“Thank goodness you are a man!”: Troubling Gender and Principal Leadership in Elementary Schools

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education
Graduate Department of Social Justice Education
University of Toronto

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Abstract

This study identifies and critically examines gendered discourses of leadership amongst elementary school principals. Interviews with 15 female and male elementary school principals in the Greater Toronto Area were carried out as a means of discovering and revealing these gendered discourses. A discourse analysis of their responses is conducted. A feminist post-structuralist approach to analysis gives rise to a series of gendered discourses of principal leadership, revealing the manner in which these discourses act upon elementary principals. These discourses are divided into three areas: discourses of female principal leadership, discourses of male principal leadership and finally, discourses of reluctance and denial. The work of Michel Foucault is used to understand how dominant discourses work upon the subject through disciplinary power and governmentality. The revelation of these discourses provides opportunities to challenge them. This study illustrates the way these discourses work to both limit and, in some cases, legitimate the elementary principal depending on each principal’s gender. A process by which principals deny the influence of gender on their leadership, then accept and recognize its influence, is analyzed. Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of symbolic violence is used to explore the workings of masculine domination upon both men and women, revealing the suffering experienced by principals as a result of this domination. The wider implications of
these gendered discourses on the role of elementary principal are discussed. Moments of resistance to the dominant discourses and agency are also discussed when they are revealed through dialogue with the principals. The work of Judith Butler is used to explore the presence of agency amongst these principals and the implications it has for principals as they navigate these gendered discourses. This study positions principalship as a place where resistance and agency can be explored and realized. Implications for theory and further research are considered.
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I would also like to acknowledge all of the participants in this study, who shall remain nameless. Thank you for being willing to talk with me about this important issue. Thank you for your honest and thoughtful remarks. Without you, there would be no thesis.

Dedication

I dedicate this work first and foremost to my mother, Anne MacKinnon (McCann). When I was a little boy my mother instilled in me an absolute love for learning and books which became for me a way of both engaging with the world and escaping it. Books incited my inquisitiveness and I developed many questions about the world as I grew into adulthood. Thank you, mum, for inspiring me every day and encouraging me in my efforts to “figure it out” and keep going no matter what!

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Finally, to my two wonderful daughters Maeve and Bronwyn. I have always felt that when you become a parent, part of your job is to make the world a better place so that your children can thrive. This project is one of the ways I have tried to do this. I have so many hopes for you both, but my greatest hope is that you both find fulfillment, the kind of fulfillment I have found by completing this project. I love you both and look forward to watching you thrive.
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Chapter 1: Contextual Framework

Introduction

If you ask teachers, students and parents what they think about the principal of their, or their children’s, elementary school, you will likely hear a lot of different comments. This is because each of these groups demands something different from their principal. Teachers may say he/she is collaborative and makes decisions with us; parents may say he/she is approachable and we can take our concerns to him/her; and the children may comment on how nice their principal is. The comments you receive will largely depend upon what each group wants from their principal. Within the context of these examples, teachers want someone they can work with, parents want someone approachable, and students just want someone nice. All of these wants appear to be acceptable and reasonable. In general, principals are meant to be collaborative, approachable and nice! People of all ages and roles also seem to have preferences when it comes to the person leading their school. How do we as principals respond, however, when they seem to prefer a male or female principal?

I have now been a (male) teacher, vice principal and principal within the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) at six different elementary schools. During a discussion about moving me to my current school, the superintendent reluctantly stated that the school needed a male principal. This statement was made reluctantly, because the superintendent knew that to make such a suggestion was somewhat problematic. The school in question had previously been led by two female principals over the past 10 to 12 years, and I got the sense that the superintendent felt that the school needed a different kind of leadership, which translated into wanting to place a male principal in the school. This situation begs the question: what assumptions did the superintendent make about the way female and male principals lead, in making the decision to
place a male principal in the school? The fact that this conversation occurred, and resulted in my being hired for the position, suggests to me that whether the principal is a man or a woman does matter. Interestingly, the story continues.

The very first day I entered the school, the school’s secretary made the statement, “Thank goodness you are a man!” Later that week, I met with a small group of parents to talk about their goals for the school. One parent commented on the fact that I was a male principal and said they liked that. Then, on the first day of school in September, a Grade 1 student said to his teacher, “Miss…our new principal is a boy!” At this point, the superintendent’s comment began to make sense. It did seem to make a difference to the school and community that I was a man. But, I wondered, why does this make a difference? What assumptions are being made by the superintendent, staff and parents about how men and women lead? Moreover, what does this say overall about gender and principal leadership?

This thesis asks the question, to what extent does gender matter when it comes to elementary principal leadership? It interrogates the presence of hegemonic discourses and how these discourses impact principalship in elementary schools. It asks how these discourses are produced and maintained, and examines the existence of gendered stereotypes and how they work within principalship to regulate principals. As is illustrated from my experiences described above, it seems that others with whom the principal works have preferences around whether their principal is a man or a woman. These preferences must also have an effect on how male and female principals lead their schools. For example, once I discovered that the staff, parents and children in the school were pleased that I was a man, it put me at ease a little bit because my gender, or their perception of my gender as male, placed me “ahead of the game,” as it were. I had an advantage because I was a man, and in their eyes, that was a good thing. And yet, this
situation also made me very uncomfortable. What if I were a woman in this situation? How would I feel if I knew that the school preferred a male principal? How would this affect my leadership style? And, for myself, how was I going to live up to whatever expectations the staff, parents and students had about how a male principal should lead? Are men and women “naturally” different leaders?

These are some of the questions that ran through my head during the first few days of school, and they continue to linger as I complete my tenure in this same school. A teacher who has been in the school for a number of years, recently came into my office and told me that I am the best principal they have ever had! This made me feel good – but is it because I am a man? It seems to me that people have a hard time separating what they want in a leader from the gender of the leader in question. I suspect that this is because the same behaviour in a leader seems to be perceived differently depending on whether it is a man or a woman doing the leading. I remain troubled by this issue and this thesis is my attempt to shed some light on the topic. With this study, I thus probe the following questions: What kind of impact does hegemonic masculinity have on the principal and the manner in which they lead their school? How do expectations around the different ways men and women are ‘supposed’ to lead affect the way principals conceptualize their leadership?

**Background, Significance and Historical Context**

When principals of elementary schools think about leadership, they often also think about school improvement and/or student achievement. This is largely because improvement in student achievement is generally seen as occurring, in part, as a result of effective leadership. Principals are always looking at ways they can use their influence, knowledge and skills to improve student learning in their schools. There is a plethora of research on the importance of
leadership to school improvement. Discourses about school leadership often revolve around researchers such as Fullan (2010; 2011; 2013; 2014), DuFour (2013), Leithwood and Seashore (2012), and Kaplan and Kaiser (2013), who have all focused on the strategies that it takes to move schools, students, teachers, and results forward. Most educational leaders would agree that the goal of effective leadership is improvement in student achievement.

In his most recent work, Fullan (2014) provided a very inspiring account of the work that is required of the 21st century principal, in order to improve the learning of both teachers and students in our schools. As a principal with the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), I often come across Fullan’s work as an example of successful leadership. In fact, this book is given to us as principals by our superintendent. It captures the complexities of the role, and positions the principal as a change agent. Fullan even devoted a chapter to this notion, writing, “I’ve said that the marks of a change agent are relentless commitment to a cause and flexibility in how to serve that cause. To combine the two, you need to become simultaneously assertive and sensitive, demanding and understanding, confident while doubting, local and big picture, essential at the beginning and dispensable at the end. You will need to resonate with the group all the while” (Fullan, 2014, p. 137). Here, Fullan has described some very admirable qualities of leadership. I think most would agree that leadership requires flexibility, commitment, confidence, and so on, and that good leaders utilize and exhibit such qualities.

What I find troubling, however, is the dichotomy created when Fullan juxtaposes being “simultaneously assertive and sensitive, demanding and understanding, confident while doubting.” On the surface, it would appear that a leader who is both assertive and sensitive is able to employ excellent and useful traits. There are many times when a principal needs to assert his/her goals, strategies, or positions in order to drive improvement. However, if this is done
without being sensitive to the needs of teachers and students, it can end in disaster. Most principals that I know would agree that the ability to balance one’s assertiveness with sensitivity to the needs of others is a critical trait in leadership. I suggest, however, that these traits come with a certain amount of baggage, particularly when it comes to the social construction of gender.

In focusing on the strategies and attitudes that principals need to take up in order to be successful leaders, Fullan (2014) considered the impact that the person who is doing the leading has on the outcome of his or her efforts. In fact, he stressed the importance of the principal to student success and improvement, stating, “If the principal really is the second most important factor in student learning, let’s see how we can enable him or her to function as such – with maximum results” (Fullan, 2014, p. 10). Clearly, the person doing the leading and the skills they employ are important. Is it equally important whether the person doing the leading is a man or a woman? Does gender matter, or is leading a school really only about leadership skills, abilities, and personality? In his work, Fullan makes little distinction between male and female leaders, perhaps because he does not believe that it really matters whether the leader is a man or a woman.

One of the documents that principals in Ontario turn to in order to understand and define their role is The Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF) (2012). The purpose of the OLF is to provide a roadmap for educational leaders to enable them to navigate the waters of educational leadership. The introductory section of the document states:

In the framework, you will learn about the key practices of successful education leaders and organizations, and how you can put them into action to achieve your goals. You will also find out about:

- The traits of effective leaders;
- The characteristics of effective organizations; and
• A common leadership language.

These will facilitate effective dialogue, professional learning and collaboration. (p. 3)

The OLF was conceived in order to create a common understanding amongst educational leaders around how to lead their schools and school boards in an effective manner. It is expected that leaders throughout Ontario will turn to this document as a means of evaluating their own leadership style and competencies, and to ensure that their approach is in line with what is expected across the province. In fact, this document is used quite extensively in the process of principal evaluation. Gender is not mentioned anywhere in the OLF, for it is expected that effective leadership knows no gendered boundaries. Women and men are granted equal access to educational leadership in the OLF, and, as such, both are capable of meeting the demands and expectations set out in this document. It is indeed in the best interests of principalship to focus on the skills and attributes that make good leaders. The current study, however, brings into question the assumptions that might be being made about such skills and attributes and the discourses around them, and reveals that some of these discourses are in fact quite limiting when considering gender as a factor.

In theory, it would be wonderful indeed if a leader’s gender had no impact on their leadership or how it was perceived. However, it seems that whenever leadership is discussed, it is often described in such a way that the speaker ends up making reference to essentialist notions of what it means to be a man or a woman. For example, to deconstruct Fullan’s statement on leadership qualities quoted earlier, it clearly contains essentialist or stereotypical notions around gender, without actually stating it outright. Fullan described the effective leader as both assertive and demanding (masculine) on the one hand, and sensitive and understanding (feminine) on the other. Here, there are clear gender binaries at work, but interestingly, Fullan is suggesting that
both stereotypically masculine and feminine qualities are needed to be an effective leader. Blackmore (1999) suggested in her work that “the benchmark of leadership remains white, middle class, heterosexual and male” (p. 6). Although Fullan does not advocate for this type of approach, he does, however, legitimize the supposed differences between men and woman by referring to the traits that are often used to differentiate and describe male and female leaders. When these essentialist notions are legitimized, they become the fabric of dominant discourses about how men and women principals lead.

Eagly, Karau, and Johnson (1992) looked at possible sex differences in leadership style in order to discover why women were not entering principalship. They made an interesting prediction that encourages more critical thinking on how proposed gender differences affect leadership style:

One perspective that suggests predictions about differences in the leadership styles of female and male principals emphasizes the gender role expectations represented in gender stereotypes. To the extent that male and female school principals carry out their roles in a manner consistent with gender stereotypes, they would differ in their leadership styles. This gender role perspective readily provides predictions about sex differences in leadership style because the distinctions that leadership researchers have made between task oriented and interpersonally oriented styles and between autocratic and democratic styles are gender stereotypic. (p. 79)

Clearly, by making distinctions between leadership styles that are “task oriented” (male) versus “interpersonally oriented” (female), researchers are emphasizing gender differences based upon socially constructed notions of what it means to be a man or a woman. Within this discourse, men and women are described as having very different and opposing leadership qualities.

1 It is important to make the distinction between sex and gender and this will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.
Women are portrayed as having “soft” leadership skills, and are encouraging and collaborative, whereas men are “pushers” and focused on task completion. Hence, the discourses around masculinities and femininities set up yet another discourse around what it means to lead as a man and as a woman. As these notions dominate the discourse around the issue, they become widely accepted as true. As a result, principals become subjected to this discourse and find themselves having to “live up” to these ways of leading.

Historically, research on effective educational leadership has generally focused on leadership strategies that lead to improved student achievement, but has failed to make mention of the impact that gender and gender roles have on principals and their leadership style. The problem is that, by not addressing the issue of gender and leadership, this research has assumed that it does not matter if the principal of an elementary school is a man or a woman. My position is that it does matter and it has an impact on leadership, and I conducted this study to determine if other principals felt the same way. As I will illustrate later in the literature review, researchers such as Eagly et al. (1992), Blackmore (1999), Coleman (2003), and Shakeshaft (2006) have all considered the effect that gender has on leadership among principals/leaders in our education system. These researchers have agreed that gender has an impact on leadership, but there is disagreement and differing opinions on how this is so. Some research on gender and leadership makes stereotypical assumptions about how men and women lead, while other studies ascribe to a blending of male and female ways of leading, and still others reject these stereotypes all together. Often when we describe leadership strategies that are successful, we describe them through a lens that makes certain assumptions about how men and women lead.

Notions of leadership roles and styles are, then, clearly saturated in discourse. Michel Foucault has most poignantly defined discourse in terms of relations of power: “In a society such
as ours, but basically in any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterize and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse” (cited in Niesche, 2011, p. 19). Foucault’s notion of the establishment of power relations through discourse can be applied to the relationship between gender and leadership in the following way: if there are in fact discourses around the gendered nature of leadership qualities, where stereotypically more “masculine” qualities are more readily associated with effective leadership, then women are disempowered by the whole culture around leadership. This would also suggest that when women want to successfully take on leadership roles, they will have to also understand and exhibit male qualities of leadership, since men are considered more suited to being leaders.

Alternatively, one might also take the position that the cultural stereotypes or social constructions that define what it means to be a woman actually make women better suited to leadership than men. Hence, the particular discourse to which one ascribes works to affect the ways in which one leads. Niesche (2011), in taking a Foucauldian look at leadership in elementary schools, proposed that discourses and practices normalize principals and position them as subjects within the complex web of school-based management and educational leadership (p. 25). I suggest that discourses around gender and leadership have the same effect on both men and women leaders. In fact, there are many discourses around leadership that shape the way we think about what makes an effective leader, and which people are suited to the role.

It is important to acknowledge that the work of the principal has undergone many changes over the past 10 to 15 years. For example, although principals in all Canadian provinces used to be members of teachers’ unions, as is still the case in provinces such as Alberta, in 1998,
the government of Ontario removed principals from teachers’ unions. As a result, organizations such as The Ontario Principals’ Council were created to represent the interests of principals and vice principals in Ontario. The removal of principals from the unions drastically changed the role of principal, from curriculum and learning leader to manager. This shift can be acutely understood through Katina Pollock’s (2014) study on the changing nature of the principal’s work, in which the data collected presents principalship as highly structured with little room for autonomy:

Despite finding some minor contextual difference in what principals do and how they do it, the lack of any major variations in principals’ work across personal and contextual variables implies that the principalship has become so structured and rooted in compliance that there is little room for principals to demonstrate professional judgement or autonomy in their daily work. (p. 3)

Pollock also references three policies, or regulations, that guide a lot of what principals do on a daily basis:

Policies have a significant influence on what principals actually do at work, and in particular on their duties and responsibilities. Regulation 274/12 (77.7%), which deals with hiring practices and regulations, Growing Success (77.4%), and the Safe School Act – Bill 212 (69.1%), were cited by the participating principals as having the most influence on what they do on a daily basis. (2014, p. 3)

For example, Regulation 274/12 makes it very difficult to hire staff that principals want to hire for the school. The regulation requires that principals consider seniority as the dominant factor when it comes to hiring, rather than the skills and abilities of the applicant. This lack of autonomy is significant as it prevents principals from using their professional judgement to make the best decisions for their school. The changing role of the principal has also resulted in the creation of tension between the expectations of principal leadership as outlined in the OLF and the realities of carrying out these duties. For example, one of the competencies in the OLF requires that principals maintain good relationships with unionized staff in order to support the
work of the school to improve outcomes for students. Specifically, it requires that principals establish productive working relationships with teacher federation representatives (OLF, p. 12). However, there is a disconnect made noticeable by Pollock’s (2014) study. One of Pollock’s findings is that there exists a tension between maintaining good relations with unionized staff and enforcing policy and regulation. In highlighting this, she wrote, “The tension between being simultaneously accountable for maintaining excellent labour relations and enforcing policy and regulations with staff is just one example of the multiple accountability expectations principals cited in this section of the online survey” (p. 24). This tension is important to note because it points to some of the challenges principals face in performing their duties. There is a disconnect between what is expected of them as presented in the OLF and the reality of the daily work lives of principals presented in Pollock’s study. In this thesis, I explore the tensions that arise when we throw gender into the mix to determine the ways one’s gender has an impact on one’s ability to lead as a principal.

One popular discourse around leadership that causes some of this tension is that it is a role inhabited by men. Eagly, Karau, and Johnson (1992) commented on this issue as it relates to possible sex differences in leadership:

Sex differences in leadership style is among the possible causes of the sparse representation of women in school administration. To the extent that female principals are inclined to perform their administrative roles in the style that is different from their male counterparts, women may face barriers in being selected for the roles, regardless of whether women’s styles are more or less effective than those of men. (pp. 76–77)

Here, it is suggested that when leadership positions are inhabited by men, and hence the role becomes defined using a masculinist perspective, women find it very difficult to enter into these roles. Women are seen to perform leadership differently than their male counterparts and hence are not perceived as being suited to the role, as it has been defined by men. Over time, however,
the number of women in leadership positions has increased, although an imbalance – particularly in the business world – continues to exist. Yet in elementary education, the imbalance actually goes the other way. Recently, in 2015, the Ontario Principal’s Council (OPC) submitted a paper to Ontario’s Ministry of Education on pay equity. This document pointed to the fact that, historically, elementary principals have been paid less than secondary principals. In fact, this is still the case in Ontario. The paper also referenced historical discrimination based on gender.

Research shows that public school teaching and school administration have gone through various gender-linked states over the last century and a half. Despite the often-superior qualifications and their predominance in the elementary teaching pool, women were significantly under-represented for most of the 20th century in elementary principal positions in Ontario. As well, according to research data reviewed by the OPC for selected years between 1911 and 1954…if women were promoted to principal, they were often paid less than male elementary principals. In Ontario, it took until the late 1990s before women started to gain a real foothold as elementary principals. In the U.S., 55 per cent of elementary principals were women by 1929. Yet it took until 2005-2006 before Ontario’s elementary principals were 62 per cent female. (Shilton, 2015, p. 2)

It is notable that women did not hold the position of principal in significant numbers until the 1990s, and, if a woman was promoted to principal, she was paid less than her male counterparts. This speaks to the notion that principalship is largely defined in masculine terms. Women were excluded from this position, and when they began to take up the role of principal, they were paid less. The OPC document later referenced more current data on gender and the principalship.

