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ABSTRACT

This paper uses the seven principles of "stalking," the cultural wisdom for training Yaqui Indian warriors as described by Carlos Castenada, as a framework for organizing insights shared by successful women superintendents. "Stalking" is a metaphor for the process through which women seek success as superintendents. The research used a modified version of the reputational method (Hunter 1953) to locate 12 women superintendents from across the United States. Interviews were conducted with each superintendent and with two other administrators within each school district. In accordance with the seven principles of stalking, the administrators: (1) retained their gender identity; (2) set priorities to accommodate their work; (3) simplified their focus and demonstrated persistence; (4) were fearless risk-takers; (5) guarded their private selves; (6) used time efficiently; and (7) utilized collaborative power. The original principles for Yaqui warriors were: Choose the battleground; discard the unnecessary; aim for simplicity; fear nothing; retreat temporarily when faced with insurmountable odds; do not waste time; and never push oneself to the front. The paper also discusses how the interview process changed the researcher. (Contains 43 references.) (LMI)

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Women "Stalking"

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**DEVELOPING WOMEN LEADERS:  
THE ART OF "STALKING" THE SUPERINTENDENCY**

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RUNNING HEAD: Women "Stalking"

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**DEVELOPING WOMEN LEADERS:  
THE ART OF "STALKING" THE SUPERINTENDENCY**

*It is a case of choosing your wars carefully and staying out of battles  
(woman superintendent).*

A system of beliefs -- *the seven principles of stalking* -- gathered by Carlos Castaneda (1974, 1981, 1987, etc.) from the cultural wisdom for training Yaqui Indian warriors can serve as a useful framework to organize insights, another type of cultural wisdom, shared by successful women superintendents. These insights are particularly important for women either "stalking" (seeking) the position of superintendent of schools or women "stalking" further success while in the superintendency. And although the term *stalking* currently carries negative connotations, it is not meant to be negative within the context of Castaneda's work or within the context of this paper. Actually, Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary (1983, p. 1770) defines "stalk" to mean "to go softly or warily," "to walk in a sly or stealthy manner screened from view," or "approaching softly as from cover." As women move into positions most often filled by men, or even think about the possibility, they tend to do it "softly or warily." This use of the word, then is very appropriate and well within the meanings of this project.

Women do "stalk" (seek) success when placed in the position of superintendent of schools. However, women rarely are hired for the superintendency, so, they must first "stalk" the position itself. In fact, about ninety-three percent of the time the position is filled by a man (Arnez, 1981; Blount, 1993; Edson, 1988; Glass, 1992; Ortiz, 1982; Shakeshaft, 1989). Much of the literature related to this phenomenon focuses on barriers women face when seeking the position--barriers such as lack of support from networks/mentors, lack of role models, attitudes toward concepts of power, and family demands (Brunner, 1995; Edson, 1988; Marshall, 1984; Schmuck, 1975; Shakeshaft, 1989; Tyack & Hansot, 1982). From my perspective, however, the literature offers

little in the way of advice or guidance toward positive action for women aspiring to or currently practicing district-level administration.

It is the purpose of this paper to share what I have understood from the specific stories of successful women superintendents. There is suggestive evidence that women in general "see, value and know" their world differently than men (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986; Brunner, 1993; Edson, 1988; Lather, 1991; Ortiz, 1982; Sexton, 1976; Shakeshaft, 1989; etc.), therefore, there is value in learning from the voices of women. Simply, this paper--based on advice from women reputed to be successful superintendents--is written to inform women who are "stalking" the position of superintendent of schools or "stalking" greater success in their current roles as district-level administrators.

### Method of Study

This ethnography focuses specifically on women because problems result when studies of men in the superintendency assume that male behavior is appropriate for the understanding of all behavior (Shakeshaft, 1993, p. 94). It is the gender specific advice of women that I pursued in this study, but beyond that, I was interested in exemplary women who were considered by others to be superior, well-liked, successful, and supported in their practice. In order to develop a sample, I used a modified version of the *reputational method* (Hunter, 1953). Hunter used this method in his community power study of Atlanta. To determine the most influential members of the community, Hunter made lists of leaders occupying positions of prominence in civic organizations, business establishments, government, and persons prominent socially because of their wealth. After compiling lists, he asked persons who had lived in the community for some years and who had a knowledge of community affairs to select and rank order people on the lists in a way which identified the most influential from the point of view of their ability to lead others.

I modified Hunter's method to fit my needs. My original sample was a list of the women superintendents in the nation. Knowing that no one would know them all because there are so few

in any particular state or region, I asked people in the educational arena including professional organizations, national headhunters, university contacts, and people in the private sector to select women superintendents whom they perceived to be extraordinarily successful in their practice. In other words, I talked to people in the national network attached to superintendents of schools whom I felt could identify women who had "reputations" for excellence. I then shaped their lists into one that was practical given my time and logistical limitations.

The final list of superintendents included twelve women from all over the nation. They were in districts of all sizes (smallest -- 1,300 students; largest -- 127,000 students), had been in the positions for various lengths of time (one to eleven years), were all ages (most were over forty), and had a multitude of backgrounds. Their only commonality was that they had reputations for extremely successful performance in the position of superintendent of schools--something affirmed later in each district through interview triangulation. Thus, respondents were chosen for representative purposes.

