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WOMEN OF POWER IN A MAN'S WORLD
CAREER PROFILES OF SUCCESSFUL WOMEN
IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

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ABSTRACT

There is now a considerable body of literature on women in education and the blocks that prevent them from entering the senior administrative positions in educational institutions. Much of this research has been primarily survey-based and between-group in nature. Too often in between-group research the women become 'deficit' in being compared to the men who are the 'norm'.

In studying the careers of successful women in educational administration this thesis aimed to present positive role models for women. It has concentrated on between-group analysis, to compare women with other women and attempted to determine how these women were able to overcome such 'barriers'. The data are a combination of both survey questionnaire and conversational non-hierarchical interviews. The women in this study have resisted stereotyping. They are in control of their lives, balancing home and career lives without detriment to either. They are committed to their institutions, families and communities. They have not taken absences from teaching to raise their children and rarely move to accompany their partners. Their partners, on the whole, move for them. They have no 'wives' to take the nurturing role in the home but their partners are completely supportive. They have little leisure, few holidays, and have continued study for further qualifications for their professional development. They are leaders in politics, the community or church, as well as at school.

They nearly all planned their careers, developed a knowledge of the career path and had training for political skills and speaking by holding executive positions in teachers' organizations. They avoided the 'feminine' roles in the school hierarchy.

They have shown tenacity in applying for promotion and have been willing to move to gain promotion. They show courage in taking risks, responding to change, making the hard decisions and being innovative. They perceive their isolation and are sometimes burdened by the responsibility of speaking for all women and of being seen as symbols to all women. A group of well-known male administrators recognized their capabilities and sponsored them for important national residential courses and promotion. Many belong to a network of supportive women colleagues. They have a clear vision of what their goals are, and use a caring and collaborative leadership style.

They, in turn, are empowering others, and above all, are preparing young people to face a future that is uncertain and unknown. These women are redefining the role for career women in New Zealand and are redefining leadership styles for leaders throughout the education system.

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