In Ontario, it was 2001 before women could gain access to 57 per cent of elementary principal positions. More broadly, in Canada, it did not reach a majority (53 per cent) until 2004-2005. Ontario-wide, this has now increased as of 2012-2013 to women holding 65.5 per cent of the elementary principal and vice-principal positions. (Shilton, 2015, p. 4)

Over the past 15 years or so, women have taken up elementary principalship in larger numbers, and currently surpass the number of men in this role. Clearly, the role has become more available to women over time, which is certainly positive. The question now becomes: how do these
women lead? To what extent might women’s leadership styles be different from the way men lead? Now that more women are educational leaders than ever before, do we still need to think about issues of gender equity?

In examining the matter, it is important to further break down what is assumed and also perceived about female characteristics and the ways in which these are different from male aptitudes and focuses. Shakeshaft (2006) wrote about, “Studies [that] document women’s propensity to listen to others whether in groups or one-on-one. Researchers have explored the themes of nurturing, emotional connections, and interpersonal relationships among women administrators, connecting these to societal expectations for women as ‘mothers’” (p. 506). Women leaders, then, are often associated with nurturing, emotionally connected “mother” figures. Hence, the discourses around masculinities and femininities set up yet another discourse around what it means to lead as a man compared to leading as a woman. Pitinsky et al. (2007) found, however, that these notions of “female leadership” can be limiting and problematic.

Many mainstream organizations—not just traditional, dangerous, male-dominated ones—conflate stereotypical masculine traits with images of competence and leadership, and women pay a price. This conflation places women seeking leadership roles in a classic double bind: those who enact idealized masculine images of leadership, by definition, violate idealized feminine images of womanhood, and vice versa. The result is that women who are tough, confident, and decisive are demonized as bitchy, strident, and insensitive. By the same token, women who are sensitive, relational, and warm are discounted as weak, passive, and too nice. Either way, women are seen as unfit for leadership roles. (p. 465)

It seems that women are truly in a “bind” when it comes to leading, as they are either seen as too tough, and hence “bitchy,” or too soft, and hence “weak.” This is the trap that occurs when broad statements are made about how women and men lead. In fact, if the situation described above holds true, women have no chance at all of becoming successful, well-liked leaders. This scenario also played out in Reynold’s (2002) research, in which she interviewed male and female
principals who had served as principals in different generations. She wrote about the “gender bind” experienced by women principals: “They talked about how difficult it had been to exercise power since, when they behaved like women, they felt they were not taken seriously. Yet they could not present themselves as being exactly like men either. They were caught in a ‘gender bind’ that diminished their personal and organizational power” (p. 43). When we have a discourse of leadership that is highly masculinized and is hence predicated on hegemonic notions of what it means to be a man, we set women leaders up for failure. Clearly, we still need to be concerned with gender equity when women continue to be seen as “unfit” for leadership roles because they are not men. How can women leaders respond to this discursive inequity? Can/should women define their leadership style in alternate ways? What are the dangers from a feminist perspective of endorsing a conception of natural difference if indeed there is a difference between the way men and women lead? Finally, what discourses are produced by both men and women when they talk about principal leadership?

In response to this inequitable discourse, feminists began to make a case for female styles of leadership. The “great woman theory of leadership” (Pittinsky et al., 2007, p. 94) was created in response to the fact that more women were entering leadership roles. It was felt that there was a need to legitimize female leadership styles, and in fact, many began to profess that women lead better than men. As Pittinsky et al. (2007) elaborated, “By placing women on a pedestal, albeit a precarious one, advocates of this great woman approach to leadership use positive stereotypes about women’s traits to argue in support of why women are uniquely effective, why they are desperately needed as leaders, and why organizations should pay attention” (p. 94). The creation of such positions is appealing, as it places a positive and progressive spin on women leadership
styles. It is, however, also troubling, because once again, leadership style is defined by essentialist notions of gender.

Looking at these feminist discourses as they pertain to women’s leadership, and particularly in the context of educational restructuring, Blackmore (1999) wrote:

Populist versions promoted in the media of feminist discourses about women’s styles of leadership being more caring and sharing have conflated being female to being feminist in highly essentialist ways. It is a conflation that ignores both the differences amongst women and the difficult political context in which leading women now work. The tendency to treat the issue of women in leadership in dominant management discourses as merely a matter of upgrading women’s skills to meet the demands of current modes of leadership is also blind to the gender politics of educational change. Educational restructuring, with its emphasis on efficiency, accountability, and outcomes, privileges ‘hard management’ and entrepreneurial discourses of leadership over less instrumental, more holistic and ‘softer’, ‘feminized’ leadership discourses. The former discourses decontextualize, distort, and depoliticize the issue of gender in their refusal to see how educational restructuring and shifts in cultural values continue to reshape, and indeed constrain, the possibilities for feminist leadership practices. (pp. 3–4)

Blackmore suggests here that these notions of “female leadership,” in fact, constrain feminist leadership discourse, as the issue of gender is depoliticized. In response to a discourse that positioned men as effective leaders and women as “soft” and, hence, as unable to lead, another discourse was created to counteract the negative view of women as leaders. This is one example of how an attempt to position women as effective leaders only further hinders them, as it relies on the very same gender binary that was used in the proliferation of the initial and problematic discourse that promoted men as strong and effective leaders. Women are expected to adhere to a “feminized” form of leadership that is “softer” as opposed to the more masculine “hard management” style. What can be the way forward if these “feminized” notions are not enough to free women from the repressive notions of what it means to be a woman? Why is it that women are found to be more collaborative and “softer”? Is this possibly a learned response to avoid condemnation for being “authoritarian” or “bitchy”?
In this section, I have provided some background around the research that has been done in the area of gender and principal leadership. Over the years, the concern among educational leaders has moved from the matter of women having access to principalship to how women are expected to “fit” into the role once it is attained. In response to these difficulties, progressive ways of leading emerged and women were, very generally, able to find comfort and stability. The work of Blackmore (1999), however, illustrates how these “feminized” notions only further objectified women, describing them as “soft,” while men remained strong and “hard.” I have also discussed how, even when leadership skills and abilities become the focus, gendered notions of principal leadership remain – and remain problematic. Given this context, the question is how to move forward. I take the position that to understand the relationship between gender and principal leadership, one must turn to discourses of principal leadership. In placing these discourses under investigation, I hope to uncover how they reveal the inherent problems that arise when gender meets leadership, but also how they can point to possible solutions, or at least a way forward.

**Examining Discourse**

Foucault (1978) wrote that “discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (p. 101). Foucault is suggesting here that discourse has the capability of both limiting and freeing us from the bonds of power that regulate us. Discourse provides an avenue through which we can question power relations that have been created out of cultural and discursive norms. So, what discourse of gender and leadership would upset limited notions of what it means to lead as a man or woman? Foucault understood how power relations make us subjects. As Niesche (2011) commented:
Foucault’s work on disciplinary power is particularly important for an examination of the subjectification of leaders through the multifarious disciplinary regimes of school-based management. Foucault emphasizes power as a central notion in the understanding of how subjects are constructed. It is therefore the examination of practices undertaken by and upon the principal that is important in this analysis of power relations. (p. 19)

Here, it becomes clear that the discourse of educational leadership, as described by scholars, works as a form of power that acts upon the principal. The principal, whether man or woman, is thus under surveillance, and becomes subject to discourses around what it means to be an effective leader, as well as around his/her identity construction as a man or woman. Precisely how the principal is subject to this surveillance and the discourses at play is one of the central questions in this thesis.

Foucault (1977) described the manner in which surveillance becomes integrated with disciplinary power as follows:

Hierarchized, continuous, and functional surveillance may not be one of the great technical “inventions” of the eighteenth century, but its insidious extension owed its importance to the mechanisms of power that it brought with it. By means of such surveillance, disciplinary power became an “integrated” system, linked from the inside to the economy and to the aims of the mechanism in which it was practiced. It was also organized as a multiple, automatic, and anonymous power; for although surveillance rests on individuals, its functioning is that of a network of relations from top to bottom, but also to a certain extent from bottom to top and laterally; this network “holds” the whole together and traverses it in its entirety with effects of power that derive from one another: supervisors, perpetually supervised. (p. 192)

Foucault makes clear that, as individuals, we are all under surveillance, and, as a result, we are also subject to disciplinary power. This is an anonymous power integrated with surveillance in such a way that we are both the supervisors and the supervised. The principal, then, is not immune to this supervision, this surveillance. Going further, I propose that gender cannot be ignored in the discourse around principal leadership, as notions of gender are already and always present in how we engage with qualities and styles of leadership. Gender takes up a position
within principal leadership discourses, and hence is subject to this integration of surveillance and disciplinary power.

In this thesis, I intend to reveal discourses of female and male principal leadership, discuss how these discourses are produced and manifested, and demonstrate the implications these discourses present for both men and women principals. This thesis explores whether or not one can talk about men and women leading differently without ascribing to hegemonic masculinity. It asks if a revelation or discussion of these discourses can ultimately disrupt hegemonic notions of principal leadership.

In order to answer these questions, I felt it was important to talk with principals and find out what they thought about the intersection of their gender and their leadership style as principals. This is therefore how I designed this study. In the chapters to follow, I trace the extent to which interviewed principals were aware or unaware of the problem of gender and principal leadership, as well as the manner in which these principals engaged with the subject. I hope that these conversations will shed some light on the many questions posed throughout this chapter – however, it is understood that with every question answered, another lies behind it, waiting to be asked.

Why is this Study Necessary?

I take the position that gender matters when it comes to principal leadership in the sense that it is an element of leadership that cannot be ignored, however hard we try. This thesis explores the ways in which both male and female principals recognize the workings of gender within their role as principals. My intention with this study is to discover the extent to which men and women legitimate and promote hegemonic masculinity within this role. (I define the term hegemonic masculinity more clearly in Chapter Three, but it is generally defined by Connell
1987) as the manner in which men have the advantage over women, and how this advantage is woven into the fabric of society.) At the same time, however, I intend to demonstrate that principalship provides a space where women and men can find agency, a place of resistance that works against the gendered discourses at play in their daily work lives. By extension, principalship provides a space in which alternate gendered discourses can be realized and acted upon. The interviews conducted as part of this study provided an opportunity for principals to enter into the conversation about gender, a topic that these principals had not necessarily considered to be an issue. The resulting dialogue brings into question the assumptions we make, and, to some extent, lays bare the presence of masculine domination and hegemony within the daily work lives of the principals to whom I spoke. My discourse analysis of the data collected tells the story of the relationship between gender and leadership within principalship, and opens the door toward some new realizations and thinking around this issue.

It is critical that the hegemonic masculinity experienced within the role of principal be challenged, if not for any other reason than to benefit the children we serve. The words that we as principals choose to use and the actions that we choose to take send messages to our students. We might think that children will not notice hegemony at work in our schools, particularly in the way a principal might promote its presence, however, we must not forget that hegemony is often silent, working behind the scenes while all the while influencing the actions and decisions we make each day. I argue that this hegemony, this domination, needs to be exposed, recognized for what it is, and challenged.

**Overview of Chapters**

Chapter Two provides a review of the related literature on gender and leadership from an educational perspective. It highlights different research approaches and outlines existing
scholarly work around gender and leadership from a socio-cultural perspective. Feminist and post-structuralist approaches to leadership, particularly within schools, are also highlighted. In Chapter Three, the theoretical framework is discussed and outlined. This chapter sets the stage for the study, describing how disciplinary power, governmentality, and gender will be utilized and understood. Chapter Four presents the methodological approach as discourse analysis, and further explains the procedures, process followed, and decisions made when participants were selected and interviewed. In Chapters Five and Six, a discourse analysis of the interviews is used to discuss discourses of female and male principal leadership. Chapter Seven highlights discourses of reluctance and denial, where principals privilege the principal’s personality and skill as a tool to measure their own suitability to the role, and to distance themselves from the notion that gender has anything to do with leadership. Chapter Eight explores avenues of resistance and agency that come about as a result of denial and recognition. Finally, Chapter Nine summarizes the various discourses and provides insight around identifying the discourses themselves, as well as the influence they have on leadership, and their implications in terms of how principals lead their schools. Implications for theory and opportunities for further research are also discussed.
Chapter 2: Review of Related Literature

Overview

When one begins to tell the story of gender and leadership, one cannot help but start with the rather prevalent belief that men and women lead differently. We know that men dominated principalship decades before women were ever able to enter leadership roles. Now that more and more women are becoming principals, some leaders find it necessary to differentiate the manner in which men and women lead so that hegemonic notions of leadership are maintained. Women then find themselves having to fit into a leadership mold that was never designed for them. Moreover, Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) have commented that research on “gender” tends to be only about women and not men: “Critics of the traditional research on educational administration suggest that the literature of the field is really the study of male administrative behavior. Gender research in school administration, then, is generally thought to be studies of women or studies that compare women and men” (p. 31). This is important to note since any study of gender and school leadership should be about both men and women. Perhaps this speaks to the difficulties women experience, as expressed in Reynolds’ (2002) work, in trying “to gain a ‘voice’ within the dominant discourse on school leadership to speak about gender and its continuing importance in both theory and practice in education” (p. 2). There is, however, some hope for research on gender and educational leadership. In fact, Oplatka (2016) recently commented on the kinds of research being done on gender and leadership, stating that “In recent years, the research has focused more and more on ‘doing gender’, i.e., on the ways by which individual women and men are actively engaged in creating and recreating their identity” (p. 9). This movement toward engaging with research that looks at “doing gender” highlights the importance of looking at how both men and women “do gender” within leadership roles. With this thesis, I plan to do just that.
within the context of elementary principalship. Oplatka (2016) further commented that research related to gender that is most applicable to managers addresses barriers to the advancement of women, and the particular experiences of women and men in leadership roles (p. 9). As the following literature review will show, there exists a significant amount of research on the barriers women face in terms of taking on leadership roles. However, this thesis leans more toward an investigation of the experiences both women and men have as principals, and the way these experiences relate to how they perceive their gendered selves. According to Law (2013), research in the area of gender and leadership seems to take on three broad approaches: one that focuses on stereotypical differences between men and women; one that takes a non-stereotypical approach; and finally, an approach that suggests there are no differences between the manners in which men and women lead (p. 297). Each of these approaches will now be discussed, in order to determine the extent to which each focuses on the gender paradigm.

**The Gender Paradigm: Stereotypes**

In their meta-analysis of research on the topic of gender and leadership style amongst school principals, Eagly, Karau, and Johnson (1992) made some interesting comments about possible differences between the way male and female principals lead:

> This interest in possible sex differences in principals’ leadership style very often reflected researchers’ desire to understand why relatively few women occupy major administrative roles in schools, despite the presence of large numbers of women in the teaching profession (see Fay, 1988). Sex differences in leadership style are among the possible causes of the sparse representation of women in school administration. To the extent that female principals are inclined to perform their administrative roles in a style that is different from their male counterparts, women might face barriers in being selected for the roles, regardless of whether women’s styles are more or less effective than those of men. (pp. 76–77)

Indeed, up until about 15 years ago, there was a time when men dominated principalship and women found it difficult to move up the management ladder and join men in this role. This has
changed significantly, particularly in the TDSB, where there are now more female principals in our grouping of schools than male principals. This pattern gets duplicated throughout the TDSB, so that it seems that women have been able to break through the barriers that prevented them from entering the principalship in previous decades. What I find most interesting in the above quotation, however, is the fact that Eagly et al. (1992) make reference to a few different issues surrounding gender and educational leadership. They speculate that sex differences in leadership style may have been the reason why women were not able to enter principalship. This position assumes that women do not, or may not, have the requisite skills to be successful principals, simply because they are women. Their statement also takes the position that men and women have different leadership styles and that the principalship is more suited to the masculine style of leadership – whatever that may be.

Oplatka (2016) has commented on the masculine stereotype of leadership, stating that it, “poses a problem for women aspiring to management roles because female stereotypes do not match expectations for leaders. Even women who possess outstanding qualifications for leadership may have the burden of overcoming preconceptions that they are not well equipped to lead like their male counterparts” (p. 10). This speaks to the notion that leadership roles are designed for, and hence intended for, men to inhabit. Applebaum, Audet, and Miller (2003) examined the issue of gender and leadership by first looking at the body of research that focuses on biology and sex alone as a determinant of the affect gender has on leadership style. They concluded that “The basic premise of this body of research is that leadership is biologically determined, behaviourally demonstrated and innate to the male species. As such, an effective leadership stance can only be assumed by the male species. Much of the supporting work restricts leadership studies to male subjects. The premise for biological sex = male = leader does
seem somewhat biased” (p. 44). It seems safe in the current day, however, to say that most researchers would take the position that this way of thinking is largely unsupportable. Applebaum et al. (2003) referred to this position as biased. Indeed, taking the position that leadership is biologically determined puts into question the ability of women to lead. The fact that so many women are successfully leading our elementary schools is proof alone that this way of thinking holds no ground.

In her work on gender and educational management, Shakeshaft (2006) explored female leadership styles recognizing that, historically, leadership theory was based upon studies of males (p. 504). This resulted in the creation of a movement toward defining a female style of leadership. As more women moved into school administration, and as scholars argued that women’s styles should be researched in their own right, studies that observed, interviewed, and surveyed only women administrators emerged. Similar approaches to female ways of leading are found in the work of Skrla (2000), for example, who studied female superintendents in the US. She designed a study that examined the ways social constructions of the female gender operate in public school superintendency when the superintendent is a woman (p. 294). She noted that the perspectives and perceptions of women in leadership roles went largely ignored in research studies about gender and leadership (Skrla, 2000, p. 298). “These studies sought to identify the ways women lead as well as to describe best practice, regardless of whether or not female leadership is different from male leadership” (Skrla, 2000, p. 504). A great deal of research was put forth as scholars began to look at female ways of leading, in a clear response to the fact that previous studies had only considered leadership from a male perspective. It is important to note, however, and Shakeshaft (2006) has made note of this as well, that many scholars question whether men and women actually lead differently. A look through the scholarship coming out of
the business world on gender and leadership uncovers articles that explore reasons why women find it difficult to enter leadership positions. Authors here generally point to gender as a social construction in management (see, for example, Askehave & Korning Zethsen, 2014; Fairhurst & Grant 2010; Vecchio 2002; Ridgeway, 2001). Much of this literature has confirmed that “masculine leadership traits tend to dominate the language of executive job advertisements with the possible real-life result that men, or individuals with masculine traits, find it easier to identify with the requirements for executive positions” (Askehave & Korning Zethsen, 2014, p. 543). Clearly, the consensus within this literature is that men and women do lead differently. However, if you want to be a successful leader, you need to lead like a man. In their work, Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) called for a redefinition of leadership that is more inclusive of women’s leadership approaches, stating that, “As a result of that redefinition, such approaches would be not only legitimate but also available to all leaders – women and men alike… [and] women’s approaches to leadership [could then] be threaded together to generate collective action” (p. 102). While it appears on the surface that considering differences between how men and women lead, and redefining leadership to include female ways of leading, is a positive movement forward, it can also be seen as problematic. This issue will be explored further later in the thesis.

The Non-Stereotypical Approach

The approach to leadership that purports the non-stereotypical approach to be the best option can also be viewed as problematic. Arguing that gender in leadership discussions is not taken very seriously, Coleman (2003) stated that most research or theorizing about leadership treats gender as an add-on. She, however, also took the position that gender is essential to understanding leadership behaviour (p. 29). In her article, she described the results of a survey that she gave to both male and female headteachers in England and Wales that asked them about
their leadership style. In one part of the survey, respondents had a choice between various stereotypical adjectives that described traditional notions of what it means to lead as a man or a woman. She used a table created by Gray (1993) on gender paradigms for the adjectives used (cited in Coleman, 2003, p. 30).