I interviewed the twelve women superintendents plus two people (usually building-level and central office administrators) within each school district in order to triangulate data--a total of thirty-six interviewees. Each interview was at least an hour in length, and I interviewed every superintendent at least twice. The interview approach was non-standardized, a free-flowing and spontaneous movement guided by cues from the interviewee which enables the understanding of multiple realities and inner perspectives of the participants (Patton, 1980; Guba and Lincoln, 1981). In addition, I followed guidelines established by Lather (1991) for post-positivist inquiry. Those guidelines include: 1) interaction with self-disclosure on the part of the researcher -- I was open with the respondents about my own opinions and biases; 2) sequenced as suggested by respondents in order to facilitate collaboration -- this occurred within the schools districts as I asked those around the superintendents whom I should talk to next; 3) open to negotiation of meaning -- respondents were asked to interpret the meaning of common responses in addition to the interpretation of their own monologue; 4) conducted at least twice with each superintendent -- and as many as six times--in order that reciprocity occur. (By reciprocity, I mean that my response

to the interviews was discussed with each participant in order that data analysis be collaborative and mutually negotiated); 5) conducted with a researcher who was impacted by the knowledge of these guidelines and consequently changed so that the shape of the interviews also changed -- my own changing views became part of the discussions during the practice of reciprocity.

Finally, in order to discern the degree to which I influenced the interview process I asked another investigator to conduct three interviews with superintendents using my protocol. The answers given to the second investigator were strongly within the range of what I found when I conducted the interviews. Thus, I would suggest that I changed more during the interview process than the participants. In reflection, this was not a surprise, as I have in the past aspired unsuccessfully to the position of superintendent of schools, and it was during interviews that I understood areas in myself that may have potentially fed my failures. In addition, I found the women participants to be skilled interviewees. In their positions, interviews are common occurrences, and they were quite comfortable during the process. And although the topics of discussion were unusual, all of the respondents had given private thought to their answers long before their interviews with me. I was the learner as they shared their wisdom.

The constrained, lived experiences of the researcher and of the participants served as data for the study. Therefore, "[d]ata are used differently;" as Lather (1991, p. 150) states, "rather than to support an analysis, they are used demonstrably, performatively." Eisner (1988) supports this particular use of data when he shares his belief that "it is more important to understand what people experience than to focus simply on what they do" (p. x). This focus on the importance of experience in educational research is echoed in the works of Greene (1991), Connelly and Clandenin (1988), Miller (1992), Ayers (1992), and Schubert, (1992). Furthermore, although there is a current emphasis on the significance of teachers' experiences, very little work has been focused on administrators' experiences; particularly, according to Shakeshaft (1989), there are few individual accounts, biographies, histories, case studies, or ethnographies centered on women (p. 56). This study adds a relevant piece to existing knowledge in educational research by providing individual accounts of the lived experiences of women administrators.

### Data Analysis

Data analysis occurs several times in qualitative research. It is a continuous process which occurs at many levels for different reasons. Since collaboration with the respondents was one of the goals of the method used, the analysis of the data was a shared activity at as many levels as possible. Respondents were made aware of my opinions and biases at appropriate moments. Further, during reciprocity respondents were asked to analyze their own positions as well as the positions revealed in the collection of ideas and theories of the other participants. Suggestions from the respondents for further direction in data collection were followed.

This continuous collaborative process of analysis followed three steps. First, data analysis was done in the field as data were collected. At this level, analysis was done to create additional questions to be used in upcoming interviews. Second, data analysis was done to organize the data, to pull it together into a taxonomy or category. It was at this stage of analysis that Carlos Castaneda's work became important. Coincidentally, while I was in the second stage of data analysis, I was rereading one of Castaneda's books. It was while I was reading the *seven principles of stalking* that I discovered an uncanny parallel between the emerging themes in my data and the seven principles. At that time, I decided to use the principles as categories to organize the data.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, data analysis occurred during the writing process so that I could write what was seen and heard in a way that translated as clearly as possible to the reader (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to write a clear translation from the data gathered in interviews, I decided to use Castaneda's metaphor to help me share what I have come to know of women in the superintendency. I use metaphor because it is "[t]hrough transfer of meaning, [that] metaphors [can] broaden perspectives, enhance understanding and provide insight..." (Bredeson, 1988, p. 293). Further because, "[t]he essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 5), I believe that metaphor is a literary device of great value when describing the position of superintendent to women who have never been in the

position. It is also my aim to "broaden perspectives, enhance understanding and provide insight" for women wanting to know what it "takes" for a woman to be successful in the role of superintendent.

### The Use of Metaphor

The use of metaphor to describe thoughts, emotions, and experiences is neither new in literature nor in everyday speech. It is a commonly used linguistic structure which aids people when they are seeking to understand experiences within a particular environment. For through the use of metaphors large pieces of information can be transferred from one person to another in very few words. Metaphors are vivid, and they often are used to express an idea or understanding that cannot be adequately expressed by other means (Bredeson, 1988, p. 295). Or as Olderman (1995) offers, "Metaphors are the primary human tool for grasping the intangible" (p. 7).

