.9
Total male teaching force	7,500		8,017		8,511	

<sup>1</sup>Based on *The Alberta Teaching Force, September 1968*, Research Monograph No. 15 (June, 1969); *The Alberta Teaching Force, September, 1969* (May 1970), Supplement to Research Monograph No. 15; and *The Alberta Teaching Force, September, 1970* (June 1971), Supplement to Research Monograph No. 15.

<sup>2</sup>Table does not show the number and percentage of the male teaching force deployed in supervisory capacities outside the schools.

Tables 3 and 4 indicate that, while women made up 60% of the teaching population in both the Calgary Public and the Calgary Separate School Systems in the school year 1972-73, they held only 24 per cent and 15 per cent respectively of the administrative positions in these systems. The under-representation of women in administrative positions appears even more obvious when it is viewed in terms of distribution across elementary and secondary schools. In both school systems, Public and Separate, women constituted 80 per cent of the elementary school teaching force, yet they accounted for only 41 per cent of administrators in the Public Elementary Schools and only 28 per cent of administrators in the Separate Elementary Schools. In the case of the secondary schools, while women made up 42 per cent of the Public School System's secondary teaching staff, they represented only 8 per cent of its secondary school administrators. The Separate School System, although 34 per cent of its secondary teachers were female, had no female administrators at this level.

Thus, in the Calgary Public School System, where 30 per cent of male teachers (496 of 1645) held administrative positions, only 6.5 per cent of female teachers did so (160 of 2463); in the Separate School System, 17 per cent of male teachers held administrative positions (60 of 399), while two per cent of women did so (11 of 535) and these all at the elementary school level. Table 5 contains the distribution of administrative positions by sex across school and administrative level for the present school term, 1975-76.

It seems apparent that some sort of selection criteria are operating here which result in the under-representation of women in administrative positions in the School Systems. The possible explanations for this state of affairs are numerous.

One such explanation is that women in the teaching profession are subject to overt discrimination against them for administrative positions. There are some indications both for and against this possibility in the figures on the Leadership Potential Programme (Table 3). While only 18 of 1535 (1.2 per cent) females in the elementary division applied for the Programme, 8 (44 per cent) of those applying were accepted.

**Table 3**  
**Calgary Public School Board of Education**  
**Teacher Distribution by Sex (1972-73)**

Positions	Males	Females	Total
1. Teaching Staff:			
a. Elementary	382 ( 20%)	1535 ( 80%)	1917 (100%)
b. Jr./Sr. High	1263 ( 58%)	928 ( 42%)	2191 (100%)
Totals	1645 ( 40%)	2463 ( 60%)	4108 (100%)
2. Leadership Potential Programme			
a. Elementary			
Total staff	382 (100%)	1535 (100%)	1917 (100%)
# applied	42 ( 11%)	18 ( 1.2%)	60 ( 3.1%)
# accepted	16	8	
b. Jr./Sr. High			
Total staff	1263 (100%)	928 (100%)	2191 (100%)
# applied	106 ( 8%)	10 ( 1%)	116 ( 5.3%)
# accepted	25	1	
Totals Applying	148	28	176
3. Administrators			
a. Elementary	189 ( 59%)	132 ( 41%)	321 (100%)
b. Jr./Sr. High	307 ( 92%)	28 ( 8%)	335 (100%)
Totals	496 ( 76%)	160 ( 24%)	656 (100%)

For males, the comparable figures were 42 of 832 (11 per cent) applying and 16 of these (38 per cent) being accepted. In this instance, the small number of female administrators would seem to be directly related to the failure of sufficient numbers of women to apply. This is especially so since the acceptance rate is higher for females than for males. Further support for the failure of women to apply as an explanation

**Table 4**  
**Calgary Separate School Board**  
**Teacher Distribution by Sex (1973)\***

Position	Males	Females	Total
1. Teaching Staff:			
a. Elementary	77 ( 18%)	371 ( 82%)	448
b. Jr./Sr. High	322 ( 66%)	164 ( 34%)	486
Totals	399 ( 40%)	535 ( 60%)	934
2. Administrators:			
a. Elementary	28 ( 72%)	11 ( 28%)	39
b. Elem./Jr. High	26 (100%)	0	26
c. Junior High	7 (100%)	0	7
d. Senior High	8 (100%)	0	8
Totals	69 ( 85%)	11 ( 15%)	80

\*These figures include classroom teachers, special education personnel, and the staff of the Fine Arts Centre. They do not include education centre personnel (26 males, 14 females).

for their relative absence from administrative positions is found in the foregoing statement of Nixon and Hrynyk to the effect that women teachers in Alberta applied for less than 10 per cent of the available in-school administrative positions for the school year 1972-73.

The "failure-to-apply" argument alone, however, is less tenable for the secondary school data. Here, 10 of 928 females (or less than 1 per cent) applied for the Leadership Potential Programme and only 1 of these 10 applicants was accepted. For males, 106 of 1263 (or 8 per cent) applied and, of these 106 applicants, 25 (or 24 per cent) were accepted. These figures, while still indicative of the fact that women apply for administrative positions in very small numbers, may also support the allegation that they do so out of an awareness of the relatively small likelihood of their application meeting with success.