Table 1

*Gender Paradigms*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The nurturing/feminine paradigm</th>
<th>The defensive/aggressive masculine paradigm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>caring</td>
<td>highly regulated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>creative</td>
<td>conformist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intuitive</td>
<td>normative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aware of individual differences</td>
<td>competitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-competitive</td>
<td>evaluative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tolerant</td>
<td>disciplined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>subjective</td>
<td>objective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>informal</td>
<td>formal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Looking through these leadership traits, it is clear that these paradigms are highly stereotypical. Coleman reported that both male and female headteachers chose a range of adjectives to describe themselves. However, she said, “The prevailing model of management that both sexes appear to identify is ‘androgynous’ in that it cuts across both sets of gender stereotypes, but it does favour the ‘feminine’” (2003, p. 31). The results of this survey, and others like it, are interesting because the responses suggest that leadership style is an androgynous endeavour. Respondents typically chose traits from both sides of the chart, suggesting a leadership style that crosses the boundaries between male and female ways of leading. What is also noteworthy is that respondents were asked to choose between two opposing leadership styles. By providing the respondents with these two paradigms of male and female leadership, Coleman essentially promoted stereotypes about how men and women lead. The results from this particular survey, however, also allow for
the suggestion that the respondents actually favoured feminine ways of leading. However, when examining the list of adjectives, I question why anyone would want to describe oneself as “highly regulated” and “conformist,” when one could speak of having much more interesting characteristics such as being “creative” and “intuitive.”

Applebaum (2003) also commented on this particular strain of research that suggests that there are three dimensions to the gender role: male, female, and androgynous.

Clearly, from a woman’s perspective, the merits of androgyny show potential. Although masculinity still appears to have a significant relationship with leader emergence, a possible relationship between androgyny and leader emergence indicates that the possession of feminine characteristics, in balance with masculine ones, also may be important in perceptions of leadership (Kolb, 1997). Individuals with masculine or androgynous classifications are more likely to be identified as preferred leaders than individuals with undifferentiated or feminine scores. (Kolb, 1999, p. 44)

On the surface, this kind of understanding and approach to gender and leadership makes sense. In examining the list of attributes that are traditionally ascribed to both men and women, one can see the benefits to taking on attributes from both sides of the coin as it were. For example, it makes sense to say that good leaders are evaluative so that improvements can be made, intuitive so that other perspectives can be taken into consideration, disciplined enough to get the job done, and yet tolerant of others, and so on. These attributes are certainly noteworthy and valuable. However, when they are applied to specific genders, they become yet another means by which men and women are regulated as leaders. As a result, the supposed non-stereotypical approach only further promotes and is limited by the gender binary.

Oplatka (2016) has recently pointed to research that emphasizes the complexities of masculine and feminine leadership styles, androgynous models of leadership, and exploring women’s ways of legitimizing their leadership (p. 30). Some of this research examines the
problems that come with talking about feminine ways of leading, as is the case in Reay and
Ball’s (2000) work, where they wrote that,

A growing number of feminist accounts assert that gender matters when we examine
leadership styles in schools and other educational establishments. We argue that gendered
identities are in context more fluid and shifting than often depicted in such texts. There
are many different femininities and the form they take is powerfully shaped by the roles
women undertake, the context within which they perform these roles and the amount of
power they have access to. (p. 145)

Reay and Ball not only assert here that gender does indeed matter when talking about leadership
in schools, but they also point out that it is too simplistic to talk about feminine ways of leading.
Instead, they present gendered identities as a fluid, ever changing entity that takes on different
forms and that is shaped by women within the roles they inhabit. In this thesis, I will make it
clear that indeed, based on the evidence, gender does matter. However, I also agree that it is
troublesome to write only of male and female ways of leading without considering the fluidity of
gendered identities. Is the answer then to say that there are no differences between the way men
and women lead?

“There are no Differences” Camp

Pittinsky, Bacon, and Welle (2007) asked some very good questions about gender and
leadership, such as: “Does a gendered perspective advance our understanding of leadership?
Does it hold promise for closing the leadership gender gap? Are there unintended results for
gendering leadership in this way?” (p. 97). Research that focuses on gender differences, such as
Coleman’s (2003) study described above, seem to blur any concrete differences in the way men
and women lead. Pittinsky et al. (2007) suggested that empirical research on gender differences
actually reveals very small differences between men and women’s leadership style, and that the
results of these surveys are often exaggerated or overemphasized (p. 99). They argue that “this
categorization (and consequential polarization) of the masculine versus feminine leadership
becomes a cyclical chicken-and-egg scenario: The more differences are discussed, the more they are perpetuated” (Pittinsky et al., 2007, p. 99). It is suggested here that as long as researchers continue to define and differentiate between male and female ways of leading, the more they perpetuate the idea that men and women lead differently and that their particular ways of leading can be defined. It seems to me that if one believes this to be true, then one must also believe in a connection between how one leads and one’s gender. If one believes that men and women lead differently, then how does this belief then translate into the way people actually lead?

Pittinsky et al. (2007) traced the process by which expectations shape one’s behaviour. “First, people have expectations of others. For example, there is an interculturally shared view of female-specific leadership competence, according to which women possess a higher interpersonal orientation than men” (p. 108). In a school setting, teachers, students, and parents may have a particular expectation of how their female principal will lead the school. If people believe that women have greater interpersonal skills than men, then they will expect this skill to be present in the women who lead them, and absent in male leaders. If we consider the effect this has on the leader, we can see how expectations of behaviour can influence the manner in which one might choose to lead. It is in this way that leaders begin to take on gendered leadership roles. On the process, Pittinsky et al. (2007) wrote: “Next, people start perceiving their own leadership in gendered terms. Actual differences do not emerge nearly as much as stereotypes would have us think, but we certainly describe leadership as though they do – this is part of the molding process” (p. 108). Gradually, leaders begin to believe that the expectations of them, which are solely based on stereotypes, actually define their leadership style. I argue that this occurs as a result of the dominant discourses that surround the issue of gender and leadership. If, in general, people believe that men and women lead in certain ways and place expectations on their leaders
to fit into the “boxes” that are created for them, then leaders cannot help but to satisfy these expectations. Pittinsky et al. (2007) described the final step of how expectations shape one’s behaviour as follows: “Finally, women and men actually begin acting the way followers expect them to act because of their gender; their leadership is molded by the stereotypes until they match. Women start to describe their own leadership in a certain way – and act that way – given the expectations and beliefs of others” (p. 109). One can certainly imagine a principal molding his/her leadership style to suit the expectations of those whom they serve. Most would agree that principals have a vested interest in meeting the expectations of teachers, parents, and students, so that they can find success in their role. As principals, we are always thinking about how our decisions affect each group within our school community. But, to what extent does the success of a principal’s leadership depend upon their acceptance amongst those they lead?

Whether men and women lead differently or not, whether there is a kind of androgynous way of leading, or whether there are no differences between the ways men and women lead, researchers continue to rely upon the gender binary to demonstrate their thinking on the issue. Researching gender and leadership in this way, however, does not allow the researcher to move away from essentialist notions of what it means to be a man or a woman. Moreover, each time this gender binary seems to be removed, it returns in one form or another. Fuller (2010) wrote of the problem with focusing on the binary that, “In perpetuating a view of gender as biological embodiment the notion that women might draw on what have been ascribed as ‘masculine’ attributes and qualities, or that men might equally draw on the ‘feminine’ is in danger of furthering bi-polar, essentialist and reductive views of gender. A poststructural stance that acknowledges gender as fluid, ever-changing, never fixed, is present in few such studies in England” (p. 364). It is important to note that Fuller calls for a post-structural stance to be taken
when researching gender and leadership. Certainly, research that mixes stereotypical ways of leading in the practices of men and women only further promotes the gender binary. The gaze and expectations of others force both men and women leaders to fit into tightly packed boxes that define and shape their leadership. Researchers Quader and Oplatka (2008) have also made reference to the construction of “feminine styles” of leadership, and the manner in which these styles are linked to issues of caring and emotional attachment. These traits are seen to be compatible with educational values and school effectiveness and are positioned as desirable in terms of school leadership (Quader & Oplatka, 2008, p. 397). As I have shown, some studies approach gender and leadership in this way, which only works to further promote and enhance the gender binary. A feminist approach to school leadership can challenge and bring into question these limited notions of leadership.

**A Feminist Approach to School Leadership**

In my research on feminist approaches to leadership in schools, Jill Blackmore’s work came up time and time again. Blackmore (1999) moved away from stereotypical beliefs about the ways men and women lead, writing that, “The discourse of ‘women’s style of leadership’ is dangerous in that first, it has the potential to produce a meta-narrative universalizing the category of women…Presenting women as a homogeneous category recycles the modernist storyline that women, because of their differences, even in leadership, merely complement men” (p. 58). Blackmore is suggesting that categorizing leadership in this way, i.e., into female and male styles of leadership, runs the risk of presenting both men and women as homogeneous groups. Having said this, it is also important to note that, historically, men have enjoyed a privileged position as leaders in Ontario’s elementary schools. Blackmore (1999) also referenced this fact, stating that being white, middle class, heterosexual, and male remains the benchmark for good leadership in
schools (p. 6). Naturally, out of this paradigm, women leaders began to formulate ideas about how to successfully lead as women, in a movement that resulted in the notion of transformational leadership. Leithwood (1992) has written extensively on this topic and outlined the elements that make transformational leadership transformative: “Our results suggest that transformational school leaders are in more or less continuous pursuit of three fundamental goals: 1) helping staff members develop and maintain a collaborative, professional school culture; 2) fostering teacher development; and 3) helping them solve problems together more effectively” (pp. 9–10). This form of leadership is very desirable. What principal would not want to develop collaborative cultures, foster teacher development, and encourage collaborative problem solving? It is clear that schools need transformative leaders in order to move forward toward the ultimate goal of improved student achievement. As discussed above, Coleman (2002) linked transformative leadership to gendered notions of leadership that came out of her survey of headteachers:

The men were slightly more likely to choose words that related to collaboration, efficiency and values. Collaboration is more often associated with women and feminine management styles, although efficiency would be identified with the more “masculine” managerial stance. The single most popular works for both men and women was the one termed collaborative and the second most popular was the potentially overlapping “people-oriented” style. These two broad categories give a clear indication of a favoured style of management for both men and women. This is similar for both and aligns more with the participative and possibly even the transformative styles of Leithwood et al. (pp. 31–32)

In the adjectives used to describe women’s leadership style, a number appear to fit nicely within transformational leadership, such as ‘collaborative,’ ’tolerant,’ ‘creative,’ being ‘aware of individual differences,’ as outlined in Gray’s (2003) gender paradigm chart (see also Table 1, above). It is not difficult to see how these skills and characteristics would benefit a principal hoping to build a collaborative culture in his/her school. Pittinsky et al. (2007) defined this form of leadership within the paradigm of the “great women theory of leadership…that is, arguments
that women are, for example, caring, nurturing, collaborative, and inclusive, thereby predisposing them to be effective leaders” (p. 94). If discourses around leadership effectiveness see these traits as potentially beneficial to leadership, then it follows that leaders would naturally want to possess these traits in order to be successful leaders, and would also wish to describe their leadership style in a manner consistent with these traits. What is interesting to note is that these traits are seen as positive, and, because they are largely associated with women, they put a positive spin on women’s leadership style.

Blackmore (1999) suggested that promoting a transformative leadership discourse has its drawbacks. Although it places women on a pedestal, celebrating and promoting leadership traits that are applied to women, it also creates universal truths that are difficult to undo. As she argued,

This “transformative essentialist” discourse, in appealing to notions of women’s moral superiority and concern for relationality, fails to address how feminist discourses themselves can be containing and disempowering in that they create their own meta-narratives or universal truths…discourses about women’s styles of leadership, in reifying care, can position women as self-sacrificing, and are prone to idealize women’s oppression. (Blackmore, 1999, pp. 58–59)

Here, Blackmore highlights the idea that situating women within this “transformative essentialist” realm of leadership only positions them in a place where their oppression from men is idealized. Dominant discourses of caring and compassionate women set up new universal norms and ways of leading successfully, such that men also take ownership of some of these female ways of leading. Blackmore (1999) challenged this approach further, stating that there are women who are controlling, women who are facilitators, and women who are both: “Women do not suddenly assume masculinist behaviours as leaders, leadership is learnt over a long period of time, and behaviours do not change unless conditions force that change” (p. 60). In pointing to the need for a redefinition of what it means to lead, Fuller (2010) made reference to Blackmore’s
work, stating, “Jill Blackmore called for a re-definition of power and leadership as acting with others and empowerment rather than control over others. This feminist conception of power opens the way to consider gender and school leadership for social justice in relation to diversity” (p. 364). Here again, Fuller makes a case for a feminist, post-structuralist approach to the study of gender and leadership, and speaks of the power/control dynamic that essentialist approaches promote and enhance.

The notion of power also comes up within the feminist literature around leadership. Reay and Ball (2000) commented on the fact that female headteachers (principals) are constantly having to counteract mainstream notions of management and power: “Indeed, female headteachers have to deal with, and act out, a number of contradictory and competing tendencies due to the conjunction of a gendered socialization which prepares women for relative powerlessness and a current occupational location invested with power” (p. 146). This research points to the struggle women feel in leadership positions between the social construction of the feminine as powerless and the wielding of power within headship (principalship). Women, in other words, are consistently positioned in relation to, rather than by, power (Reay and Ball, 2000). Similarly, in her study, Fennell (1999) wrote, “By examining how women lead and enact power within the principalship, alternative ways for conceiving and identifying power and the principalship will occur” (p. 47). Fennell (1999) studied power in three ways, defining them as “power over,” “power through,” and “power with” (p. 23). I argue that it is important to also consider the manner in which power acts upon the bodies of women and men, particularly in terms of their role and identity as principals. It is hoped that this post-structuralist approach will enable new power relations to be revealed and conceived.
The work of Fullan (2014) and Leithwood (1992) illustrates that transformative leadership has become a very popular form of leadership that seems to transcend gender norms and possibly promote a more androgynous notion of leadership. Yet, this movement further reduces both men and women to simplistic and limiting notions of leadership. What if we took the position that gender does not matter when it comes to leadership?

Some researchers deal with the intersections of gender and leadership by making the claim that stereotypical behaviours of male and female leaders do not matter. What matters is which behaviour will be most effective in any given situation (Meyerson, Ely, & Wernick, 2007). Some of these researchers turn to functional leadership as a way forward. For example, Banwart and McKinney (2005) criticized the great women theory of leadership for the manner in which it focuses on styles and traits of leadership rather than on functions.

The great women approach – with its group-based notions of gendered leadership – considers traits and styles rather than functions, and as a result is limiting as a framework. Leadership involves executing a certain number of functions – functions such as putting in place an enabling structure, setting a compelling direction, envisioning a desired end state and communicating this to others, thinking of non-obvious ways to accomplishing goals, securing resources or assistance needed to support group efforts, coaching, forecasting future conditions, and gathering information about goals and task requirements. All of these functions can be fulfilled in various ways, and can lead to achieving a leadership goal. The critical piece, for theory and practice, is that the function, rather than the behaviour or style (gendered or not), is the unit of analysis. (p. 115)

Here it is suggested that focusing on styles and traits of leadership misses the point. Instead, it is the function of leadership that informs its effectiveness. This takes us back to the discussion of Fullan’s (2014) work where he defines the actions and strategies that create an effective leader. Interestingly, Banwart and McKinney (2005) do not seem to discount gender entirely. However, they do separate it from the functional aspects of leadership, such as coaching, forecasting, and setting direction. This kind of focus is reminiscent of transactional leadership, which helps
people decide what needs to be done in order to reach desired outcomes. Transactional leadership is about the delivery or exchange of services for various rewards, such as salary and recognition (Leithwood, 1992, p. 9). It is suggested that researchers can tease out what it means to be an effective leader by simply focusing on the actions of leadership as opposed to any notion of style or behaviour. This type of leadership also discounts gender altogether, as does Fullan’s (2014) work. Further, its proponents argue that does not matter whether one is a man or a woman when one focuses on and analyzes the accomplished tasks that make one an effective leader. I find it difficult to accept this position, because, as is discussed within feminist research on leadership, it is very difficult to separate out the act of coaching, for example, from behaviours that enable coaching to occur. Does coaching not require “people skills” and hence involve so-called feminine ways of leading? And what about the notion of leadership as a performance?

One of the questions that also arises is why there is a need for a feminist approach to principal leadership. Fuller (2017) commented on this need through a lens of social justice and the underrepresentation of women in principalship:

This concern with women’s underappreciation in headship resonates with second wave feminist theory of equality which sought women’s equality with men in the workplace, and feminist theory of difference, which identified that women’s socio-cultural roles necessitated different approaches to career advancement (see Scott, 1988). In the twenty-first century, women’s underrepresentation in headship is a matter of social injustice, with women’s lack of parity of participation resulting in lack of recognition for their capacity for leadership and from lack of resource with which to achieve it. (p. 55)

What I think is most important to note here is that when both the current and historical underrepresentation of women within principalship are considered, it becomes clear how it affects the manner in which women are viewed within the role. If principalship was indeed designed for men and suited to so-called masculine ways of leading, then women would be challenged when entering the role and questioned in terms of their suitability and fitness for the
role. For this reason alone, a feminist approach is necessary if this injustice is to be both revealed and addressed. Schmuck, Hollingsworth, and Lock (2002) defined feminist scholarship in educational leadership as that which “focuses on the condition of females; articulates embedded assumptions about gender in organizational and interpersonal relationships; and provides theory and suggested action aimed at restructuring power relationships” (p. 93). With this thesis, I hope to reveal some of these embedded assumptions, as well as suggest a way forward through the use of agency. As I have stated above, a post-structuralist approach to school leadership will help in formulating some new ways of thinking about gender and leadership amongst principals.

The Post-Structuralist Approach to School Leadership

Niesche (2011) disrupted traditional understandings of educational leadership by making use of Foucault’s work on power. He followed two principals who documented their daily practices in their role, and then provided the following analysis:

Specifically, by theorising how principals are created subjects reveals how power and authority are critical to educational leadership. I move away from simplistic notions of power to show how Foucault’s notion of webs of power provides a more nuanced understanding of power that moves beyond hierarchy and position. Power is thus exercised to provide agency to principals that work against the normalizing discourses of education and leadership that focus on particular modes of performance and examination. The situatedness of the daily work practices of the principals is also illustrated through the disparity between the ways each of the principals’ actions were viewed by their local communities. It seems that current modes of governmentality tended to be more constraining than empowering as they are concerned with the managed self and thus tap into the desires of educational leaders to do well for their communities. (p. 138)

Niesche takes a post-structuralist approach to leadership, focusing not on functions or styles of leadership, but in a manner that explores the power relations that come into play for principals working in elementary schools. By positioning the principal as a subject, Niesche is able to point out how principals are affected or not affected by the power relations that they face every day. Niesche has thus opened a door into this new realm of studying educational leadership, which
provides a helpful means of determining the relationship between one’s gender and how one leads a school.