Metaphor, from my perspective, can be particularly useful for expressing the thoughts, emotions, and experiences of women in the superintendency. Because the superintendency is an isolated job, the experience is a difficult one to describe to someone who has never had it. This difficulty is a barrier to those wishing to understand the role. It is important that the few people who really seek to understand the job succeed, as often they are the same people who aspire to fill the position.

The use of metaphor also appeals to me because I am reluctant to discount anyone's "truth," including my own, for I literally experience in my bones the push and shove of power as it resides/swells/diminishes at the "capillary level" (Foucault, 1980). I find, at my core, a place that truly feels postmodern as I let my "voice" wander in and out of the text--at times the text exerts its own power and subordinates me--and I am drawn to a literary style which is more "vivid," more able to express the inexpressible. My desire is to be a conduit and share experiential wisdom from women in the superintendency to others.

To be sure, as a conduit, I use my power as author when I choose one story over another, one metaphor over others, and further, use my experience and "lens" to translate what I have viewed and learned from women superintendents. Further, you as reader will bring your own interpretation/meaning to this text, adding yet another layer of messages. Finally, even with the use of metaphor I openly admit that my message will be no substitute for the experiences represented. As Lakoff and Johnson (1980) state it, "In actuality we feel that no metaphor can ever be comprehended or even adequately represented independently of its experiential basis" (p. 19). Going even further, Thomas Pynchon (1966) says, "Metaphor is a thrust at truth and a lie" (p. 129).

### The Metaphor of the Warrior Stalking, and Power

As a reader of the work of Carlos Castaneda, I recently have come to an understanding of an "unspoken" side of life that previously eluded my conscious mind. Through this understanding, I have learned to pay attention to my behavior and the behavior of others with the help of lenses borrowed from another culture. Castaneda is an anthropologist whose studies revolve around a Yaqui Indian from northern Mexico, don Juan Matus and a Mazatec Indian from central Mexico, don Genaro Flores. According to Castaneda in The Eagle's Gift (1981, p. 1), "Both of them [don Juan Matus and don Genaro Flores] were practitioners of an ancient knowledge, which in our time is commonly known as sorcery, or psychological science, but which in fact is a tradition of extremely self-disciplined practitioners and extremely sophisticated praxes." While studying these two Indians, Castaneda became an apprentice of their work, and in his books he shares his learning with his readers.

In The Power of Silence: Further Lessons of don Juan, Castaneda (1987) relates don Juan's scheme for teaching female and male warriors.<sup>2</sup> He reports that teachers school their apprentices toward three areas of expertise: the mastery of *awareness*, the mastery of *intent*, and the art of *stalking*. He continues that "[t]hese three areas of expertise are the three riddles [warriors]

encounter in their search for knowledge. The mastery of *awareness* is the riddle of the mind; it is the perplexity [warriors] experience when they recognize the astounding mystery and scope of awareness and perception. . . . The mastery of *intent* is the riddle of the spirit, or the paradox of the abstract--it is [warriors'] thoughts and actions projected beyond our human condition. . . . The art of *stalking* is the riddle of the heart; it is the puzzlement [warriors] feel upon becoming aware of two things: first that the world appears to us to be unalterably objective and factual, because of peculiarities of our awareness and perception; second, that if different peculiarities of perception come into play, the very things about the world that seem so unalterably objective and factual change" (pp. 14-15).

It is the definition of the *art of stalking* that, in my opinion, resonates clearly with the successful women in my study. In my experience, I found them to be women with "heart." Using Castaneda's metaphor, I believe they had worked through the "riddle of the heart." It was their love of children that caused them to do this work in the first place. They all professed a deep love of children, and a desire to do everything they could to better the lives and learning of students under their care. Their ethics reflected what Noddings (1984) refers to as an "ethic of care." This deep caring drove them to work through the "riddle of the heart"--to look past what the world has perceived to be factual; that is, that only men make superintendents, and to move their own perceptions into play in order that the "very things about the world that seem so unalterably objective and factual change." Their presence in the superintendency has tremendous potential to change a worldly perception which has in the past disallowed women the position. And, their caring practice and heartfelt perceptions while in the position, are suggestive changes for the way all people--men and women--perform while in the position of superintendent.

In The Eagle's Gift, Castaneda relates to women and men his lessons in becoming a warrior adept in the *art of stalking*. In his words, "The art of *stalking* was introduced to me as a set of procedures and attitudes that enabled one to get the best out of any conceivable situation" (p. 4). It is the *art of stalking* that I have chosen to use as a metaphor to translate procedures and attitudes which have enabled women, viewed by others as successful in their position, "to get the

best out of" the situation presented them while in the superintendency. This particular metaphor is compelling because it supplies the context for a tradition of rigorous practice which exemplifies, dignifies, and substantiates a previously overlooked body of knowledge or way of knowing--that is, women's ways of knowing the superintendency. While I recognize that the use of this literary device may be viewed as romantization, I believe it helpful as an organizational tool because it does not reduce this particular body of knowledge, but recognizes and resonates with its instinctual wisdom.