Other possible reasons for women's poor showing in obtaining administrative positions were suggested by a sample of school superintendents included in the Nixon and Hrynyk study. Of 87 school superintendents asked, 83 (95.4 per cent) responded to a question asking why few women achieve administrative positions. Five options were provided, including lack of ambition, lack of interest, lack of ability, lack

**Table 5**  
**Calgary Public School Board of Education**  
**Administrators Distributed by Sex, School Level, and**  
**Administrative Level for the School Year 1975-1976**

Position	Males	Females	Total
<b>Elementary</b>			
1. Principals	93 ( 82%)	20 ( 18%)	113 (100%)
2. Assistant Principals	50 ( 51%)	48 ( 49%)	98 (100%)
3. Vice-Principals	36 ( 63%)	21 ( 37%)	57 (100%)
4. Team Leaders	3 ( 22%)	11 ( 78%)	14 (100%)
Total	182 ( 64%)	100 ( 36%)	282 (100%)
<b>Junior High</b>			
1. Principals	50 (100%)	0	50 (100%)
2. Assistant Principals	46 (100%)	0	46 (100%)
3. Vice-Principals	25 ( 86%)	4 ( 14%)	29 (100%)
4. Team Leaders	7 ( 70%)	3 ( 30%)	10 (100%)
Total	128 ( 95%)	7 ( 5%)	10 (100%)
<b>Senior High</b>			
1. Principals	15 (100%)	0	15 (100%)
2. Assistant Principals	27 ( 93%)	2 ( 7%)	29 (100%)
3. Department Heads	107 ( 90%)	13 ( 10%)	120 (100%)
Total	149 ( 91%)	15 ( 9%)	164 (100%)
Administrative Total	459 ( 79%)	122 ( 21%)	581 (100%)

of authority, lack of training, and other. The number of choices was not restricted. Open-ended responses were also categorised and the survey results are shown in Table 6.

More than half of the superintendents who responded to the questionnaire gave as their opinion that few women achieved in-school administrative positions because women themselves lacked interest in achieving such appointments. The next most frequently cited reasons for few women achieving in-school administrative positions were: lack of ambition, traditional male role and domestic responsibilities conflict.<sup>3</sup>

Few superintendents appeared to believe that women teachers lacked either the necessary authority or ability for leadership, but felt that women simply did not *want* administrative positions.

**Table 6**  
**Opinions of Superintendents as to**  
**Why Few Women Achieve In-School Administrative Positions**

Response	Number of Times Chosen
Lack of ambition	12
Lack of interest	42
Lack of ability	1
Lack of authority	4
Lack of training	6
<hr/> <b>Summary of open-ended responses</b> <hr/>	
Traditional male role	11
Domestic responsibilities conflict	10
Women reluctant to boss women	2
Lack experience	1
Lack opportunity	1
Poor sickness record	1
No opinion	3

It seems reasonable to conclude that women's under-representation in administrative positions may be caused, in part, by prejudice against women as potential administrators. Any and all responses represented in Table 6 may be thought of as suppositional evidence — they represent the imaginings of male administrators and

<sup>3</sup>*Loc. cit.*

are not necessarily founded on attempts by these superintendents to interest capable women in administration. It often happens that we define certain categories of people in stereotypic ways and subsequently perceive them in a congruent fashion without ever feeling called upon to change our techniques of observation. It is interesting to compare the findings of another study<sup>4</sup> in which 226 female teachers were asked to suggest factors which they considered to be important in accounting for the small proportion of women in higher levels of educational administration. Six factors were suggested and subjects were encouraged to fill in alternate or additional factors. The resulting factors included all the same possibilities as were mentioned in the Nixon-Hrynyk study, but with considerably heavier emphasis, especially in the written-in responses, on the conflicting roles women in the professions are expected to fulfill and the unpleasant consequences attached to failing to be seen as adequately filling a rather narrowly defined feminine sex role. The prejudice against women as potential administrators apparently does not derive exclusively from the male establishment, but may be mediated by women's own attempts at establishing acceptable, sex-role-consistent, social selves.

This last observation brings us to the second explanation of women's failure to apply for administrative positions. Until qualified women apply for administrative positions in approximately the same proportions as men, it is difficult to substantiate charges that applications from women are discriminated against by those responsible for filling these positions. The question of why there is so much reluctance among well-qualified women to apply must, therefore, become the object of investigation.