Similarly, Blackmore and Sachs (2007) further explored a post-structuralist approach to gender and educational restructuring. They engaged a feminist analysis, which enabled them to track and map out networks of power and influence during the process of educational restructuring and organizational change (p. 263). This particular study was about the experience of women leaders during a period of rapid changes to the educational system in Australia. The researchers found that,

For many of the women in this study, leadership in and of itself was not the issue, as they had been teachers and academic leaders throughout their lives, although more often in the mode of democratic (participatory) rather than distributed (delegated) leadership. However, formal positions of management were more problematic. This was because such positions imparted institutional legitimacy, often unwelcome, that changed their relationships with colleagues, students, management, and communities. Their systemic position in line management was premised upon authority rather than trust as in more participatory modes of governance and more reliant upon a negative use of power to change practice. (Blackmore and Sachs, 2007, pp. 267–68)

Here, the influence of power relations on principalship and on leaders in general is clear. Whereas the women felt comfortable as leaders and confident in their ability to lead, problems arose when they were systemically placed within a rather undemocratic space, where they were forced to enact change via delegation, as opposed to taking a more participatory approach. Moreover, Foucault’s notion of governmentality is at play, as these leaders were subjected to the authority of upper management, and in turn expected to exert that same authority upon those they were leading.

In this same study, Blackmore and Sachs (2007) made some interesting comments on the nature of leadership and positioned it within a post-structuralist framework. They explained,

Leadership is a set of performances and representations that are both familiar and that also distinguish the activities of some individuals from others in particular contexts.
Managers do leadership, and leaders manage. But in our study, the discourse of leadership was most often mobilized when referring to ethical ways of managing social and political relationships. Discourses of management were most often mobilized to gain strategic advantage and resources to create the social and material conditions in classrooms, lecture theatres, workshops, and meeting rooms that were conducive to teaching, learning, and research about organizing how to get things done. (pp. 266–67)

Understanding leadership as a social practice and as a performance is very important to my inquiry, because I believe that people bring multiple identities to their performance of leadership and that leadership is informed by these identities. It is within the performance of leadership that we are not only subjects within dominant discourses, but also individuals with agency. While much of the methodological approaches to gender and leadership have been qualitative (Oplatka, 2016, p. 11), there is a movement toward looking at how men and women “do” gender. Reay and Ball (2000) took the position that “a number of feminist texts on management and gender” focus on essentialist notions of what it means to lead as a woman. They argued that these texts work with essentialized notions of femininity in which homogenizing conceptions of what it means to be a female depict women as uniformly nurturant, affiliative and good at interpersonal relationships. In contrast, we suggest that gendered identities are in context more fluid and shifting than they are depicted in such texts. There are many different femininities and the form they take is powerfully shaped by the roles women undertake and the context within which they perform these roles. As a result, female leadership in practice frequently appears to be both more multi-faceted and more contradictory than the idealized depictions in some feminist texts. (p. 145)

It is clear that, like Fuller (2010), Reay and Ball (2000) were advocating for a post-structuralist stance, as it presents gender as fluid and ever-changing. To fully understand the intricate relationship between gender and leadership, one must move beyond the gender binary and engage in discourses of gender and leadership. Murakami and Tornsen (2017) recently made use of a feminist post-structuralist approach in their research on equity and the development of professional identities amongst female principals. This approach is helpful as it enables the researcher to analyze how identities are negotiated within and amongst often “competing and
interwoven discourses” (p. 811). A post-structuralist approach, then, provides an avenue through which to explore the relationship between gender and leadership.

Summary of Current Research

To summarize current research on gender and leadership in elementary schools, there are three main areas of focus. The first is research that focuses on historical stereotypes around how men and women lead. These studies tend to be based upon biological and sex differences between men and women, and describe, in detail, particular traits that men and women employ as leaders. There is not a great deal of support for this approach, as it is very limited and takes a very essentialist approach to leadership. The second is the non-stereotypical approach focusing on a more androgynous version of leadership. Movements such as the “great women theory of leadership” arose out of the lack of women taking on leadership roles in schools, but also in the business world. Historically, leadership research was primarily conducted using males, however, researchers began to conduct studies analyzing female leadership behaviours. Researchers have found that, “Particularly in qualitative studies that only examine female behaviours, women educational leaders are portrayed as committed to social justice, relationships, and instruction” (Shakeshaft, 2006, p. 505). This approach is thus just as reductive as the stereotypical approach. The third type involves those who claim that gender does not matter and that studies on leadership should focus only on the functional or action-oriented aspects of leadership. On a surface level, this kind of approach can work, however it is unclear how even these functional aspects of leadership can be completely separated from identity, in particular, gender identity.

Researchers such as Fuller (2010) and Reay and Ball (2000) have made the case for studies that position gender as fluid, and hence for a movement away from the binary. Questions around the fluidity of gender have led to a post-structuralist approach to the topic, which is in
line with the kind of approach I wish to take. Niesche and Gowlett (2015), commenting on the opportunities a post-structuralist approach provides, wrote: “Given that education is the modernist project par excellence, post-structuralist forms of critique have played an important role in unsettling and challenging particular claims to truth in education and educational discourse” (p. 374). Post-structuralism, in other words, provides an important opportunity to disrupt commonly held notions within education, to challenge them and present different approaches and ways of engaging in educational discourse. With this approach comes an awareness of the power relationships that present the principal as a subject. This approach understands leadership as both a social practice and a performance. My argument is that it is within this performance that the principal is subjected to dominant discourses around gender and leadership, but can also find opportunities to subvert these discourses and find agency.

One of the questions that arose during my review of the literature on gender and leadership was around whether to take a qualitative or quantitative approach to this study. As stated previously, much of the literature on gender and leadership has used a quantitative approach, however there has been a movement toward qualitative approaches. Coleman (2002) used both approaches by conducting both surveys and interviews, and has advocated for both kinds of research as a means of using the data to inform practice. As she wrote, “Studies of male and female communication show consistent difference in male and female speech which must surely affect the ways they manage and are perceived to manage” (p. 118). Although I appreciate the strengths that come with quantitative approaches, I use a qualitative approach in this thesis so that discourses of gender and leadership can be revealed through the interview process. In a tribute to Coleman’s body of research, Moorosi (2016) commented on the contribution Coleman has made to the field of women and leadership by focusing on challenges, choices and change,
writing, “These are challenges that women face in pursuing their leadership career and choices that they make along the way and … these challenges and choices influence change – change in the organizations and change in people’s attitudes towards gender and work” (p. 250). Coleman (as cited in Moorosi, 2016) paved the way for an understanding of the issues faced by women in leadership roles, and at the same time, made suggestions around how to move forward with this knowledge. This kind of approach leads to categorizing the research discussed within this literature review into the realms of empirical and normative literature. Empirical research is largely data driven and involves surveys, whereas the normative research is more focused on theoretical notions. The following table will not only help to demonstrate the differences between these approaches, but also make a case for the need for more theoretical, post-structuralist approaches in this field of study. Studies are organized in the table depending upon whether they focused on the results of surveys or took on a more theoretical or post-structuralist approach.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Empirical</th>
<th>Non-Stereotypical Approach</th>
<th>“There are no Differences Camp”</th>
<th>Feminist Approach to School Leadership</th>
<th>Post-Structuralist Approach to School Leadership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stereotypical Approach</strong></td>
<td>- Meta-analysis on gender and leadership (Eagly, Karau, &amp; Johnson, 1992)</td>
<td>- Survey of male and female headteachers, who chose between stereotypical adjectives to describe their leadership (Coleman, 2003)</td>
<td>- Empirical research reveals small differences between male and female leadership styles, and that the results of these empirical studies are overemphasized (Pittinsky, Bacon, &amp; Welle, 2007)</td>
<td>- Post-structuralist studies of school leadership were not found</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Use of only male subjects in leadership studies leads to bias (Applebaum, Audet, &amp; Miller, 2003)</td>
<td>- Coleman (2003) found that effective leadership is</td>
<td>- Feminist empirical studies of school leadership were not found</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Shakeshaft (2006) called for</td>
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the use of female subjects, as traditional studies are from male perspective
- Empirical study of women in leadership (Skrla, 2006)
- Masculine leadership traits dominate job adverts (Askehave and Korning Zethsen, 2014)

| Normative | - Normative studies not found | - Normative studies not found | - Normative studies not found | - Transformational leadership (Leithwood, 1992)
- placing women within transformational leadership, which, on the one hand, promotes female ways of leading only further regulates women in terms of the binary (Blackmore, 1999)
- Reay and Ball (2000) and Fennell (1999) analyze power in principalship and the implications for women | - Focus on the power relations that work and act upon the principal (Niesche, 2011)
- Understanding leadership as a social practice and performance through a feminist lens (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007)
- Fuller (2010, 2017) makes a case for post-structural approaches to gender and leadership and for the importance of using a social justice lens
- Murakami and Tomsen (2017) make use of feminist post-structural analysis to reveal the manner in which female principals negotiate their identities |

Table 2 demonstrates that empirical research around the relationship between gender and school leadership has primarily centred around stereotypical, non-stereotypical, or androgynous
approaches to leadership. The criticism of this approach is that it focuses on supposed
differences between the way men and women lead, and, according to Pittinsky et al. (2007),
these differences become overemphasized in such studies. Alternatively, the feminist and post-
structuralist approaches take a normative or theoretical stance, bringing into question the
assumptions made around how men and women are different and the various power relationships
at play within principalship. This body of research encourages one to view leadership as a
performance and social practice (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007), rather than as an expression of
stereotypical leadership traits. It is interesting to note that feminist and post-structuralist
approaches to this research are not empirical, but rather theoretical. During my exploration of
current research on gender and leadership, I did not find many studies that have taken a post-
structuralist approach to understanding how gender affects leadership, or research that conducts a
critical discourse analysis of principal interviews. Much of the research that I found most helpful
came out of Australia in the work of Niesche (2011), Blackmore (1999) and Coleman (2003). In
particular, the work of Niesche and Blackmore was most helpful in developing a post-
structuralist approach to this topic, given the fact that other examples of such an approach to
educational leadership could not be found. Much of the research I found asked principals to fill
out surveys and answer questions about their leadership style, as is evident in the above table.
These studies then analyzed the responses and made conclusions about gender differences in
leadership. These surveys revealed interesting findings, however they do not necessarily bring
into question the many assumptions that are made about the manner in which men and women
lead. For example, asking principals or educational leaders to choose between various adjectives
to describe their leadership limits the leader’s responses to the adjectives that are provided for
them. In order to arrive at a more fulsome understanding of how principals enact and perform
their leadership in relation to their gender, I think it is important to engage principals in a
dialogue about the issue. It is through discourse that individuals perform and reveal the way they
perceive their role as principals, and I hope that, through engaging in a discourse around gender
and leadership, much will be revealed. This study will tease out what principals actually think
about and understand to be true when they ponder how gender affects their leadership.

This literature review has confirmed my hypothesis that some researchers define
leadership style based upon stereotypes about men and women that still seem to be widely
accepted in society. If these stereotypes were not widely accepted, then, in my case as principal,
no one would make such a statement as, “Thank goodness you are a man.” Other researchers
have determined that effective leadership is a mixture of both male and female leadership styles.
As I have discussed, while on the surface, this approach may seem non-stereotypical, it relies on
very limited notions of what it means to lead like a man or a woman. And still other researchers
turn away from gender completely and promote a leadership style that is gender free. Yet, within
these frameworks, we find hegemony, as the role of the principal is continually represented as
being the role of a male. This explains the fact that much of the research on gender and
leadership is actually about women as leaders and the challenges they face. As a result, this
literature review has presented the issue of gender and leadership as being about sexism rather
than gender. Indeed, much of the research presents female ways of leading as inferior to that
which is considered to be successful leadership, or male ways of leading. Moreover, even when
attempts are made to take gender out of the picture through movements such as transformational
leadership, for example, women continue to find themselves at a disadvantage, being relegated to
feminine ways of leading.
In this study, I turn to post-structuralist theory as a means of breaking through these gendered stereotypes. I did not intend, however, to speak with principals about whether or not they thought sexism is rampant within how school leadership is understood and perceived. I felt that responses to such questions might be quite typical and thus not reveal enough about the way gender and leadership intersect. For this research, I was far more interested in how the principals perceived their gender in relation to their role as principals. This is why I interviewed both men and women, in order to get a fulsome picture of the manner in which gender and leadership intersect. I was hopeful that the discourse with principals around gender and leadership through an understanding of leadership as a performance would reveal the myriad of discourses that act upon the principal, and how they both limit the principal and encourage agency. As the remainder of this thesis will illustrate, asking principals to talk about how they see their leadership style and their gender intersecting reveals a great deal about new possibilities for looking at gender and leadership.
Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

Overview

This chapter recounts the theoretical framework I employed for this study, a post-structuralist framework based primarily upon the work of Foucault (1977, 1978), Connell (1987), and Butler (1990). First, I used Foucault’s understanding of disciplinary power and governmentality to describe how discourses regulate and work upon our bodies. Next, I made use of Connell’s approach when discussing how hegemonic masculinity gets weaved into and through society. Finally, I explored Butler’s conception of gender as a performance, as well as her notion of agency. Key concepts and terms such as disciplinary power, hegemony, and gender are explored and defined so as to clearly delineate my theoretical position.

Theoretical Framework

In my research on educational leadership and gender, I have found that there has been very little work done in terms of taking a post-structuralist approach to leadership. As I discussed in my previous chapters, I chose post-structuralism as an approach because I believe that it provides opportunities to look at leadership in different ways, rather than as a series of strategies that make one successful at leading. Post-structuralism is said to be “useful for both critiquing from within and also opening up new lines of analysis beyond traditional frameworks and approaches” (Niesche & Gowlett, 2015, p. 375). It provides a space to critique and deconstruct the social phenomena of leadership in ways that traditional theoretical approaches do not. Niesche (2011) applied Foucault’s theories of power relations and subjectification to educational leadership, and commented that,

While the use of Foucault has been extensive in educational research generally, there has been very little use of his work specifically in the field of educational leadership. However, Foucault’s work can be valuable for providing fresh insights
into our understandings of principals’ work and principals’ subjectivities. By examining the principal as a site of power relations and exploring principal subjectivities, it becomes possible to find the cracks and spaces in which principals are able to operate within normalizing discursive regimes such as leadership frameworks and self-management. (p. 3)

Foucault’s work can be very helpful when teasing out the power relations that come into play within principalship. At the heart of understanding these power relations is looking at discourses of educational leadership and self-management and the way they normalize and regulate the principal. In my articulation of the problem that occurs with leadership and gender, I make reference to the importance of discourses around leadership. It is important to understand that many theories and discourses of leadership are, in fact, masculine in the ways they are interpreted and carried out. The result is that women are then expected to take on these masculine ideals and enact them as principals in schools. In the words of Judith Butler (1990), “to be a woman within the terms of a masculinist culture is to be a source of mystery and unknowability for men” (p. vii). Already, one can see that this becomes troubling. It is important to also note that discourses not only constrain and limit, but they also provide a space/place for possibilities and the formation of new meanings and opportunities. Stephen Ball (1990) said of discourses that,

Meanings thus arise not from language but from institutional practices, from power relations. Words and concepts change their meaning and their effects as they are deployed within different discourses. Discourses constrain the possibilities of thought. They order and combine words in particular ways and exclude or displace other combinations. However, insofar as discourses are constituted by exclusions as well as inclusions, by what cannot as well as what can be said, they stand in antagonistic relationship to other discourses, other possibilities of meaning, other claims, rights, and positions. (p. 2)

This notion of the possibilities that lie within discourse is very important to this study, because I look at how discourses around leadership have continued to be based upon limited notions of what it means to be a leader – namely, masculine, white, and heterosexual (Blackmore, 1999). I
take the position that it is important to take up new discourses that challenge these limited notions. If it is the case that female principals find themselves subjected to masculine discourses around how to lead, new and resistant discourses need to be created.

**Disciplinary power.**

One cannot talk about discourse without first exploring disciplinary power. In writing of this phenomenon, Foucault (1977) made reference to the “examination,” which, historically, has taken up a very prominent position within our educational system, suggesting that it provides a space to regulate bodies:

Disciplinary power, on the other hand, is exercised through its invisibility; at the same time it imposes on those whom it subjects a principle of compulsory visibility. In discipline, it is the subjects who have to be seen. Their visibility assures the hold of the power that is exercised over them. It is the fact of being constantly seen, of being able always to be seen, that maintains the disciplined individual in his subjection. And the examination is the technique by which power, instead of emitting the signs of its potency, instead of imposing its mark on its subjects, holds them in a mechanism of objectification. In this space of domination, disciplinary power manifests its potency, essentially, by arranging objects. The examination is, as it were, the ceremony of this objectification. (p. 187)

It is my experience as a principal that we are constantly under examination by teachers, parents, the broader community, and, of course, our superiors within the school board. It is widely accepted that the principal of the school is meant to be a visible fixture within the school. In fact, one might say that the principal is subject to a “principle of compulsory visibility.” If we understand this to be true, then it follows that, given Foucault’s notion of disciplinary power, power is in fact exercised over the principal on a daily basis by virtue of his/her visibility. In this way, the principal is objectified. It is important to recognize that the principal is subject to a disciplinary power that judges and measures his/her effectiveness. In fact, Foucault (1977) referred to the individual as being “described, judged, measured, compared with others, in his [sic] very individuality; and it is also the individual who has to be trained or corrected, classified,
normalized, excluded etc.” (p. 191). This description of the individual as subject to disciplinary power clarifies how a principal is judged, measured, and compared with others.

The question becomes: against what standard is the individual being measured? Foucault (1977) suggested that one is measured by whatever is seen as the “norm”: “as power becomes more anonymous and more functional, those on whom it is exercised tend to be more strongly individualized; it is exercised by surveillance rather than ceremonies, by observation rather than commemorative accounts, by comparative measures that have the ‘norm’ as reference rather than genealogies giving ancestors points of reference” (p. 193). Here, Foucault illustrates how power is enacted upon the individual through surveillance and the extent to which one is compared to whatever happens to be the “norm.” He also refers to the anonymity and functionality of power, which make the subject increasingly individualized. It must be remembered, however, that one is only an individual as far as one can be trained, normalized, and classified. If the principal is understood to be such an individual, then it follows that the surveillance of the principal by staff, community and the school board, subjects them to disciplinary power. Moreover, each of these bodies – staff, parents, and superiors – would have different notions and expectations around how the principal’s role is enacted. Hence, the principal is under the surveillance of a number of different sources of power, all exercising themselves upon him/her, determining his/her effectiveness or worthiness to be in that particular role. This is evidenced in Foucault’s definition of the examination: “The examination combines the techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of a normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify, and to punish. It establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them” (1977, p. 197). As I have shown within my conceptualization of the problem in this study, this examination extends to the way others expect the principal to perform his/her role as
per their gender. Discourses around how men and women are “supposed” to lead further regulate the principal. I suggest in this thesis that it is through the “normalizing gaze” that the principal is judged and/or punished, according to the extent to which he/she “measures up” to gendered expectations around how he/she must act and carry out his/her duties.