### Successful Women Superintendents: Impeccable Practice

*What matters is that a warrior be impeccable. . . . So I will say what matters to a warrior is arriving at the totality of oneself.*

*(Castaneda, 1974)*

It is my impression, from the research, that there are characteristics and practices common to women in the superintendency which allow them to be viewed as successful. During the interview process, participants identified characteristics which they believed necessary for a position of power. Many of these characteristics are discussed in the literature and, therefore, are common to more women than those interviewed (Cantor & Bernay, 1992; Edson, 1988; Epstein, 1970; Faludi, 1991; Frieze, Parsons, Johnson, Ruble, & Zellman, 1978; Hennig & Jardim, 1977; Kanter, 1977; Vianello & Siemienska, 1990).

First, women who are viewed positively in the position of superintendent have a strong sense of efficacy. These women believe that they can do anything they decide to do. Some women believe it is the influence of parents which created their strong sense of self. One woman recalled that her father always responded to her ideas and aspirations with the question, "Why not?"

Second, women in superintendencies have the strong support of one or more men when achieving their career goals. Many mention the support of fathers, husbands, professors, immediate supervisors, and men inside the system which hired them. It appears that men are needed to actively campaign in favor of gender diversity in particular situations in order that windows of opportunity open for women seeking the superintendency. One successful woman superintendent recalled the male superintendent preceding her who first encouraged her application for the position and later was her advocate during the process.

A. *I felt like Mark (pseudonym) was a supporter. He encouraged me to apply.*

Q. *Would you have applied if he hadn't suggested it?*

A. *Probably not. I have read that women do not apply until they are encouraged to by someone else, while men have a tendency to apply.*

Third, there are several personal traits which women in the superintendency typically exhibit. They are extremely bright, not openly ambitious, workaholics, retain their gender identity in a conservative normative sense, and are exceptionally skillful in their chosen career -- in fact, often more skillful than their male colleagues. Comments from people who work for and with the superintendents in this study reflect the talents of these women.

- *She is very organized with lots of qualifications.*
- *I call her "superwoman." She does things so quietly. She is so capable, always has time for people. She's a listener, collaborator, doer. She has vision and can see the potential that people have, unknown to themselves."*

- *I believe she is a very powerful individual, yet she does not intimidate people. She is powerful because she is able to establish relationships, because she is able to work with a variety of people-- so many people--because she has been able to accomplish a lot in our district.*
- *She resisted the temptation to take the front position and recognized that the win had to be in a plurality. She listens, collaborates, gets the best out of the people who are available to her.*

These professional characteristics, among others, are common to the women in my study and are clearly an important part of their impeccable practice. Specific personal characteristics are as vital to the success of women superintendents as professional ones. The following poem summarizes these personal characteristics precisely.

The conditions of a solitary bird are five:  
The first, that it flies to the highest point;  
the second, that it does not suffer for company,  
not even of its own kind;  
the third, that it aims its beak to the skies;  
the fourth, that it does not have a definite color;  
the fifth, that it sings very softly.

--San Juan de la Cruz, *Dichos de Luz y Amor*

I found that women in the position of superintendent of schools (in my study) are solitary -- the majority of their colleagues are men. Because so few women are superintendents, they must learn to live without other women around them and not suffer the loss. It is plain that they have worked to the highest point of the career ladder in public school administration, and in order to do

that they have aimed high throughout their lives. There is no definitive way to identify these successful women superintendents by looking; rather, their practice must be examined. Further, as individuals they are not flamboyant or showy. Instead, I found them humble, warm, friendly, gentle, courageous, stable, and positive about their lives and profession. In addition, there was a softness to their energy which was upheld with a resolute strength. Finally and foremost, they were dedicated to the care of and for children. I have reported my reactions to these women, at the risk of sounding sentimental, because I was not alone in my opinions. People who selected their names for my sample, and those around them whom I interviewed during the process of triangulation, described them in similar ways.

### The Seven Principles of *Stalking*

There are seven principles taught to warriors (female and male) learning the art of *stalking* which I found useful in conveying the major themes of my research on women in the superintendency. The following section of the paper lists the seven principles and how they serve as metaphors for the procedures and attitudes that enable women to be successful in their roles. My translation of these metaphors into organizational categories draws on interviews with women superintendents. The principles are all taken from Castaneda, 1981, pp. 278-291.

#### The First Principle

"The first principle of the art of *stalking* [original italics] is that warriors choose their battleground.... A warrior never goes into battle without knowing what the surroundings are" (p. 278).

Sitting in different offices with the women in my study, I noticed that they did not hide their feminine (in the classical sense) taste when furnishing and decorating their surroundings. Their offices were beautiful and tasteful, rather than institutional. There was a warm welcoming quality to their environments which was copied by others around them. These feminine

environments, I found, were symbolic of their professional and personal philosophy. One petite woman with buoyant energy offered:

*As a woman, I don't want my style to be like a man. I am not a man. I don't think that I would feel comfortable acting like one.*

In my research I found that women who experience success in the superintendency "choose their battleground" by retaining their gender identity while in the position. Even when confronted with the predominately male culture of the position, these women assert that it is necessary to be "a woman" in the way they work, do battle, and the way they present themselves to the world. This keeps their battleground familiar for them. They abide in their known realm by feminizing their surroundings in order to assist/protect themselves when threatened or uncomfortable. Women I interviewed expressed themselves on this topic in a variety of ways.