The responses of a sample of women teachers in the Public and Separate Schools in Calgary<sup>5</sup> to this question indicate that sex-role definitions have a significant role to play in the problem. Throughout childhood and adult life, every individual encounters strong pressures to accept and act out the role specified for him or her by society. Females are trained to accept a societal definition of the female role and the attendant mythology which Lambert describes as a "partial theology" that "specifies the content of the role, provides a rationale that legitimises the existing state of affairs in terms of supposed characteristics of females and ties the role into dominant societal values."<sup>6</sup> The Royal Commission on the Status of Women suggests, further, that the educational process reinforces childhood learning of sex-roles by promoting occupational choices for female students which are in line with the existing sex-typing of occupations. Many women may then be assumed to have chosen teaching as a profession because it is a "realistic" female choice, a "traditionally female occupation." For a woman who is concerned with maintaining her own and others' perceptions of herself as feminine or as adequately fulfilling the female sex-role, the move into administrative areas may be perceived as undesirable. In addition, she may feel that males, whose sex-role definition contains quite different ascribed characteristics, are better suited to administrative or leadership positions than are women. Broverman et al. suggest that characteristics generally thought of as typically male are more often positively valued than are characteristics ascribed to women:

The positively valued masculine traits form a cluster of related behaviors which entail(s) competence, rationality and assertion; the positively valued feminine traits form a cluster which reflect(s) warmth and expressiveness.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup>K. V. Cairns, "Motivation to Avoid Success, Sex-Role Stereotyping, and Same-Sex Affiliation," unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, The University of Calgary, 1974.

<sup>5</sup>*Loc. cit.*

<sup>6</sup>R. D. Lambert, "Sex-Role Imagery in Children: Social Origins of Mind," *Studies of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada* (Ottawa: Information Canada, 1971, Number 1).

<sup>7</sup>I. K. Broverman, et al. "Sex-role Stereotypes: A Current Appraisal," *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 28, No. 2, 1972, p. 61.



enough to provide reassurance that, in administrative promotional procedures, male and female candidates will be considered on an equal basis. While this approach may serve to overcome feelings among low fear-of-success women that their applications will be subject to prejudicial procedures and to increase the frequency of their applications, it cannot be expected to result in any improvement for high fear-of-success women.

A further possibility, of course, is that changes in the traditional distribution of the work load associated with running a home and raising children are a necessary precondition to increasing applications from either group of women. These are changes which do not come easily — an excellent treatment of the resistance of males to equal participation in and responsibility for domestic chores and child-rearing may be found in Mainardi.<sup>11</sup> The dual roles expected to be filled by working women make concentration on professional advancement very difficult. However, in these days of lessening family size, earlier completion of child-rearing, and the increasing tendency for women to see marriage as an option rather than a necessity, the dual-role problem is becoming one which applies for a shorter period of time and to fewer women.

A first step toward salvaging some of the wasted talent represented by the numbers of high motive-to-avoid-success women might be the establishment of an in-service education programme designed specifically to encourage women to move toward administrative roles. Such a programme might contain some of the ingredients suggested by Fodor, who has described the conflict for these women as being one between

. . . having to decide whether to exhibit positive traits considered desirable for men and adults and have femininity questioned, or to behave in prescribed feminine manner and accept second class adult status.<sup>12</sup>

Women come into such a programme blaming themselves for being angry at the limitations of their roles, questioning whether they are feminine enough, and wondering whether they may, after all, be castrating females, "an image which haunts the modern woman and warns her to suppress her natural assertive strivings."<sup>13</sup>

The programme methods follow Kohlberg's<sup>14</sup> model for how roles are learned. A behavioural approach is used to

. . . challenge the morality of conforming to sex-role stereotypes and provide reinforcements so that prestige, competence or goodness can now be associated with new or expanded interests and role behavior. It could provide non-stereotypic female (models) for the (participant) to model, as well as enable the (participant) to experience approval for expanded role repertoires. Techniques such as desensitization, assertive training, role modeling, the sensitive use of positive reinforcement for behavior change seem suitable for women struggling with sex-role conflict between self-felt needs and the "stereotypic feminine" role conditioned by our culture.<sup>15</sup>

A further suggestion involves the participation of men, and especially the husbands of interested women, in the programme as "many men do indeed feel that a wife's achievement somehow takes something important from them . . . their masculine

<sup>11</sup>P. Mainardi, "The Politics of Housework," in R. Morgan (Ed.), *Sisterhood is Powerful* (New York: Random House, 1970).

<sup>12</sup>I. E. Fodor, "Sex-role Conflict and Symptom-Formation in Women: Can Behavior Therapy Help?" *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 1974, pp. 22-29.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>14</sup>L. A. Kohlberg, "A Cognitive-Developmental Analysis of Children's Sex-Role Concepts and Attitudes," in E. Maccoby (Ed.), *Development of Sex Differences* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1966), pp. 82-173.

<sup>15</sup>I. E. Fodor, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

sex-role, misdefined.”<sup>16</sup> Such a programme might be offered either by the teachers’ professional association, by the concerned school board, or by one of the women’s organizations within the teaching profession (e.g., Professional Opportunities for Women). If successful, it would represent another, less tradition-bound avenue of approach to administrative positions for women, and an opportunity for school boards to greatly increase the numbers of female applicants for those positions. Given such an application increase from qualified candidates, the question of *institutional* bias against women in administration might be more realistically assessed and combatted by women who have freed themselves of whatever internal ambivalence might presently inhibit their professional advancement.

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<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 24.