At this point, it appears that there is no hope, that we are all subjects of disciplinary power. However, for Foucault (1978), “Where there is power, there is resistance” (p. 95). In fact, there is a plurality of resistances that can only exist within power relations (p. 96). Foucault viewed this resistance as being possible through discourse:

Indeed, it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together. And for this reason, we must conceive discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable. To be more precise, we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies…Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. (1978, pp. 100–101)

Although the principal is subject to a number of different discourses that regulate and determine how he/she will act and carry out his/her duties, therein lies the possibility to thwart these discursive elements and create new ones. This is not to suggest that all discursive elements at play in principalship are negative, as there are a number of discourses that most people would agree reflect the common good. For example, most would agree that the principal should be concerned about the welfare of the children under his/her care, particularly in terms of the opportunities that are provided for the children to learn. Principals would agree that their job is to act and make decisions that are in the best interest of the children they serve. Discourses of leadership become problematic, however, when they reflect the expectation that both men and women should live up to standards of leadership that are nearly impossible to achieve. For
example, I have shown how women are expected to adhere to and enact a masculine form of leadership. This becomes a nearly impossible task, because as women try and enact this dominant form of leadership, they are labelled as “bitchy” and considered unsuccessful as leaders (Pittinsky et al., 2007). It is these discourses that require unpacking. Foucault’s argument was that although discourses transmit and produce power, they also undermine and expose it. It is in these moments that we can perhaps form new discourses. The problem is deciding upon which discourses should be created around gender and principal leadership. Do we expect all principals, whether male or female, to adhere to the same discourse of principal leadership? Male and female principals are generally understood to lead their schools in different ways. As I have discussed, however, leadership is largely presented within a masculine construct, and, as a result, men and women approach principal leadership in different ways. Hence, in a quite circular fashion, these differences in leadership style and approach become measured against masculine notions of leadership. I argue that, in order to change these masculinist notions of principal leadership, both men and women need to resist these notions. This presents a challenge. Given the propensity of these masculinist frameworks, one might assume that men enjoy the privileges that come with leading within a masculinist framework, while women work to fit into this framework and perform their leadership roles as best they can. This challenge adds to the complexity of this issue and will be examined from the perspective of both male and female principals in chapters five and six.

**Governmentality / management.**

Foucault’s notion of governmentality is helpful for beginning to explore issues of power relations and how they affect the way principals carry out their duties. Niesche (2011) stated the importance of understanding principals as being subject to the practices of government, but also
as vehicles through which government regulates the population (p. 33). Similarly, Ball (1990) used the word “management” to describe controlling and classifying those who work in education: “Management provides a paradigm case of a disciplinary technology, a form of bio-power, which employs scientific categories and explicit calculation to objectify the body – the worker – and to render individuals docile and pliable” (p. 7). I have presented the many ways in which the principal is subject to discourses around leadership. However, it is important to note that while the principal is subject to these discourses, he/she, in carrying out his/her management role, in turn subjectifies those under his/her control. Ultimately, this additional form of control or power has an impact on the staff and the children within the school, as the principal manages the operations of the school.

To understand how this plays out within a Foucauldian perspective, the next step is to look at his notion of bio-power. Foucault (1978) wrote that, with the advent of capitalism came: “an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations, marking the beginning of an era of ‘bio-power’…With regard to discipline, this development was embodied in institutions such as the army and the schools, and in reflections on tactics, apprenticeship, education, and the nature of societies” (p. 140). In this passage, Foucault refers to the creation of bio-power as a means of regulating and controlling the population through government. In fact, he stated that it is an “indispensable element in the development of capitalism” (Foucault, 1978, pp. 140–41). In order for capitalism to be successful, bodies needed to be controlled as part of a larger system of economic productivity and processes. To understand this notion as it relates to the role of the principal, it is important to note that the education system is a by-product of bio-power. It was formed as a means of further
regulating and controlling the population in order to ensure that the appropriate power relations were employed. Foucault (1978) wrote of these power relations:

If the development of the great instruments of the state, as institutions of power, ensured the maintenance of production relations, the rudiments of anatomo- and bio-politics, created in the eighteenth century as techniques of power present at every level of the social body and utilized by very diverse institutions (the family and the army, schools and the police, individual medicine and the administration of collective bodies), operated in the sphere of economic processes, their development, and the forces working to sustain them. They also acted as factors of segregation and social hierarchization, exerting their influence on the respective forces of both these movements, guaranteeing relations of domination and effects of hegemony. (p. 141; italics original)

If the education system is understood as an “institution of power,” as described above, then we can begin to see how the principal, as an agent of the institution, regulates bodies. To go even further, the principal maintains the power relations that are at play within the system as a means of sustaining and supporting the economic/capitalist system. This is interesting to consider within this thesis because this notion of the “institution of power” speaks to the kinds of influence that principals’ attitudes and decisions can have on the students and staff in their schools. For example, if a principal is to exhibit and promote hegemony, surely this will impact those with whom he/she works.

Ball (1990) shed some light on the concept of management using Foucault’s notion of discourse and the regulation of the subject, writing that,

As a discourse, a system of possibility for knowledge, it eschews or marginalizes the problems, concerns, difficulties, and fears of “the subject” – the managed. The management subject is the objectified product of organization, authority, and responsibility. The limits and possibilities of action and meaning are precisely determined by position and expertise in the management structure. (p. 157)

It is clear, then, that in the process of the subject being managed, the subject’s concerns and fears are marginalized. Further, one’s degree of control or authority is completely dependent upon
one’s placement within the hierarchy of power. In other words, one’s expertise and/or position within the hierarchy determines the level to which one can take action. For example, it is one thing for the director of the school board to make a decision about what must be done, but it is an entirely different experience making that decision a reality in the classroom. Recall, however, Foucault’s (1978) finding that even within these power relations, there are opportunities for resistance. Moreover, Ball (1990) took the position that these opportunities relate to one’s expertise and position within the management structure. This is where I think the principal has a unique position within the education system – that opportunities for resistance lie within principalship. Indeed, the principal is subject to a number of discourses that regulate him/her. However, I believe that this also provides a space in which new discourses can be created and tested. Hierarchical structures certainly do exist within our education system. However, within these systems there also exists a fluidity where negotiations happen. This fluidity becomes clear when gender is inserted into the mix. For example, it is easy to see how Ball’s (1990) description of the management structure is very masculine in its “top-down” and authoritative approach. In a more current day and popular culture example, Sheryl Sandberg (2013), chief operating officer of Facebook and author of *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*, has commented that gender lurks beneath the surface in our work lives. On her experience in the workplace, she wrote, “But while gender was not openly acknowledged, it was still lurking below the surface. I started to see differences in attitudes towards women. I started noticing how often employees were judged not by their objective performance, but by the subjective standard of how well they fit in” (p. 143). This speaks to the way women are expected to fit into a mould created by men. Sandberg (2013) also described a time when she tried to smoke cigars with her male counterparts, as an example of how she tried to meet the standards set out for her. (p. 143).
Thinking about women fitting into a male or masculine space leads to a discussion of conceptions of gender and gender discourses, the next topic.

**Gender.**

To understand the impact gender has on leadership, it is important to first look at how people view gender and what are perceived as gender differences in society. It is critical when writing and speaking of gender that one makes the distinction between sex and gender. Sussman (2012) helpfully described how sex and gender are often conflated when in fact they are quite separate.

A person is born within the male sex or the female sex, although, as we shall discuss, for some persons and in some cultures, even this sharp biological distinction can be problematic. Gender, on the other hand, describes the expectations or definitions established by society for behaviour by persons of a specific sex. In common usage, however, gender is often used for what we are here calling sex, as in the term gender discrimination. (pp. 1-2; emphasis original)

Here, Sussman presents gender as a social construction and separates it out from biological sex. Gender is about the expectations society places upon persons of each sex around acting and behaving in a certain manner. Sussman (2012) also pointed out that it is easy and often destructive to link biological sex and behaviour (p. 2), as can be seen in statements such as “boys will be boys” and “don’t throw like a girl.” These are simplistic, and, quite frankly, ignorant comments that only serve to relegate girls and boys to essentialist ideals. Sussman (2012) further wrote that “Being born within the female sex does not necessarily mean that women are naturally subservient to men, uncontrollably emotional, and poor at math. But we have been reluctant to apply this distinction to men. Men are still seen within a hormonal theory, as driven by

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2 I recognize that this biological distinction is troublesome, especially when we consider those who identify as transgender, for example. This statement, as simple as it appears, is my attempt to distinguish between what is meant by the terms sex and gender for the purposes of this thesis, but I do not suggest that it encompasses the intricacies that exist.
testosterone” (p. 2). Hence, it is not the sex to which one is born that determines how one will behave, but rather the manner in which one’s gender has been socially constructed and is then worked upon both male and female bodies. In this thesis, the word gender is used to mean the way each biological sex is expected to behave as socially constructed. Indeed, the dangers of conflating these separate notions of gender and sex will be revealed, as I report on how the principals involved in this study engaged in what I refer to as gendered discourses, where the hegemony at work within principalship is uncovered. As a society, we often take the approach that men and women are equal, and that gone are the days when women were discriminated against (as is presumed to be the case within the postfeminist movement). However, when we begin to look at hegemonic notions of gender, we find a very different picture.

R. W. Connell (1987) defined two terms that are integral to this issue, “hegemonic masculinity” and “emphasized femininity.” The foundation of Connell’s work is an understanding that in our society, forms of masculinity and femininity are structured and constituted based upon the global dominance that men have over women (p. 183). In order to see how this occurs, it is important to understand what is meant by hegemony. As Connell wrote,

In the concept of hegemonic masculinity, “hegemony” means a social ascendancy achieved in a play of social forces that extends beyond contests of brute power into the organization of private life and cultural processes. Ascendancy of one group of men over another achieved at the point of a gun, or by the threat of unemployment, is not hegemony. Ascendancy which is embedded in religious doctrine and practice, mass media content, wage structures, the design of housing, welfare/taxation policies and so forth, is. (1987, p. 184)

It is clear here that hegemony is not about who has the power or physical prowess over another. Anyone can wield a gun, and thereby has the power to harm others. This power, however, is momentary and fleeting. Connell is talking here about hegemony as something that is woven into the very fabric of society. It is present in both our private and public lives. It transcends religion,
politics, the workplace, and so on. Hegemonic masculinity, in other words, makes clear that within the very fabric of society, men have the advantage just by virtue of being men. In fact, men do not even have to actually live up to the notion of what it means to be a man. On this, Connell wrote that, “the cultural ideal (or ideals) of masculinity need not correspond at all closely to the actual personalities of the majority of men. Indeed, the winning of hegemony often involves the creation of models of masculinity which are quite specifically fantasy figures, such as the film characters played by Humphrey Bogart, John Wayne and Sylvester Stallone” (Connell, 1987, pp. 184–85). Certainly, not many men can live up to the personalities and performances of masculinity that we see on the big screen. In fact, there really is no expectation that men will live up to these “pictures of masculinity” – they simply have to buy into them and promote them.

Just as hegemony is certainly alive within our society, so too is it present within principalship. As discussed above, a report written by the Ontario Principals’ Council, historically in Ontario, women did not have access to principalship for much of the 20th century, and when they did become principals, they were not paid the same wage as their male counterparts (Shilton, 2015, p. 2). Hegemony, then, has historically inhabited the system of how principals are selected and paid. In order to understand this issue further, and trace how it might have come into being, it is necessary to look at Connell’s (1987) notion of “emphasized femininity,” described as

the global subordination of women to men that provides an essential basis for differentiation. One form is defined around compliance with this subordination and is oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men. I will call this “emphasized femininity”. Others are defined centrally by strategies of resistance or forms of non-compliance. Others again are defined by complex strategic combinations of compliance, resistance and cooperation. The interplay among them is a major part of the dynamics of change in the gender order as a whole. (pp. 183–84)
“Emphasized femininity” thus refers to everyone’s compliance to the subordination of women by men, and allows for and accommodates the desires of men. There are, however, other forms of femininity with either resistance to this domination or that combine compliance and resistance. As women find themselves in a situation where they are subject to hegemonic masculinity and hence dominated by men, there are spaces within these relationships in which women have no choice but to cooperate with this domination; at the same time, these spaces also contain opportunities to resist it. Notably, Connell (1987) suggested that hegemonic masculinity does not necessarily mean that men are being cruel toward women.

Women may feel as oppressed by non-hegemonic masculinities, may even find the hegemonic pattern more familiar and manageable. There is likely to be a kind of “fit” between hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity. What it does imply is the maintenance of practices that institutionalize men’s dominance over women. In this sense, hegemonic masculinity must embody a successful collective strategy in relation to women. Given the complexity of gender relations no simple or uniform strategy is possible: a “mix” is necessary. So, hegemonic masculinity can contain at the same time, quite consistently, openings towards domesticity and openings towards violence, towards misogyny and towards heterosexual attraction. (pp. 185–86)

Hegemonic masculinity is constructed in relation to women as well as subordinated masculinities. To enable the achievement of dominance over women, it successfully contains within it an openness to femininity, and also includes within its parameters domestic chores and other aspects of life that are usually associated with femininity. However, it also embodies notions that dominate women. Applying this notion to principalship, it is clear that the role of principal has been opened up to women, as more and more women have begun to lead schools. However, this role remains within the domain of men. Spaces have been created within the role where women can inhabit it and conduct the business of running a school, just as long as they do not begin to take on too many “male” qualities of leadership.
It is important to position femininity in relation to hegemonic masculinity as it is created in relation to hegemonic masculinity. As Connell (1987) wrote,

Femininity organized as an adaptation of men’s power, and emphasizing compliance, nurturance and empathy as womanly virtues, is not much of a state to establish hegemony over other kinds of femininity…They must rely heavily on religious ideology and on political backing from conservative men. The relations they establish with other kinds of femininity are not so much domination as attempted marginalization. (p. 188)

Connell seems to be suggesting here that forms of femininity are continually created in relation to male power and domination. Even when women try to carve out a piece of what it means to be a woman, they are doing so in relation to what men demand from them. In her article on the feminization of teaching, Griffiths (2006) wrote, in response to concerns about the feminization of schooling, that “there is one, clearly dominant masculinity…hegemonic masculinity. There is no equivalent hegemonic femininity. It is hegemonic masculinity that is a problem” (p. 403; emphasis original). We see this anxiety around the feminization of schooling and the curriculum, for example, and the impact on students, in particular, in terms of failing boys (Martino and Rezai-Rashti, 2012) comes about in response to the fact that most teachers are female. This anxiety suggests that there exists a dominant, hegemonic femininity that pervades our school systems, however, as Griffiths (2006) has pointed out, such a femininity does not exist.

Hegemonic masculinity is the problem. When women take on roles that are meant for – as in designed for – men, such as principalship, they have to formulate an identity and enact a performance that enables them to navigate and be successful within a role that was never created for them in the first place. Some might say that women have broken free from hegemony, as they are taking up principalship, and certainly, in some cases, they do outnumber the men in the role. Hegemonic masculinity remains, however, and women are continually having to navigate its
dominating presence. It is at this point that the question of masculinity and how it is related to femininity arises.

Sussman (2012) made clear that the idea of masculinity really only exists insofar as it is presumably the opposite of femininity: “Men are men in that they are not women. But if females no longer act in conventionally feminine ways and instead act in conventionally masculine ones, then the difference that grounds masculine identity simply disappears” (p. 154). It is in this way that masculinity can and does get performed not only by men, but also by women. For example, when women take up roles designed and created for men, such as principalship, they begin to take on stereotypically masculine traits. However, women ‘wear’ these traits differently than men, and so what results is a “crisis in masculinity.” Greig and Martino (2012) referred to this “crisis in masculinity discourse” as it appears in various media and public institutions such as education (p. 1). Underpinning this crisis is the perspective that men are now at a disadvantage somehow and that women have achieved full equality (Greig & Martino, 2012, p. 2). Examples of this crisis of masculinity play out in our school system, particularly when it comes to boys and their academic achievement levels. Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2012) examined arguments made in support of the notion that our school system is failing boys, and came to the conclusion that “the discourse of ‘failing boys’ is couched and framed in terms of a reform agenda committed to reinstating boys as certain sorts of essentialized gender subjects” (p. 162). This is an example of the dangers that lie in determining differences between males and females based upon biological sex. They went on to state, “These sorts of theories feed into ‘common sense’ and taken-for-granted notions about differences between boys and girls that are explained as ‘biological givens.’ There is no attempt to engage with the fact that there are differences among boys as a group and that these differences cannot be accounted for adequately in terms of their sexed
bodies” (Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012, p. 168). As these authors argue, this kind of discourse, then, assumes that all boys fit into a very neatly packed box which is masculinity, and hence, because some boys might be failing, all boys must be failing. It also assumes that girls have surpassed boys in our school system, that they are equal to boys in every way, and, in fact, that they have even gained an advantage at the expense of boys. With this thesis, I reveal how this “crisis in masculinity” also emerges within the realm of principal as the number of women in the role begin to outnumber the men, as well as the discomfort amongst both men and women when female principals begin to use and take on what are perceived as masculine qualities. These are the kinds of discourses that emerge when we limit our understanding of gender to biological sex. Gender needs to be understood as a fluid and changing phenomenon – as a performance.

At this point, it is helpful to look at Butler (1990) and her understanding of gender. Her book Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity begins with a discussion around what constitutes or should constitute the “category of women” (p. 1). Butler referred to the notion of the subject as understood by Foucault, and the systems of power that produce and regulate the subject. Using this understanding of the subject, Butler (1990) wrote:

Apart from the foundationalist fictions that support the notion of the subject, however, there is the political problem that feminism encounters in the assumption that the term women denotes a common identity. Rather than a stable signifier that commands the assent of those whom it purports to describe and represent, women, even in the plural, has become a troublesome term, a site of contest, a cause for anxiety….If one “is” a woman, that is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive, not because a pregendered “person” transcends the specific paraphernalia of its gender, but because gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. As a result, it becomes impossible to separate out “gender” from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained. (p. 3)
In this passage, Butler points to a number of issues that come up when we are talking about gender. First, as a society, we tend to define terms such as “women,” and I will venture to also say “men,” as denoting a group with a common identity. As I have shown in my articulation of the problem to be explored in this thesis, we ascribe both women and men certain traits that are meant to define them and their identity as leaders. Butler has agreed that all individuals are subjects and hence are subjectified by the power relations that work to regulate them. Gender is constructed, produced, and maintained within political and cultural intersections, and it is clearly not sufficient to simply say that all women or all men behave, act, and are represented in the same ways. Given Butler’s argument, what do we do now with hegemonic masculinity?

To begin to untangle the issue, it is important to outline Butler’s (1990) reference to gender as a performance:

In this sense, gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence. Hence, within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative – that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed….There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results. (pp. 24–5)

Understanding gender as a performance positions it quite differently than within the context of attributes of gender. Women and men do not adhere to particular attributes that define their gender. They perform their gender, and this performance is regulated through the adherence to practices of gender within our society. Gender identity, then, is created through the performance of gender and is defined by the way gender is expressed. It is important to note that this performance of gender is “compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence” (Butler, 1990, p. 24). Women and men are performing their genders according to societal expectations
around how gender should be performed. The attributes of gender still exist in society; however, they do not constitute gender. It is the performance of gender that constitutes it. This notion has a huge impact on how we view gender. In order to continue this examination of gender performance and its meaning and impact, the next step is to dig a little deeper into Butler’s notion of performativity.