*I also think that women in leadership roles [her voice gets louder] must remember that they are women, and they got where they are because they are women. And, we shouldn't act like a man.*

A second woman shared:

*And so you know, I think it's also a sensitive thing to the people that you work with that you are simply cognizant of the fact that these are males that have mothers that were fine people. They respect women and they are open to working with, working for women, and you don't alienate that sensitivity by trying to act foreign to that. In other words, behave like a lady [woman].*

The Second Principle

"To discard everything that is unnecessary is the second principle of the art of *stalking*" (p. 278).

Successful women in the superintendency talk about how they focus their lives in myriad ways in order to accommodate their work. For example, the most common topic centered on difficulties faced in relationships. Several women superintendents told me, with sadness, about their marriages--in some cases the failures of marriages--in terms of the dilemma facing the men in their lives. They felt that because society expects men to be the major wage-earner in marriages, most men have difficulty allowing their "wives" to fill that role -- the "male ego" was a concern. Because of this difficulty and others, for some women, "to discard everything" meant to discard their husbands or partners -- men or women in their personal lives became "unnecessary." This particular topic is an emotional one for the women. They have a deep desire for relationships, and regret that our culture has not honored relationships in a way that works with and supports our professional lives. This is especially difficult for women because they are trained to take care of relationships and because the job of superintendent is so demanding on their time, it appears that they have to some degree given up this piece of socialization. One woman talked about the failure of her first marriage because of the inability of her husband to be supportive. At the time of the interview, she was in a second marriage and related the following:

*I think it is a real key issue whether the man in your life can support you in what you are doing. I am in a second marriage [The first failed due to the respondent's occupation] and it is an extremely difficult role for a man to follow when the woman is in the predominately achieving successful one. When you are sitting in the role of superintendent you have to have a male companion who has a very strong ego and is very comfortable with himself. His (her*

*current husband) comment was, "I can either sit at home and pout or I can be supportive of you." And, he chose to be supportive.*

Other women told me about how careful they are in the way they dress, the importance of a doctorate degree, their willingness to work eighty hour weeks, their connections to the power networks in the community, and the necessity of a male advocate when applying for a position. All of these concerns are viewed as survival skills by women superintendents. Anything that interferes with these skills (even in the superintendents' personal lives) must be discarded. These necessary skills are reflected in the literature on women in positions of power (Cantor & Bernay, 1992; Brunner, 1993; Edson, 1988; Epstein, 1970; Faludi, 1991; Frieze, Parsons, Johnson, Ruble, & Zellman, 1978; Hennig & Jardim, 1977; Kanter, 1977; Vanello & Siemienska, 1990). Because the skills necessary for survival are so important and time consuming, women in the superintendency shed or discard most other aspects of their lives. One superintendent, for example, talked about the difficulty of maintaining friendships when her professional life was so demanding. She talked about the patience of friends who continued to make contact when she did not have time to reciprocate.

*Although I don't have much time for friends, they are very patient in continuing to include me when it's very difficult for me to make those initiations. They continue to do that.*

### The Third Principle

"Aim at being simple. Apply all the concentration you have to decide whether or not to enter into battle, for any battle is a battle for one's life. . . . A warrior must be willing and ready to make his [her] last stand here and now. But not in a helter-skelter way" (p. 280).

Women in the superintendency talked about choosing their battles carefully, even from the beginning stages of securing a position. One woman talked about her attitude toward seeking jobs and staying in them once hired:

*When I go for something, I go for it whole heartedly. I've never applied for a job and not gotten it. I don't want that to happen. . . . Pick the battles you can win. Then when you win, the first thing you need to do as a new superintendent is pick a tough issue that you know you can win, and win it--so people see you as a winner. But you need to study and decide which things you can win!*

In addition, women in the superintendency have consciously altered or simplified their lives and even their understanding of their roles within our culture in order to remain successful in their positions. They have worked through the "riddle of the heart" to make conscious decisions about every aspect of their lives. This applies to "getting the job done" as well. There is nothing "helter-skelter" in the way they do business. Take for example, the way one woman makes certain that she is finally heard by her male colleagues.

*When I was first in administration, I found myself mainly in the "quiet persistence" category. All of my colleagues were the good ole boys type males. That was the way to get an entry -- was to attend the meetings. They had their style, and they weren't used to me [a woman]. They didn't know how to deal with me. So I found that what was most useful was to sit and listen. Then quietly persist in getting my point across. Then I would persist on through the meetings. For example, I would say, "We talked about doing so and so, and if we should...." And I would repeat what I wanted to*

*say -- persistently pursue -- what I thought was important. It is a case of choosing your wars carefully and staying out of battles [my emphasis].*

When women in the superintendency talk about the way they present ideas to peers and others, they reflect that they keep their agendas very short, saving the clout they have for only the things that really matter to them. Especially in the beginning stages of their work, they find themselves to be more silent than anything else because they realize that women are initially given less credibility than men. They save their energy for what they believe to be important issues.