As I have shown in my discussion of masculinity, gender is not sex. It is a performance, which means that it involves acts and gestures. On these, Butler (1990) wrote:

In other words, acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this on the surface of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality….In other words, acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality….If the inner truth of gender is a fabrication and if a true gender is a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies, then it seems that genders can be neither true nor false, but are only produced as the truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity. (p. 136)

To deconstruct this statement, our performed gestures and acts are produced on the surface of the body and are construed through discursive means. They give the illusion that they represent some inner gendered identity that is revealing itself to the world. This illusion is present as it enables us to regulate our sexuality within a limited notion of heterosexuality. Yet, Butler suggests here that there is no true or false form of gender, except that which is produced as a result of discourses around identity. In adding to this notion, Butler stated, “Significantly, if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the
mode of belief” (1990, p. 141). Gender is thus a constructed identity that is both constructed and performed through gestures and acts that have nothing to do with any internal identity. The performance is believable, however, not only to the “social audience,” but also to the person enacting his/her gender. This is also true of hegemonic masculinity, as it is a discourse of male domination that is instituted through acts and gestures made by both men and women. It, too, is not based upon any true notion of what it means to be a man or a woman, but instead is performed and enacted on the surface of our bodies, regulating how gender is performed. This suggests, then, that notions of masculinity and femininity are also performances and constructions, and do not represent true identity.

I argue in this thesis that there must be a way to critically examine the manner in which we enact and perform our gender – to intercept it, question it and respond to it in a way that does not make us subject to its power and influence. It must be possible to be affected by the discourse, but not be totally defined by it. Butler (1990) saw a way forward through agency, of which she said:

The question of locating “agency” is usually associated with the viability of the “subject”, where the “subject” is understood to have some stable existence prior to the cultural field that it negotiates. Or, if the subject is culturally constructed, it is nevertheless vested with an agency, usually figured as the capacity for reflexive mediation, that remains intact regardless of its cultural embeddedness. On such a model, “culture” and “discourse” mire the subject, but do not constitute that subject. (p. 143)

It seems that whether or not the subject has agency depends upon the subject’s ability to mediate the power relations and discourse enacted upon that subject. Discourse may impede the subject in terms of agency, but it does not define the subject in the way it means to. Butler (1990) took the position that agency cannot exist without these constructed identities, writing that:

Construction is not opposed to agency; it is the necessary scene of agency, the very terms in which agency is articulated and becomes culturally
Butler suggests here that it is through construction that new identities can be formulated. By engaging in the repetitive acts and gestures that constitute gender identity, one is able to find subversive acts and gestures that contest these constructions. Subversive repetitions then provide the subject with agency in order to put into question and ultimately displace the very gender norms in which the subject was participating. Subversion may take the form of a political statement, an intentional “act” against the discourses that regulate us. Whatever its form, it is a series of purposeful acts that constitute identity and ultimately contest gender norms. Butler (1990) also referred to the critical task for feminism as being to locate and seek out opportunities for subversive repetition. Further, Sussman (2012) commented on opportunities for men to also explore new ways of being.

The scripts of manliness and the possibilities for male lives have multiplied and shifted with an increasing acceleration. Recent liberation movements – black, women’s and gay – have surely challenged traditional masculinity and the self-esteem of those men who inhabit such conventional identities. Yet these movements have also opened the possibility of liberation in the lives of men. Although there are external and internalized pressures to confirm to the traditions of manliness, there is a potential, perhaps not yet fully realized, to invent new forms of manliness. (p. 157)

It is precisely these moments of subversion that have opened the door not only toward new ways of understanding and performing the feminine, but the masculine as well. Indeed, there are many discursive powers working on our bodies, however we have the potential and the ability to subvert these discourses and create new ones. As stated earlier, I believe that principalship is one area that provides an opportunity to explore and discover this subversive agency.
However one conceptualizes the gendered prison where we often find ourselves, it is important to remember that resistance is possible. Griffiths (2006) suggested that it is through feminist ideals and movements that change and progress can be made: “Some current feminized practices are formed in resistance, sometimes explicitly so, to dominant masculinized forms. Resistant feminized practices are instructive. They exemplify how embodiment, diversity and relation to power can be used to mitigate the effects of overly standardized practice” (p. 403). This resistance is important, as it disrupts the norm, and, as Griffiths suggests, takes on an instructive stance in order to create meaningful change, challenging hegemony. Some theoretical positions, such as postfeminism, take the position that the feminist movement has done what it set out to do and women are now free to do and be whatever they wish. Resistance within this context looks quite different.

Angela McRobbie (2004) described postfeminism as a form of feminism that takes the position that equality with men has been realized. She wrote, “My argument is that postfeminism actively draws on and invokes feminism as that which can be taken into account in order to suggest that equality has been achieved, in order to install a whole repertoire of meanings that emphasize that it is no longer needed, a spent force” (p. 4). McRobbie (2004) further pointed to the media as a source that has largely encouraged and enabled this kind of thinking, citing movies such as Bridget Jones’ Diary, which had broad appeal amongst young women. She described the new female subject as being both free and silent, if she wishes to be seen as a modern, sophisticated woman.

The new female subject is, despite her freedom, called upon to be silent, to withhold critique in order to count as a modern, sophisticated girl. There is quietude and complicity in the manners of generationally specific notions of cool, and more precisely an uncritical relation to dominant commercially produced sexual representations which actively invoke hostility to assumed feminist positions from the past in order to endorse a
new regime of sexual meanings based on female consent, equality, participation and pleasure, free of politics. (p. 8)

It appears that this new form of feminism is something born out of the way young women engage with various media. McRobbie (2004) suggested that to be a contemporary feminist is more about having gained equality with men with a freedom to choose one’s pleasures and participation in various “cool” activities, free of political correctness. McRobbie also warned, however, of the dangers of such approaches to feminism, as its generational nature drives wedges between young women and their mothers, teachers, and other women:

  By so effectively, through the trope of freedom, enacting generational differences and the bringing them into being, these forms successfully drive a wedge between women, which sets off the mother, the teacher, and the feminist into the realms of a bygone age. By these means postfeminism undoes feminism on the basis that it is ‘always already known.’ (McRobbie, 2004, pp. 12–13)

Given all of this, I posit that there are some serious concerns with postfeminism, as it obliterates past feminist accomplishments and ideas in favour of a populist agenda – all under the mask of a supposed freedom.

  It is important to note that postfeminism appears in education just as it does in society. Ringrose (2013) wrote of a phenomenon she called a “heightened competitive market” that infuses the education system in such a way that all educational players are in competition (p. 3). Ringrose (2013) referred to a “postfeminist educational policy terrain that understands ‘gender gaps’ and ‘sexist society’, to refer almost solely to the need to help boys catch up to girls in school” (p. 24). Here, the binary clearly rears its head once more in creating not only a crisis in masculinity, but also one that involves successful girls. Postfeminism appears to take the success of these girls and use it as an argument that suggests that girls have achieved parity with boys. With this new power, girls are encouraged to go out into the world and do what they want. This
is a sharp and notable movement away from an understanding of the fluidity of gender identification and the damaging effects of hegemonic masculinity. Ringrose (2013) discussed a central paradox that arises when thinking about postfeminism, which is that: “if girls and women are so ‘successful’ and ‘aggressive’ at the expense of boys, as some media and educational discourses imply, why are girls and women still subject to oppressive sexual politics, including intensified (hetero)sexualized regulation in both private and public spheres?” (pp. 6–7). This is an excellent question as it points to the failings of a postfeminist stance in describing the true experiences of women and girls within our education system. Moreover, in light of the topic under study in this thesis, it is important to mention postfeminism because, as I will show, there are moments when this kind of thinking is used by principals when they talk about their experiences and how they relate to their gender identity. Sandberg (2013) referenced this kind of thinking in her book *Lean In*:

> This book makes the case for leaning in, for being ambitious in any pursuit. And while I believe that increasing the number of women in positions of power is a necessary element of true equality, I do not believe that there is one definition of success or happiness. Not all women want careers. Not all women want children. Not all women want both. I would never advocate that we should all have the same objectives. Many people are not interested in acquiring power, not because they lack ambition, but because they are living their lives as they desire. (p. 10)

This is a very interesting passage as it makes a case that is difficult to refute. Sandberg is calling for greater equity for women through ensuring that more women take up positions of power, and at the same time, taking the position that women are free to choose whatever life they desire. This is about the pursuit of happiness, whatever that may be. And, it suggests a freedom to choose any path without impediment. However, it also completely ignores the existence of hegemony and the dominant masculine discourses at work on female bodies. It ignores the feminist agenda, by sidelining issues such as parental leave through the suggestion that not all
women want children, a career, or both. Such statements take issues such as child care and child rearing for granted, positioning them as a choice without recognizing the systemic challenges they entail, and the fight that occurred to ensure women’s rights to compensation during parental leave. Sandberg’s book is a product of popular culture, much like the postfeminist movement. On the surface, it appears to be quite progressive. However, once you consider the existence and effects of masculine, hegemonic discourses, it begins to be very questionable as an approach to resistance.

As I introduced earlier, principalship is a place where dominant discourses can be resisted. Similarly, there exists a possibility for principals to find agency, specifically with respect to the way their role is gendered. Each day, principals are inundated with the dominant discourses and hegemonic notions that work to define their role and regulate their actions and decisions. As Butler has suggested, one needs to engage with these repetitive and gendered acts in order to resist them. In other words, to resist masculinist notions of leadership, female principals need to engage in the act of being “masculine leaders,” which will enable them to find ways to resist their dominance. Postfeminism addresses this adoption of masculine traits as a matter of choice for girls and women. McRobbie (2000) referred to the “postfeminist masquerade,” where girls must compensate for the adoption of masculine traits by placing emphasis upon their femininity (p. 65). The notion of choice becomes a matter of agency as opportunities for success have been opened up for them (McRobbie, 2000, p. 65). The previous discussion of masculinity suggests that men too need to engage with leadership in a different manner so as not to continue to propagate masculine forms or styles of leadership. This can also take the form of resistance to dominant hegemonic masculinity, in a way that encourages men to engage in the formation of new masculinities. The question becomes: what new forms of
leadership might arise if male and female principals become subversive “players” in the act of leading our schools? What kinds of new norms of leadership will be created once gendered norms are displaced?

In order for new norms of leadership to be created, current hegemonic discourses need to be challenged and disrupted. This is difficult work and it will not occur without a certain amount of discomfort and social suffering. In fact, when faced with this discomfort, most principals to whom I spoke denied that gender matters with respect to leadership. In order to explore this denial and its effects, I diverge from my post-structuralist approach for a moment with a discussion of Bourdieu’s (2001) notion of “symbolic violence” and the suffering that results. Bourdieu (1992) spoke of this notion of symbolic violence in a conversation with Waquant:

Symbolic violence, to put it as tersely and simply as possible, is the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity….To say it more rigorously: social agents are knowing agents who, even when they are subjected to determinisms, contribute to producing the efficacy of that which determines them insofar as they structure what determines them. And it is almost always in the “fit” between determinants and the categories of perception that constitute them as such that the effect of domination arises. (This shows, incidentally, that if you try to think domination in terms of the academic alternative of freedom and determinism, choice and constraint, you get nowhere.) I call misrecognition the fact of recognizing a violence which is wielded precisely inasmuch as one does not perceive it as such. (pp. 167–68; emphasis original)

In this passage, Bourdieu (cited in Waquant, 1992) makes it clear that symbolic violence is a violence exerted upon us all as social agents in such a way that, although we may be complicit in its formation, maintenance, and dominance, we are unaware of its presence. Bourdieu calls this misrecognition. This notion becomes important when principals deny that gender has anything to do with leadership, only to come to the uncomfortable realization that it does in fact matter. I suggest that this denial is an expression of the suffering caused by symbolic violence.
To help formulate an understanding of how symbolic violence works, it is helpful to look at Bourdieu’s (2001) conception of male dominance:

…All the conditions for the full exercise of male domination are thus combined. The precedence universally accorded to men is affirmed in the objectivity of the social structures and the productive or reproductive activities, based on a sexual division of the labour of biological and social production and reproduction which gives the better part to men, and also in the schemes immanent in everyone’s habitus. These schemes, shaped by similar conditions, and therefore objectively harmonized, function as matrices of the perceptions, thoughts and actions of all members of the society – historical transcendental which, being shared by all, impose themselves on each agent as transcendent. As a consequence, the androcentric representation of biological reproduction and social reproduction is invested with the objectivity of a common sense, a practical, doxic consensus on the sense of practices. And women themselves apprehend all reality, and in particular the power relations in which they are held, through schemes of thought that are the product of embodiment of those power relations and which are expressed in the founding oppositions of the symbolic order. It follows that their acts of cognition are acts of practical recognition, doxic acceptance, a belief that does not need to be thought and affirmed as such, and which in a sense “makes” the symbolic violence which it undergoes. (pp. 33–34)

In this passage, Bourdieu describes all of the conditions that allow male domination to thrive. Male dominance is present within social structures, as well as in both productive and reproductive activities, as labour is divided according to sex, as is biological reproduction, in which men are favoured. These “schemes” within the social fabric transcend perceptions, thoughts, and actions so much so that they become “common sense,” or what Bourdieu refers to as “doxic consensus.” Women find themselves in a state of “doxic acceptance” as a product of, and, in part, as the embodiment of, these power relations. This acceptance among women is “invisible” and appears as a kind of “symbolic violence” that acts upon both men and women in the form of masculine domination. This notion is quite different from Butler’s stance, as it is not a performance so much as it is a state of being or of common understanding (doxa). Indeed, Butler (1990) stated that naming one’s sex is itself an act of domination, whereas gender is performed as a constructed identity that acts upon our bodies. However different the approach,
both ideas work to create a kind of “gendered prison” in which both men and women are regulated and confined. I will show that it is from within this “gendered prison” that denial emerges.

**Summary of Theoretical Framework**

The purpose of this thesis is, firstly, to demonstrate that gender does indeed matter when we talk about discourses of principal leadership, and, secondly, to highlight how gender gets taken up by male and female principals when they talk about their leadership approach as principals. The study is positioned as a post-structuralist approach to principal leadership in elementary schools. This approach is taken as it allows for opportunities to critique and deconstruct the social phenomena and power relationships inherent within principal leadership and in the way leadership is linked with notions of gender. I chose to use Foucault (1977, 1978) because his work can be very helpful when teasing out the power relations that come into play within principalship. At the heart of understanding these power relations is in looking at discourses of educational leadership and how they normalize and regulate the principal. Historically, principalship has largely been presented within masculinist terms, and this is troubling for women as they navigate the role. Discourses around how men and women are “supposed” to lead regulate the principal. I suggest that, through the Foucauldian notion of the “normalizing gaze,” the principal is judged and/or punished according to the extent to which they “measure up” to gendered expectations around how they must act and carry out their duties. Although I note that discourses do indeed constrain and limit the subject, I also propose that they provide a space/place for possibilities and the formation of new meanings and opportunities. The question is: what discourses should be created around gender and principal leadership?
In this thesis, gender is understood within a post-structuralist lens as something fluid and as not tied to one’s biological sex. My discussion of masculinities is intended to help shape an understanding that masculinity works upon the bodies of both men and women, subjecting both to hegemonic masculinity. Connell (1987) wrote of hegemony as something that is woven into the very fabric of society. It is present in our private and public lives. It transcends religion, politics, the workplace, and everywhere else. Hegemonic masculinity makes clear that within the very fabric of society, men have the advantage just by virtue of being men.

In the face of this hegemony, women are in a bind. For example, when women take on roles that are meant for men, they find themselves having to formulate an identity and enact a performance that enables them to navigate and be successful within a role that was never created for them. So, although it is said that there is now equity between men and women, what we actually have is a system where women and men are continually having to fit into roles that are acceptable to hegemonic masculinity, and hence are allowable. One can observe this reality of masculine domination through the use of Bourdieu’s (2011) conception of “symbolic violence,” an invisible force that dominates both men and women in society. I have also presented Butler’s (1990) position that women and men do not adhere to particular attributes that define their gender. Instead, they perform it, and it is regulated through the adherence to practices of gender within our society. Gender identity is created through the performance of gender and is defined by the way gender is expressed. Our performed gestures and acts are produced on the surface of the body and are construed through discursive means. They give the illusion that they represent some inner gendered identity that is revealing itself to the world. Butler (1990) suggested that there is no true or false form of gender, except that which is produced as a result of discourses around identity. It is through this construction that new identities can be formulated. By engaging
in the repetitive acts and gestures that constitute gender identity, one is able to find subversive acts and gestures that contest these constructions. Subversive repetitions then provide the subject with agency in order to put into question and ultimately displace the very gender norms in which the subject was participating. There are, according to Butler, possibilities for change through this notion of agency – a space where discourses are disrupted and reformulated.

Finally, I ended my discussion of gender with the notion of postfeminism, a movement that in effect obliterates feminism and replaces it with a “new” way of being a woman that includes access to the same types of successes as men and a myriad of choices. In its negation of feminism, however, it ignores hegemonic masculinity and the way it continues to work upon and regulate women’s bodies. Instead, postfeminism turns toward the notion that women have the choice to be whomever they choose to be, engaging in a “postfeminist masquerade,” and, further, emphasizing their femininity in response to having taken on masculine traits. In the following chapter, I map out the choices and decisions I made to document my data analysis.
Chapter 4: Methodology and Procedures

Overview

This chapter recounts the research process employed for this study, and presents the conceptual and methodological framework. In doing so, I provide an overview of the key concepts used and the design of the research method, explain the choices that have been made and the directions taken for the analysis, and introduce the techniques used for data collection. This information is organized under the following headings: methodology and procedures, making the choice to interview, selection of participants and ethical considerations, the decision to only study gender, discourse analysis, what do I ask these principals, methodological assumptions, limitations, and data analysis and analysis of the transcripts.

Methodology and Procedures

Before describing my research design, it is important to first position this thesis as a narrative study. This study is about listening to the stories of principals. I am primarily interested in asking principals to recount stories about their experiences in the role and discuss the way these experiences intersect with their gender. Stories are multifaceted, in that they are told in many different ways and come in different forms. Denzin (1989) referred to some stories as narratives with a plot and a storyline, which exist independent of the storyteller (p. 41), and described these kinds of stories as “personal experience narratives”. He wrote, “Their focus is on shareable experience. Personal experience narratives are more likely to be based on anecdotal, every day, commonplace experiences, while self stories involve pivotal, often critical life experiences” (Denzin, 1989, p. 44). Here, Denzin makes a distinction between personal experience narratives and life stories. Life stories involve the telling of critical life events,
whereas personal experience narratives are more representative of shared experiences. Given the kinds of questions and discussion I intended to have with principals, I did not expect to hear life stories, but rather recounts of experiences in hopes of building gendered discourses of principal leadership. I expected that many of the stories would also reflect personal experiences. Denzin described the expressions of these experiences as representative of cultural and social texts:

“Expressions of experiences are shaped by cultural conventions, i.e. the convention that lives have beginnings and endings. Expressions are processual activities. They turn in the performance and enactment of cultural and social texts. When performed or enacted, a text comes to constitute that which it represents; that is, the life is in the telling or the writing” (Denzin, 1989, p. 33). For Denzin, it is in the expression or the telling of the story that meaning can be made, and the very telling of the story, the expressions used, bring the cultural and social stories to life. I hoped that, in telling these stories, the principals would bring to life and enact gendered discourses of principal leadership. For the researcher, however, it all comes down to the interpretation of the story, the personal experience narratives. Denzin (1989) framed this interpretation as a process where one is led into the emotional life of another person: “Interpretation, the act of interpreting and making sense out of something, creates the conditions for understanding which involves being able to grasp the meanings of an interpreted experience for another individual” (p. 28; emphasis original). Denzin, then, separates the act of interpretation from understanding, presenting understanding as the result of interpretation. The question becomes: how does the researcher interpret these stories/narratives in order to gain understanding? I contend that the best way to interpret this narrative data is through discourse analysis, creating what Denzin (1989) referred to as “the conditions for understanding.” For the remainder of this section, I will outline each decision I made in the process of designing my research methodology. I will also present
the process through which I engaged my analysis to build a theory around the gender and principal leadership discourses created within the personal experience narratives that were shared during my interviews with participants.

**Making the choice to interview.**

As I have discussed, previous researchers working in the area of gender and leadership have typically used surveys to learn more about what men and women think about leadership. While surveys can provide a great deal of helpful information to inform future practices, I felt that it would not provide the kind of analysis with which I was looking to engage. I decided to interview principals to see how they felt about this issue of gender and principal leadership. On the benefits of interviewing over taking surveys, Reinharz (1992) wrote, “Survey research typically excludes, and interview research typically includes, opportunities for clarification and discussion. Open-ended interview research explores people’s views of reality and allows the researcher to generate theory” (p. 18). I felt that by interviewing principals, I would be able to engage in and generate ideas and discourses around gender and principal leadership. The hope was that these interviews would spark some thoughtful discussion on the issue of gender and its effect on leadership, largely because the interview process allows participants to access their ideas, thoughts, and memories, resulting in rich discussion. Reinharz (1992) has confirmed that the interview process is one which enables the researcher to access the individual voices of the interviewed, writing that, “For one thing, interviewing offers researchers access to people’s ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher. This asset is particularly important for the study of women because in this way it is an antidote to centuries of ignoring women’s ideas altogether or having men speak for women” (p. 19). In this study, I interviewed both men and women in order to hear different perspectives. Each
participant shared their own stories, and each voice was valued and considered. Quinn (2010) has also made a strong case for the use of interviews, stating that interviews provide a “density of clues to cultural understandings that is virtually unobtainable in any other way” (p. 242). Quinn (2010) has positioned the interview as being specifically designed to allow the interviewee to share all they know about a specific subject with the interviewer (p. 242). This was very important to this study because in order to build gendered discourses of principal leadership, I wanted to hear and encourage principals’ stories of their experiences in such a way that would enable each principal to express all the intricacies of their experience, to truly tell their stories from beginning to end. Once I had decided to conduct interviews, I began to think about how to select participants. In the next section, I outline the process by which I selected the participants for the study.

**Selection of participants and ethical considerations.**

I used various sources in order to select participants to be interviewed. The only criteria were that the individual be a principal of an elementary school in the Greater Toronto Area and be willing to talk with me about gender and leadership. I posted flyers at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education as well as posting on the Ontario Principal Council website, but found that the most effective way to get participants was through word of mouth. I had asked a number of different people within my work and student life to share information about this study widely. By far, this strategy garnered the most responses from interested principals. Many of the participants were known to me on a professional basis. Some I had worked with directly. I found that because many of the participants were known to me, there was a relative ease throughout our conversations that allowed for a very open dialogue and exploration of the topic under study. I found that when I interviewed principals who did not know me, there was some trepidation
around what could be said. This trepidation did not have a huge impact on the responses. These principals were just less familiar with me and perhaps less willing to share more personal stories and anecdotes.

One of the most important considerations during the interview process is what to do with one’s own experiences, biases, and opinions. Luttrell (2010) commented on the challenges this presents to the researcher, stating,

> our role in shaping the ethnographic encounter is huge… whether consciously or not, we listen and make sense of what we hear according to particular theoretical, ontological, personal and cultural frameworks and in the context of unequal power relations. There is always the worry that the voices and perspectives of those we study will be lost or subsumed to our own views and interests. (p. 258)

Luttrell encourages the researcher to consider the tensions and contradictions that might occur during the interview and analysis process. While it is important not to allow our own biases to affect how the interviewee shares his/her experiences, or the way we interpret what is said, these biases nevertheless need to be recognized as present. Thus, Luttrell (2010) proposed that, as researchers, we should name these biases, especially since they cannot be eliminated (p. 258). I have my own thoughts and experiences with the issue of gender and leadership and have discussed some of these experiences freely within this study. However, I was very careful not to share my opinions with the principals I interviewed, even though there were moments when principals asked me what I thought, perhaps fearing that they were “wrong” in their response.

I made it clear to each participant before we began that everything being said would be kept confidential, and that I will approach all responses without judgement. Some principals shared information that was highly personal to them and I made conscious decisions to exclude that material from this study. It was difficult at times to not react to some of the ideas being shared during our conversations. There were moments when principals were looking for me to
agree with them and somehow give credence to what they were saying. I found that by listening intently and nodding my head without comment, I was able to give principals the freedom to speak without them feeling as though they were being judged in any way. I was continually cognizant of the fact that any comments from me could influence their responses. When principals asked me to respond to a question, I merely stated that, in the interest of not influencing their response, I would prefer not to comment. These moments will be discussed after my analysis of the discourses so that my biases are revealed and can be considered in terms of how each principal’s responses were interpreted.

The following chart provides a brief description of each participant in terms of their gender and the type of school at which they worked at the time of their interview. A total of 15 principals were interviewed, however, only the data from 13 of these principals is used in the study. Reasons as to why data collected from the additional two participants is not used in the study are indicated in the chart. The principals are not listed in any particular order, and pseudonyms have been used. I also note that when I refer to an urban school, I am referring to a school located in Toronto; in the case of suburban schools, these are located outside of Toronto in what are referred to as the suburbs.

Table 3

A Description of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>GENDER</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alina</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Alina was in her first year as a principal. She worked in a small K through 6 community school (200 students), with a relatively small number of staff in a mid to low income neighbourhood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Year in Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>First</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Fourth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Ten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maggie</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Third</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monica</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Last</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rachel Female
Rachel was a retired principal who was first promoted to vice principal at a time when most principals of schools were men. She had worked in a mix of affluent, middle income and low income neighbourhoods.

Sahar Female
Sahar had been a principal for five years in the same school. She worked in a relatively smaller school (250 students) with grades K through 6. Sahar was a very active principal within her school community.

Fred Male
Fred had been a principal for almost ten years and this was his third year in his current school, a mid-sized K through 8 (350 students) urban school in a middle-income community.

George Male
George had been a principal for two years and in that time, had worked in a K through 8 urban school. His school was in a more affluent area, however he had worked in a variety of communities as a vice principal.

John Male
John had been a principal for four years, and had spent the last three of those years in a K through 6 urban school. Previously, his school was led by two male principals prior to his arrival.

Khalid Male
Khalid was a seasoned principal and had been the principal of three different schools over the past 14 years. He had been at his current school for five years, a small K through 6 school in
Michael

Male

Michael was a seasoned administrator and had worked both in schools and in central positions within his district. He was currently the principal of a middle school, but he drew upon his experiences as a central administrator more than the times when he had worked in schools.

Male Principal

Male

This participant indicated that he was an aspiring principal during our interview and not currently a practicing principal. Hence, he did not meet the criteria for the interview.

Female Principal

Female

This participant appeared uncomfortable with the process and repeatedly indicated that she was sorry she could not be of more help to me. In view of ethical considerations, I was not comfortable sharing her stories as they were quite personal at times.

How interviews were conducted.

All interviews were conducted face to face, with the exception of one interview that was conducted over the phone. They were very informal and held at a location of the participant’s choice, and were between 40 and 60 minutes in length. The interviews were held within the 2015/2016 school year, between September and June. Participants emailed me to indicate their interest in the study, and dates and times were set via email. In most cases, I sent the informed
consent letter to participants to peruse before we met. In some cases, this was not possible so it was given to participants at the time of our meeting. Before we began each interview, I reminded all participants that everything they said would be kept confidential, that the interview would be recorded and transcribed, and that the transcription would also be kept confidential on a password-protected computer. I also told participants that they would not be identified and that I would use a pseudonym when referring to their responses in the study. Although the title of the study and a brief outline of the study was included in the informed consent letter, at no point did I discuss the title or any background information about the study before the interviews, as I did not want to influence responses in any way. Participants understood this and did not ask a lot of questions about why I was interested in the topic. I also asked participants to let me know at any time if they felt uncomfortable with any of the questions posed. None of the participants, with the exception of one, expressed any discomfort at all during the interviews.³

As indicated, the participants chose the location at which I conducted the interview. All of the interviews were conducted in public spaces outside of schools and school hours. I wanted them to feel comfortable with the space, especially in terms of not having others around us listen to our conversation. This was never an issue as we often conducted the interviews in quiet corners of coffee shops and restaurants. At no point did any of the participants indicate any discomfort at all with the location.

Each interview was quite different as I wanted them to be free-flowing and largely led by the participant. The resulting transcripts read more like a conversation than an interview, as principals were free to go on any tangents that they felt were relevant to what we were talking about. Allowing participants to guide the conversation and tell their stories fully revealed some

³ This information is also noted at the end of Table 3, which describes each participant.
very interesting results in terms of what information was privileged and what was not. I had originally intended to take notes during the interviews. However, I found that this interrupted the flow of the conversation, so I left my note-taking to the very end in cases where I felt notes were necessary. I used these notes to remind myself of the salient elements of each interview.

I transcribed each interview verbatim shortly after the interview was conducted. This allowed me to become quite familiar with the data and to begin to see patterns within and throughout the data. The interviews were transcribed in their entirety, as I wanted to ensure that I captured all of the information shared, in case some of it became relevant during my analysis. Shortly after transcribing each interview, I made notes throughout each transcript in order to comment on salient ideas and thoughts shared by each participant. A more technical and specific discussion of this process will be discussed later in the chapter.

**The decision to only study gender.**

It is also important to note and discuss the fact that this study does not consider the important and impactful intersection of gender, race, and sexual orientation. This study examines the intersection of gender and principal leadership. In fact, the topics of race and sexual orientation were raised by some of the participants in the study, in recognizing that these identities most certainly impact leadership. Such intersectionality can be observed, for example, in the work of Quader and Oplatka (2008), who study women school leaders within a context of Bedouin culture. I do not want to suggest that race and sexual orientation are somehow absent from the equation and that only gender matters. These intersections are critical to understanding the complex identities individuals bring to the role of principal. My interest, however, is gender, and as such, the focus remained on the construction of gender in relation to principal leadership. Pseudonyms were used for each participant and these names were chosen at random to indicate
gender only and not race or sexual orientation. A variety of names were used as a means of indicating that participants were representative of various racial identities. I am cognizant that a story of gender and principal leadership cannot simply be told through a veil of white, heterosexual privilege. Although, at the same time, I do recognize that these dominant discourses are also at play along with and alongside hegemonic masculinity. My recognition of my own white, male privilege also forms part of my analysis within the study, and this will be discussed later in the thesis.

**Discourse analysis.**

When considering using discourse analysis as a methodological tool, I turned to the work of Norman Fairclough (2003), as his work is widely used alongside that of Foucault and his conceptualization of “discourse.” Fairclough (2003) has made a strong case for using discourse analysis in order to reveal how people relate to and understand one another, writing,

> I see discourses as ways of representing aspects of the world – the processes, relations and structures of the material world, the “mental world” of thoughts, feelings, beliefs and so forth, and the social world. Particular aspects of the world may be represented differently, so we are generally in the position of having to consider the relationship between different discourses….Discourse constitutes part of the resources which people deploy in relating to one another – keeping separate from one another, cooperating, competing, dominating – and in seeking to change the ways in which they relate to one another. (p. 124)

This understanding of discourse analysis shaped how I began to think about the value that comes with analyzing texts in this way. I began to consider my own discourses around my gender and my role as an elementary principal. When I spoke with my female colleagues about some of the challenges they faced in their schools, I found their challenges to be quite different from my own. As a result, I began to think about whether these differences had anything to do with gender. This trajectory of thought brought me to discourse analysis. As Fairclough (2003) made clear, discourses tell us a great deal about how people relate to one another, as well as cooperate,
compete, and so on. I began to wonder if other principals had thought about their gender in relation to their role as principal.

One of the issues that needs to be addressed with respect to discourse is that there are many different kinds of discourses (e.g., accounts, personal life stories, experiences), and thus one is never sure what kinds of discourses may emerge while in conversation with participants. My expectation was that the majority of the responses received would be narratives around personal experiences, much like what Denzin (1989) described as shared experiences. I considered that, if many of the experiences were shared, it would not be difficult to find common discourses amongst the participants. The question became: how does one go about interpreting these experiences?

James Paul Gee (2011) has provided a very comprehensive look at discourse analysis. His work has therefore informed my practice throughout this project. I chose to use Gee’s conception of discourse analysis because his approach is two-pronged. He formulates building tasks of language, which help the researcher to understand and formulate how meaning can be made from language. Gee also provides the researcher with the tools required to make sense of the building tasks, to interpret and understand the intended meaning. Gee described the importance of discourse analysis to research as a tool that can shed light on the successes and shortcomings of our experiences in the world (Gee, 2011, p. 9). In the following passage, he describes the goal of those who use discourse analysis: “Their goal is not just to describe how language works or even to offer deep explanations, though they do want to do this. They also want to speak to and, perhaps intervene in, social or political issues, problems, and controversies in the world. They want to apply their work to the world in some fashion” (Gee, 2011, p. 9). By talking with principals in the field, I intended to come to a clearer understanding around how
they perceived gender as affecting the ways they chose to lead. My hope was also that I could engage in a dialogue about this issue, not only so that discourses could be revealed, but also so they might be challenged. Sometimes it is in the telling of our stories that we begin to recognize how some of our ideas may in fact be problematic. Other times, telling our stories only reaffirms what we believe and hold to be true. Regardless, I hoped that the telling of these stories would somehow reveal that the issue of gender and leadership is important to consider. If we are to learn about the impact of gender on the role of principal, we need to engage in a dialogue about this issue in order to learn, change if we need to, and grow as leaders. We create our realities through language, and because we, as principals, are leaders within educational settings, I believe that we have some effect on the realities of those we lead. Using Gee’s (2011) approach to discourse analysis allowed me, as the researcher, to not only learn about the discourses at play, but to engage with them in such a way as to challenge and shape them.

Gee’s (2011) position is that we make and build up the world through language (p. 17). In order to describe how this is done, he referred to what he called the “seven building tasks of language.” They are as follows: significance; practice; identities; relationships; politics/distribution of social goods; connections; and signs, systems and knowledge. Each of these is described in the table below.

Table 4

Gee’s Seven Building Tasks of Language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Building Tasks of Language</th>
<th>Key Defining Attributes</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Significance</td>
<td>Describes the manner in which language is used to render something significant or not. (p. 17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice</td>
<td>A socially recognized or institutionally supported endeavour which requires one to behave in a specified manner. (e.g., Leadership) (p. 17)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Identities

We reveal our identities through speaking and in so doing, attribute an identity to others, an identity that we explicitly or implicitly compare or contrast to our own. We create identities for others as a means of creating our own. (p. 18)

Relationships

We use language to build social relationships. (p. 18)

Politics/Distribution of Social Goods

The distribution of social goods is about who gets what in terms of money, status, power and acceptance on a variety of different terms, all social goods. This makes language political, in the sense that it determines who has the social good and who does not. (p. 7)

Connections

We use language to connect different things together in order to make them relevant (or not) to other things. (p. 19)

Signs, Systems, and Knowledge

We use language to make certain sign systems and certain forms of knowledge and belief relevant or privileged, or not, in given situations. This is how we build privilege for one way of knowing over another. (p. 20)


The building tasks of language highlighted in the above table are very important to consider within a critical discourse analysis because they shed light on the way we carry ourselves in the world and how we use language to make meaning. These tasks formed the basis for my analysis of the data as they were helpful to consider when reflecting upon each principal’s narrative. As I studied the transcripts taken from each interview (I will describe how these transcripts were analyzed later in this chapter), I could see how principals used language (the choice of words and phrases) to bring significance to certain ideals, make connections to other ideas, formulate identities as male and female principals, and privilege certain ideas over others, all while describing their experiences. These building tasks were helpful to reference when looking for shared ideas and experiences amongst the different interview transcripts, as principals reflected on their practice and made connections between their gender and their role as principals. This formulation was thus helpful in uncovering, understanding, and reflecting upon
each principal’s story. These building tasks also provided an opportunity to critically analyze the discourses at work within the dialogue, as they helped me to shape new understandings by revealing intended meanings.

In order to understand the workings of these building tasks, Gee turned to various tools of inquiry to help make sense of and analyze them. He wrote that these tools “are primarily relevant to how people build identities and practices and recognize identities and practices that others are building around them” (2011, p. 28). In my analysis, I used three of these tools of inquiry, namely, situated meanings, figured worlds, and intertextuality, all of which are discussed below.

When Gee (2011) talked of situated meanings, he was referring to the context in which language is being used. As he wrote, “When we actually utter or write a sentence it has a situated meaning. Situated meanings arise because particular language forms take on specific or situated meanings in specific different contexts of use” (p. 65). Words thus take on different meanings depending on how each word is used in the context of the sentence. For example, the word “masculinity” has different meanings depending upon how it is used, and I would argue also dependent on who is using the word. Depending on its use, it can mean tough, strong, manly, or the opposite of femininity, or it can refer to subjectification, power imbalance, or hegemony. The important thing to note is that situated meanings are “assembled ‘on the spot’ as we communicate in a given context, based on our construal of that context” (Gee, 2011, p. 103). They are, in other words, negotiated during conversations between people through their social interactions (Gee, 2011, p. 104). As my conversations with the principals developed and changed, so, too, did the meanings of words. Some words were used repeatedly by different principals throughout our conversations, which presented a collective understanding of their
meaning. In order to construct situated meanings, we need to also consider what Gee has called figured worlds.

Figured worlds are related to situated meanings as theories and stories that guide the construction and processing of situated meanings (Gee, 2011, p. 104). It is through the figured worlds in our mind that we create and formulate situated meanings. In describing how this process works, Gee (2011) wrote,

Figured worlds are linked to simulations in our minds. Simulations are the way the mind handles figured worlds. We build worlds in our minds (much as video game designers build worlds into their games). But these figured worlds are not just mental. They exist in books and other media, in knowledge we can gain from what other people say and do, and in what we can infer from various social practices around us. They exist, as well, in the metaphors we use. In many cases, individuals do not know all the elements of a figured world, but get parts of it from books, media, or other people as they need to know more. This is so because we humans are capable of gaining experiences vicariously from texts, media, and other people’s stories. (p. 81)

Gee suggests here that as we make our way in the world and come to understand what is happening around us, we create, in our minds, these figured worlds that enable us to make sense of what we see and experience. As we build these figured worlds, we develop situated meanings that change as we gain new insights into new figured worlds. To gather this information, we turn to the experiences of others, particularly through discourse. During my conversations with principals, different figured worlds were presented and revealed. In fact, I found that some of these figured worlds were shared between and amongst principals. Moreover, Gee also made reference to the fact that figured worlds are not stored in the heads of individuals, but are part of a collective understanding.