Women also choose to be simple when it comes to issues involving their own dignity and integrity. They understand that their presence in what has been commonly called the "old boys' network" creates some discomfort for their male colleagues. Rather than allowing complexity to develop around issues of sexuality, they set the ground rules in a simple straight-forward way from the beginning. For example, one soft-spoken woman gently and graciously told this story:

*If you hold your own dignity and worth, things do change. For example, at the state organization of administrators, (another woman) and I were the only women -- and at the beginning of the conference everyone got up and introduced themselves in a way that made the name of their school as some 'dirty' name. At the end of the conference, (other woman) and I talked to the president and said that we didn't want to ruin anyone else's fun, but we thought that as an educational organization it was inappropriate to use that kind of language. When the next conference opened the president laid the ground rules. . . . Now when you go to those meeting, they are very professional. It was the good old boys group -- a lot of them*

*were comfortable with it but they needed someone to stand up and say something. We present our views with quiet persistence.*

#### The Fourth Principle

"Relax, abandon yourself, fear nothing" (p. 280).

Women superintendents share many reasons for their fearlessness and their ability to be risk-takers. Their sharing does not sound like bragging, at least not to me. Rather it sounds matter-of-fact, as if fearlessness is a common-place piece of their lives. Interestingly, they give credit to many outside forces they believe enabled them to become courageous people. As women told me:

*It comes back to whether you are willing to risk anything. . . . My father used to say, "Why not?" We'd say, "Could we do something?" And he'd say, "Let's give it a try." I never thought about gender as a reason I could or couldn't do something.*

*I am the oldest of four children and I always have believed in the impact of this father/daughter relationship. My father said you can do or be anything you want, and I mean I set my goals!*

One of the main reasons these women are risk-takers is they most often have a prominent male figure (usually their father) who taught them that they can do anything. They do not believe that the superintendency is "just" for men even though about ninety-three percent of the time it is.

Courage is a common characteristic of people who abandon self.

*Dad came home one day with a new tractor, and we all went out to see the new tractor. While we were out there, we turned around, and the house was on fire. My mother ran back to the house. In the house was my sister who was just a baby. Mother was burned severely getting my sister out of the house and was in the hospital for over three months. And when she came out of the hospital, I remember them saying that she would never play the piano and things like that again -- but she did you know. And there wasn't anything she couldn't do. If you look with courage and say here's the difficulty -- I always said that if you were a one-legged man -- you could hop -- you know. Courage is to know that few things in life are fatal.*

Courage is a character trait that comes from plural--fathers, mothers, grandfathers, bosses, mentors--sources for women in the superintendency.

Belief in God helps some women in the superintendency to relax and be themselves. Some put their trust and their lives in the hands of a being they believe to be much larger than themselves. It appears that even their placement in the position becomes a part of a larger deity's plan for their lives. As one respondent shared:

*I believe that I need to do the very best I can do right where I am, and the good Lord will let me know if I'm supposed to be somewhere else.*

### The Fifth Principle

"When faced with odds that cannot be dealt with, warriors retreat for a moment. They let their minds meander. They occupy their time with something else. Anything would do" (p. 281).

To say that anyone in the superintendency is faced with odds that cannot be dealt with--on a daily basis--is almost an understatement. To find a way and place to retreat, then, is critical for anyone in the position. Women in the superintendency find ways to retreat in the cracks and crevices of their busy lives by recognizing that their own private selves must remain extremely private. In fact, when sharing this part of their practice, the women appeared to be slightly uncomfortable. It was my sense that this aspect of themselves was almost too private to share. They are so accustomed to measuring their worth by their on-task behavior, that they seemed reluctant to admit that life held more than focused work. Once sharing the information, however, it was clear that this private space was intensely necessary for their own well-being, and, in fact, for their continued excellent performance in their positions. One women revealed the following:

*. . . [T]he private self is a totally different self. I mean you get a little schizophrenic. . . . I am very private with my private life, and so my husband and I love to go to a place where you can disappear into the woodwork, and you can, you know, just enjoy all of the things it has to offer, and, you know, enjoy those things and be your other private person, too.*

Another shared:

*You have to be a chameleon sometimes. It has nothing to do with being two-faced to people. It has to do with the private self, and what you're willing to kind of expose your true feelings, and risk the vulnerability of that kind of self-disclosure. And I won't. I'm very guarded about myself, as a person.*

The Sixth Principle

"Warriors compress time; even an instant counts. In a battle for your life, a second is an eternity; an eternity that may decide the outcome. Warriors aim at succeeding, therefore, they compress time. Warriors don't waste an instant" (p. 281).

Women in the superintendency are tediously organized. People around them are amazed at the vast number of tasks that they not only keep track of, but (also) accomplish. They often do more than one thing at once: talk on the telephone, make notes on a memo, and file things at the same time--a way of operating that has been their practice all of their lives. They report that they have always been extremely busy, and have ceaselessly accomplished far more than anyone else they know.

*During my senior year, I was the person who got the awards for participation in more activities than anyone else. I wanted to be a part of things. It never dawned on me that there wouldn't be enough hours in the day to do everything. . . . My mother knew I would not turn down anything.*

Another woman spoke of her discomfort when she felt she was wasting time:

*I want to be accomplishing something. I belong to a stock club, and we meet once a month to invest our stock. As soon as we get that done, I am ready to go. I am ready to do something else, but there are those who want to sit around and drink coffee and eat donuts the rest of the day. That gets on my nerves. I think -- I've got to get out of here, I am wasting my time. When you have worked all of your life like I have, even going to the beauty shop and having your*

*hair done -- sitting under the dryer -- I am thinking -- I am wasting my time! I think it goes back to my upbringing that I find very few times when I'm doing only one thing at a time. I remember when I was back in college I had my son sitting in my lap playing with a toy, and I was studying. While my husband, on the other hand, if he was studying he was studying. Everyone else had to be away from him. I still like some confusion around.*

### The Seventh Principle

"A *stalker* [original italics] never pushes him[her]self to the front" (p. 290).

This is probably the most important principle for women in the superintendency, and its importance is related to gender appropriate uses of power. Nancy Hartsock (1987) begins her discussion of power by associating gender with the definition of power. She asserts that power defined by white male intellectuals is dominance, strength, force, authority, and violence. Cantor and Bernay (1992) assert that unconscious practices and social norms support the perception that power is masculine. The women in this study, however, do not practice or define power as dominance, authority, etc. In fact, my earlier research (Brunner, 1995) has shown that "[w]omen who attain positions of power are most successful when they practice female [gender appropriate] approaches to power which stress collaboration, inclusion, and consensus-building--models based on the belief that one person is not more powerful than another" (p. 24). This is the case with all the women superintendents whose practices are reflected in this paper. They work using a collaborative, inclusive consensus-building model with their own voices heard in concert with others rather than in authority or dominance over others. This collaborative role is comfortable for them because they do not view themselves as powerful. They do not push themselves to the front. This "positioning" is evident in their narratives.

*I have the ability to organize people in a manner that achieves desired goals -- that manner being the ability to lead people to consensus. I bring together the people who will be affected by the decision and say, 'Here is the perceived problem -- is this really the problem?' You may find that it is not the real problem, so you come to consensus about what the real problem is. Then you discuss many solutions to come up with a solution which benefits the most people -- especially who are effected by it. It needs to be for the greatest good.*

Perceiving the self as separate from the idea of "power" appears to be necessary for a woman to be truly collaborative. It is more natural for one who views self as powerful to believe that other input is less important than one's own. Genuine collaboration occurs when all participants are considered as equals as much as is possible. "A stalker never pushes him[her]self to the front." This attitude and practice, which exemplifies the seventh principle, is reflected in the statements of two women superintendents. The first stated:

*It is difficult for me to say that I have power.*

The second woman struggled with the idea of her own power.

*I'm not particularly comfortable with being recognized as a powerful person. I suppose sometimes in some context it might be a little bit flattering but, I just prefer to stay lower key than that. I like to work behind the ranks. I like working behind the scenes.*

Applying the Seven Principles of Stalking

The results of applying the seven *principles of stalking* are reflected in the qualities of character that "warrior" women superintendents value.

"Applying these principles brings about three results.

••The first is that *stalkers* learn never to take themselves seriously; they learn to laugh at themselves" (p. 291).

It was clear to me when visiting with successful women superintendents that they laugh often. They were open, warm, and humorous. They often noted that they had learned not to take things personally. They told amusing anecdotes related to their being in a typically "male" role. In other words, they had learned to laugh at themselves.

*Well, once in a while I think the fact that you're a woman just sort of "pops" up. It could be from a comment that somebody else made, for instance, we have our little favorite joke we use around here. And it came out of a situation earlier this summer and it referred to a couple of "skirts" running the district. So now, we -- that's sort of an internal joke that, you know, maybe a tough decision gets made and I will quip, "Well, you've got to remember a 'skirt' made that decision," -- or something like that. [She laughs] So I think keeping a good sense of humor and being able to laugh at yourself a little bit in the situation sort of recognize, I am a woman and wear a skirt. . . .*

••"The second [result] is that *stalkers* learn to have endless patience. *Stalkers* are never in a hurry; they never fret" (p. 291).

As an example, successful women superintendents recognize that collaborative decision-making requires endless patience. They are committed to the process of shared decision-making and are aware of its demands. This process orientation with its necessary patience, needs to be reconciled with the ability to compress activity--principle six. Unfortunately, these two ideas appear to be in conflict with one another. It is a worthy exercise to push beyond the conflict to a place where they work well together. This is what the women have done. It is when they are simplifying (the third principle) their lives that they choose which tasks to compress and which to honor with patience. They first of all, know what tasks are most important to do -- this enables their patience. To make decisions without the input of others, they have found, is counter productive. Making decisions quickly and alone in areas of importance creates larger problems--which steal time later. As women told me:

*My guess is that people would view me as being stronger at consensus-building [as a decision-making style]. . . . I am a process person -- probably to a fault.*

Another shared:

*I spend a lot of time. . . some critical time. . . it was important--trying to get a sense of who the key players are, the stakeholders, and how things happen in the community.*

Women superintendents also report that they are willing to take the time to build relationships--to be responsive to the people in their lives. When I asked one women whether she found women more responsive than men, she replied:

*One-hundred per-cent more! I think men are very good at compartmentalizing what goes on in their lives. And in the way they run their jobs, and I think that they can say , 'OK, it's 5:30!' close the book, and I'm on my way out the door. And a woman will say, gee, if I do this now and get this done, then I can spend more time in classrooms, and I can get around and do things. . . . I think women look at not only the objective things but the affective things of what's going on in schools. When they're dealing with kids I think men are much more capable of separating, and I call it compartmentalizing what goes on in their lives, their family is one and the work is one, you know. I think for women, it all kind of melds together. [Admittedly, there are men that have trouble compartmentalizing, and who look at the "affective things of . . . school."]*

••"And the third (result) is that *stalkers* learn to have an endless capacity to improvise" (p. 291).

Women in the superintendency constantly rely on their ability to improvise--to make do with the materials at hand or to do things in a creative way.

*She calls me "Lemonade Mary (not actual first name used)" -- you know, someone who makes lemonade out of lemons.*

Women work in what many people consider a covert way--they improvise in certain settings in order to get things done in a way that is not directive, but collaborative, out of preference and necessity. One respondent shared her feelings about women in the superintendency as follows:

*Women can't be direc. ve or before long they are called bitches. So if women want to stay in power they have to find a way to circumvent [they improvise]by using a softer style.*

Women use this "softer style" to get things done in a less directive, more creative way. Because of negative reactions to boldly directive behavior in women, they improvise in order to insure needed action. One innovative woman stated:

*I apply a number of different strategies in terms of getting things done, and they tend to be related to how that person best needs to work in order to feel okay and successful -- and to what extent they are willing to share it. Now those risk takers who hide out, some of them are now willing [since she came to the district] to let other people come in and observe and they are headed off into a new thing now. . . . They're into , oh, WONDERFULLY [original emphasis] creative things that are just mind boggling.*

### **"Sudden Knowings": What I Learned "Stalking" Knowledge of the Superintendency**

Our work is to show we have been breathed upon--to show it, give it out, sing it out, to live out in the topside world what we have received through our sudden knowings from story, from body, from dreams and journeys of all sorts (Estes, 1993, p. 33).

I have been breathed upon in my conversations with women superintendents who have shared the stories of their dreams and journeys -- such that I have become aware of the skill and

finesse of these women in positions of power, as well as my own pride in being a woman. Although I have never been a superintendent of schools, I aspired to the position, therefore, my connection to these women through my research has personal implications. And I have changed as a result. I have changed in the way I view the world, and in turn, the way that I am in the world. As I have come to appreciate, it is the intensely emotional stories which transfix and change us-- which " . . . present the knife of insight, the flame of the passionate life, the breath to speak what one knows, [and] the courage to stand what one sees without looking away . . . " (Estes, 1993, p. 21).

I write to speak what I know -- what I have come to know as my "truth" -- and it is with the help of Castaneda (1981) that I have found the "courage to stand what [I] see without looking away." As a student of Castaneda's, I have applied the seven principles of *stalking* to my practice as a post-administrator, professor/researcher/writer. The three results of my using the seven principles have followed like those reflected above. First, I have learned to laugh at myself as a "post-modern wanna-be." As I have struggled to work within my idea of post-modernism, I constantly bump into my rigid constructions of self. My language is full of dualisms and omnipotent utterings, and, thus, betrays me in a shameless fashion. I must finally admit that I have been born and bred a positivist, and will probably never manage the divorce I seek. Thus, I laugh at my efforts as they tend to turn on me from time to time. It is in the laughter that I find forgiveness for myself.

Second, I am willing to wait for my "voice" to fully develop -- something that, I am now convinced, I cannot hurry. My voice has been silent for most of my life, and as with all growth processes, there is no way to hurry its maturity. My patience was deepened working with developing students as a teacher and a principal. It is time for me to turn that patience inward.

Finally, it is through the use of metaphor that I, as a female writer/ researcher, improvise in order to share my research in a softer style -- hopefully, one which is more intuitively inclusive. In doing so, I have not only joined the spirit of the women with whom I have worked, but also I have come to appreciate the possibilities of metaphor for illuminating the complicated problems we all

(women and men) face in leadership positions and, further, I embrace the promise that metaphors hold for eliminating some of the complexity accompanying the articulation -- oral and written -- of gender-related research.

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**Notes:**

1. Three steps of organizing the data were used: unitizing, categorizing, and relating. The purpose of unitizing is to identify and record essential information units. A unit is a single piece of information able to stand by itself: it is self-explanatory (Hosti, 1969, in Herzog; Skrtic, 1985). Coding was done in order that the item's content could be traced back to raw field or interview notes. Categorizing was done to bring those units relating to the same content together into a loose taxonomy. Units were physically separated on different 3x5 index cards and sorted into groups or categories of similar content. Relating was done after the units were categorized. Each category was analyzed in terms of its relationship to the seven principles of *stalking*. After analysis, data related to the seven categories were placed under appropriate headings used during the writing of the paper.
2. It is important to note that Castaneda's books refer to as many women apprenticed warriors as men.

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