Figured worlds “explain”, relative to the standards of some group, why words have the various situated meanings they do and fuel their ability to grow more. Figured worlds, too, are usually not completely stored in any one person’s head. Rather, they are distributed across the different sorts of “expertise” and viewpoints found in the group much like a plot to a story (or pieces of a puzzle)
that different people have different bits of and which they can potentially share in order to mutually develop the “big picture.” (Gee, 2011, p. 105)

The way principals understand their role as leaders in schools is therefore shaped and influenced by not only an individual’s understanding of that role, but also by a collective understanding. As principals talk and interact with one another during meetings and gatherings, for example, figured worlds are being created. Common understandings are developed around the principal’s role and responsibilities and approaches to leadership. I found, for example, that during our conversations, principals used common words when describing what they perceived to be a good leader, hence revealing the creation of a figured world created by the collective. I also observed that figured worlds are created by some principals as a means of making sense of how their gender and their leadership qualities are connected. Further connections could also be made between the figured worlds created and described by different principals, both female and male. What I feel is important to note, however, is that figured worlds are not stagnant. They change over time, as do situated meanings. This opens up the possibility for the creation of new figured worlds, and hence new understandings. There is also a possibility for particular situated meanings and figured worlds to grow, take shape, and organize the social practices of a particular sociocultural group (Gee, 2011, p. 105). In some instances, principals began to consider the creation of new figured worlds through our discussion and dialogue, opening a door toward a new understanding of principal leadership. Analyzing these principals’ stories using Gee’s approach helped in recognizing moments where situated meanings and figured worlds were being revealed, created, and transformed. This kind of approach fits quite nicely into the purpose of this thesis: to determine the extent to which gender matters within principalship, expose the issues and difficulties these discourses reveal (namely hegemonic masculinity), and
point to new opportunities to transform them. The question that arises at this point is: how does one conflate two different and sometimes opposing discourses?

A big part of this thesis was to document conversations with principals that occurred in the form of an interview. These conversations were “private” in the sense that the only people present were myself and the principal. However, the conversations in which we engaged were also linked to the broader conversations about gender and leadership that exist in our society. Similarly, when we start to look at discourses around gender and leadership, we see how these discourses intersect. As Gee (2011) wrote,

Intertextuality and Conversations (big “C” Conversations), two of our tools of inquiry, are centrally about the interaction of Discourses in society. Intertextuality is about mixing together or juxtaposing different social languages, often connected to different Discourses, in various ways. Two styles of language come to interact (with complicity or tension) with each other in the same “text” (stretch of speech or writing). Conversations are public debates, arguments, motifs, issues, or themes that large numbers of people in a society or social group know about. (p. 112)

This is a very important point for the purposes of this project, because its purpose is to examine the intersection between gender and leadership in order to uncover the presence of gendered stereotypes and how they work within principalship to regulate principals. Gee (2011) suggests here that through intertextuality, social languages are mixed and juxtaposed, as are discourses. When I asked principals to comment on the extent to which their gender crossed paths with their leadership practice, I asked them to juxtapose two different discourses in order to determine if in fact there was a measurable link between the two. This juxtaposition either created harmony or tension and the extent to which it created either of these states was very telling. These were the moments when opportunities for resistance arose. Such resistance is either taken up by the participant or by the researcher through analysis. Gee’s (2011) notion of intertextuality points
toward the manner in which different discourses intersect, a helpful concept within a study focused on the analysis of two connected discourses.

*Summary of discourse analysis.*

As was mentioned earlier in this chapter, the stories told in each interview can be described as personal experience narratives, in that principals were revealing a shared understanding of their role. These stories emerged out of their reflections on the perceived role of the principal. The process by which principals were asked to engage in this discourse was further complicated by the fact that it was my intent, as the researcher, to insert gender into the discourse in order to understand how the principals connected these two distinct, yet related, worlds. This is where the use of Gee’s work was helpful and relevant.

Gee (2011) provided a clear framework, a pathway to understanding how individuals formulate an understanding of the world through language, using what he called the “seven building tasks of language”: significance, practice, identities, relationships, politics/social goods, connections, and signs, systems, and knowledge. Using these, this discourse analysis reveals words or concepts that were given significance, shedding light on that which the principals considered important to their role and conceptions of gender. The practice of leadership is also analyzed, particularly with respect to the way principals use language to define their leadership practice in relation to their gender. Relationships were considered in terms of how the principals responded to me as a researcher, particularly in terms of assumptions that were made given our gendered identities. The question of who holds the social good was also considered in this study. Who is presented as having the power, and hence access to the social good, is important to understanding the manner in which gender intersects with leadership. Finally, what would and
would not be privileged in terms of signs, systems, and knowledge is revealed as a means of further determining that which was deemed significant and that which was not.

In order to make sense of these building tasks of language, Gee (2011) turned to what he called the “tools of inquiry”: situated meanings, figured worlds, and intertextuality. My intention for my dialogue with principals was to formulate the various situated meanings and figured worlds that emerged, as the principals navigated the points of intersection between their gender and their concept of leadership. These tools of inquiry were used as a means of analyzing each principal’s responses in order to come to an understanding about how they interpreted and made meaning. I also looked for collective understandings, situated meanings, and figured worlds amongst participants as they were negotiated during our conversations. The kinds of figured worlds created help to shed light upon the discourses created by the principals around gender and leadership. Gee’s formulation around how we make meaning from language was very effective, as it enabled me to see where the discursive powers were present and how they worked to regulate the principals interviewed. These negotiations, these moments in conversations, enabled me to see the places and spaces where intertextuality is possible, where gender and leadership are inextricably linked. I will discuss all of this and my findings in the following chapters, but first I turn to a discussion of the questions I posed and the methodological assumptions.

**What did I ask these principals?**

I think that it is important to state that the questions I asked were informed, in part, by my own experiences as a principal. They were also born out of my own questions around gender and its impact on my leadership, which developed during my initial exploration for the literature review. Specifically, however, I used Gee’s (2011) seven building tasks of language in their formulation. I was looking for what principals thought was significant about the way their gender
informed their leadership practice. I wondered what practices were supported and how these practices informed the decisions the principals made. I was also interested in the social and professional relationships that the principals had with the staff at their schools, as well as in which forms of knowledge were given significance. I was also very curious to know how these principals would express the ways in which the social good is distributed through principalship.

The questions selected for the interview were intended to be a guide and it was never my intention to enter into a pose and response format. I wanted to engage in a conversation with these principals and the questions helped to frame our conversations. Each participant was given the questions to peruse during the interview. Following is a list of the questions and then a brief justification for each question’s selection, in reference to Gee’s (2011) building tasks of language.

1. How long have you been the principal of your current school? Was the principal before you a man or a woman? Were any comments made about your gender by staff, parents or students when you first arrived in this school?

2. How do you think your gender affects the way you lead as an elementary principal? Does one’s gender determine one’s leadership style or approach? Do men and women lead differently?

3. Some would say that women make better principals of elementary schools than men and still others would say that men are better able to lead elementary schools. What are your thoughts on these suppositions?

4. What about teachers, parents and students? Do you think they respond/react differently to female principals than they would male principals? Why or why not?
5. When we ask teachers whether they prefer to work for a male principal or female principal, they often indicate a preference. Why do you think this is the case? Has anyone ever made the comment to you “I am so glad our principal is a man/woman,” or “I prefer working for men/women”? How do you respond to such preferences?

6. Some would say that we express our gendered identity in different ways. At times, this expression is largely based upon how we are expected to present ourselves in a gendered way in society. For example, these expressions affect the way we might choose to dress, talk, or in the case of principals, the way we choose to lead our schools. How would you describe how you may or may not express your gendered self as a principal of an elementary school? Do you feel that you express your gender differently when you are at home with family or friends?

7. Often when we make decisions in our schools, there are some teachers who agree with our decisions, and others who do not. Recently, I was accused of creating a “boys’ club” in the school in reaction to a decision made in the allocation of an assignment. To what extent do you think others presume that we make decisions based upon our gender? Have you encountered similar situations? Do you think there may be times when gender gets in the way of our decision making?

8. Being a principal of an elementary school is a demanding role, as there are many facets to the position that are tied to expectations of our superintendents, teachers, students and parents. To what extent do you think these expectations are tied to gender roles? For example, one parent made the following statement to me, “It is time for you to be a man and grow a pair.” Has there ever been a time when you were asked to meet an expectation in your role as principal that was tied to your gender?
9. Has there ever been a time when you have felt constricted or restricted by gender roles and how your gender is perceived by others? In other words, have you ever felt that you had to enact or take on a specific gender role while carrying out your duties as a principal? Please describe this experience. How did you feel about having to take on these roles?

10. I take the position that principalship provides opportunities for us to find and act with agency. By agency, I am referring to opportunities to question or upset stereotypes and expectations that exist within our society and work lives. In this case, I am referring to the manner in which we are expected to carry out our roles as principals and the manner in which principalship gets tied up in gender roles. Have you experienced moments when you wanted to react against expectations or situations in which you found yourself having to enact a gendered role as a principal? Please describe.

These questions reflect my intent to ask principals to think about the issue of gender and leadership in the following ways:

a. Did they think gender matters when it comes to leadership? Did they think one’s gender is significant? How did they describe effective leadership? What makes an effective leader and do they hold the social good?

b. Did they think that men and women lead differently and why? How did these principals connect gender and leadership together?

c. How their gender may or may not affect the way those they lead react or respond to them. How did these principals describe their relationship to their staff?

d. They were asked to reflect on how they perform their gender as principals. I am trying to understand if they believe that it differs from when they might be in the company of family
and friends. I also wanted to know if they felt there were certain expectations placed upon them from others that could be related or linked to their gendered selves. Who has the power and hence controls the social good? What manner(s) of principal leadership gets privileged?

e. My overall intent was to inspire principals to really think about gender and reflect upon its impact on their daily work life. This is why I chose to use some examples from my own experience to discover the kinds of experiences principals had had with respect to gender and their interactions with parents, staff and students. I wondered if these principals considered gender as having an impact on principal leadership. What was made significant?

f. In my final question, I asked principals to reflect on what they thought they could do about this issue in terms of having agency. Through my dialogue with principals, this question became more about why this issue matters. I wondered how principals might connect their practices of principal leadership to gender roles and whether or not they might consider making changes to their practice?

g. I was very cognizant of the fact that some principals might not be familiar with the theoretical perspective I was employing in the study. For this reason, I tended not to use words such as “discourses” and “agency,” and instead, focused on each principal’s experiences. At no point did I define what I meant by gender, allowing each participant to reflect upon their own ideas and understanding of gender. I was particularly interested if principals made connection between their gender and their leadership style.

During the course of the interviews, it felt more appropriate to engage in dialogue and ask follow-up questions rather than staying with a script. The resulting dialogue provided opportunities for principals to reflect upon their leadership and to tell their stories, as opposed to
providing scripted responses to individual questions. In this way, I found that I could focus on
the principals’ experiences and stories and how they were expressed.

**Methodological Assumptions**

This study was built from some of my own experiences as a principal and the moments
when my gender has come into play in terms of how I lead. I realize that my experiences
certainly informed my analysis of each principal’s responses. However, it was important to me
that I captured the true essence of what each principal was saying as much as I possibly could.
Maxwell (2010) used the term “reflexivity” to indicate that the researcher is part of the world
he/she studies, describing it as “a powerful and inescapable influence [in that] what the
informant says is always influenced by the interviewer and the interview situation. While there
are some things you can do to prevent the more undesirable consequences of this (such as
avoiding leading questions), trying the “minimize” your effect is not a meaningful goal for
qualitative research” (Maxwell, 2010, p. 282). I came into the project wondering if other
principals shared some of my concerns and questions, and I felt that the best way to find out was
to interview them. My concerns thus became the basis for creating my questions, and, before
using them, I shared them with some principals to see if my questioning made sense, and if the
reader felt I was leading them down a path or in a particular direction. While I took such
precautions not to allow my bias to influence this study, I cannot eliminate the fact that I came to
each interview with a set of experiences that could not help but bias my thinking and approach.

It is also important to note that I used Gee’s (2011) building tasks of language to
formulate my questions and also as the backdrop for my analysis of the responses. I recognize
this as having a significant effect on the resulting interviews, as I was looking to see how these
principals linked gender and leadership. The formulation of my questions clearly linked the two
together, and as a result the connection was made for the participant. This is significant since it is possible that, had I not made this connection for the participants, they might not have made this connection within our discussion. As a result of my use of Gee’s (2011) work to inform both the formulation of my questions and my analysis (which is discussed in greater detail below), I recognize that a very clear connection was made between gender and principal leadership, which, in turn, resulted in discourses that reflected this connection. I reiterate, however, that it was important for me to see if principals had experienced moments in which their gender was connected to their role as principals. While this strategy enabled me to focus on the problem of hegemonic masculinity, and served to invite participants to focus as well on anticipated connections between gender and leadership, I also made use of theoretical tools beyond Gee’s framework to further deepen my analysis in chapters 5 through 7.

In addressing bias, Maxwell (2010) commented that “what is important is to understand how you are influencing what the informant says, and how this affects the validity of the inferences you can draw from the interview” (p. 282; original emphasis). An example of my inherent bias is that when I first began the interview process, I assumed that other principals would have had similar experiences that were close to my stories around gender. I was surprised to find that this was not the case, and it caused me to pause and think about my story as somewhat unique to myself. In fact, I found that each principal had their own story to tell, and that it was important that I listen to these stories for in their telling they made the experience of interviewing that much richer. In relation, Chase (2010) commented on the importance of viewing the interviewee as a narrator: “To think of an interviewee as a narrator is to make a conceptual shift away from the idea that interviewees have answers to researchers’ questions and toward the idea that interviewees are narrators with stories to tell and voices of their own” (p.
218). This was important to note because to interpret participants’ responses to questions as just that, answers to questions, misses the richness and myriad voices that appear when one recognizes these responses as stories.

Conducting the discourse analysis using Gee’s (2011) tools of inquiry enabled me to understand and make meaning from these stories. I also assumed going into these interviews that principals would be able and willing to share experiences with me that related to how they perceived and how others had perceived their gender identity. Most of the principals were quite willing to share, while others were more guarded and had some difficulty addressing the issue. I was careful not to assume that principals were aware of gender theory, however some indicated that they had done some reading and studying in the area. At times, this added greater depth to the discussion and at other times it did not. However, it was interesting to note that each principal came at this issue in their own unique way.

My bias was also revealed within my surprise that most of the principals I interviewed had not actually thought about how their gender affected their role as a principal. To be clear, I did not reveal this surprise to the participants, however, it was most certainly there as I listened to the principals’ responses. Some principals had to do a lot of thinking on the spot and took moments to contemplate their answers. I believe that this resulted in very honest and open responses rather than anything scripted. Also, conversations evolved as more questions and ideas emerged. In this way, the interview became more like a friendly, informal, and interesting dialogue. As a result, the dialogue became richer as it progressed through new understandings and ideas.

I think it also important to position myself as a white, gay, male researcher who is making use of feminist, post-structuralist theory to think about the intersection of gender and
principal leadership. I was very cognizant, for example, that my interpretation of feminist theory has been through a gay male lens, and this is significant because I cannot speak to what it means to be a female principal. I was very much aware of this when speaking with female principals, and I wondered how my gender, or at least the way it was presented to the participant, might be affecting the kinds of responses I received from women, and from men, for that matter. There are therefore moments in this thesis where I insert myself in order to reveal my biases and positioning. However, I have been careful not to do this in my analysis of each principal’s response, as my aim is to build an understanding of the experiences revealed through discourse analysis, and frame these experiences within feminist, post-structuralist theory.

**Limitations**

I recognize that this study represents a very small portion of the community of principals in Ontario. Most of the principals interviewed worked for the Toronto District School Board, and so all had similar experiences in navigating principalship within similar structures. Their experiences were in urban and suburban environments, and their references were very familiar to me as most of us were employed within the same board at the time of interviews. Interviewing principals from other boards was not quite as smooth at times, as they had to spend some time contextualizing their responses. However, having different perspectives was important to the study and their participation is very much valued.

The principals interviewed were actually quite a diverse group of people: some were born and raised in Canada, while others were born outside the country. Most were educated in Ontario universities and so their teacher and administrative training were very similar. It also worked out that some principals interviewed had recently retired, while others were in their first year. I felt it was important to get different perspectives based on differing levels of experience.
The greatest limitation in this study was the shortage of male participants. I had a great deal of difficulty convincing men to volunteer their time to participate in the study. Some men did not return my emails, while others declined. This is not to say that women did not decline as well. However, many more women were interested in participating than not. While the response from men was rather limited, the dialogue with these men was rich and diverse.

**Data Analysis and Analysis of the Transcripts**

As mentioned above, shortly after each interview, I typed up the transcripts verbatim. As Maxwell (2010) made clear, in interview studies, the data must be composed of verbatim transcripts and not just notes about significant points (p. 283). The reason for this is that the researcher must consider the entire narrative as it occurred during the interview process so as not to misrepresent the participant’s stories. In the first phase of analysis, after each transcript was complete, I made digital notes about salient points. I used Gee’s (2011) notion of the building tasks of language to determine what ideas were given significance and prominence in the dialogue, what connections were made, and what was privileged. This was particularly important as the interview was still fairly fresh in my mind and I was able to comment on the nuances of the interview. Chase (2010) has helpfully commented on the importance of retaining the narrative voice, writing that,

> narrative researchers listen to the narrator’s voices – to the subject positions, interpretive practices, ambiguities, and complexities – within each narrator’s story. This process usually includes attention to the “narrative linkages” that a storyteller develops between the biographical particulars of his or her life, on the one hand, and the resources and constraints in his or her environment for self and reality construction, on the other. (p. 222)

Here, Chase (2010) refers to the importance of considering each narrative voice as distinct, noting what she calls the “subject positions, interpretive practices, ambiguities and complexities” of each story. This is precisely why I chose to make notes after each interview, so that I could
reflect on the stories being told when they were fresh in my mind. Chase also points out how “narrative linkages” are made in the interpretation of these voices. Narratives appear as partly biographical and partly a product of environmental constraints. Chase’s reference made me think of how each principal’s story moved within and between discourses of leadership and gender, both somewhat biographical and yet also related to the environment in which these principals work and the positions they take up within it.

The second phase of the analysis began when all interviews and transcripts were completed. It was at this stage that I began to use what Luttrell (2010) referred to as “reflexive writing.” As this author helpfully explained: “The nature of reflexive writing is different from what you may be used to; it is meant to capture your thinking process while you are engaged in it. Reflexive writing can vary in length, form, and content, but its purpose is to make your thinking visible. Reflexive writing goes by various names including memos, notes-on-notes, journal entries, free writes, and ‘sampler’ writing” (Luttrell, 2010, p. 470). Here, Luttrell positions reflexive writing as the process by which the researcher makes his/her thinking visible. This describes the way that thoughts and ideas are put together while investigating and analyzing data. During my “reflexive writing” process, I read and re-read the transcripts looking for patterns and commonalities as well as unique cases. As I read, I made digital notes throughout the transcripts alongside particular passages that were significant, specifically in terms of the manner in which they were reflective of Gee’s (2011) building tasks and tools of language. As I took notes, I began to see various discourses repeated over and over again through the process of my analysis and I made additional notes about these discourses. Using my notes, I then began to look at moments when principals created or revealed situated meanings and created figured worlds within their choice of words, phrases, and comments. I looked specifically for moments
when principals created similar or connected figured worlds in order to reveal the gendered discourses that were emerging. My digital notes attached to each of these salient comments pointed me in the direction of a particular discourse or analysis. As I was writing and formulating my arguments within each discourse, I perused my digital comments to find responses that best reflected my thinking on the matter. I then made sure to quote these responses in the thesis because I felt they best reflected my thinking and the general flow of my analysis.

While Gee’s (2011) building tasks of language enabled me to make connections, determine what discourses were privileged and which were not, determine who held the social good, analyze that which was made significant, and discover what practices were supported and maintained, it was Gee’s tools of inquiry, namely situated meanings, figured worlds, and intertextuality, that informed much of my analysis. I chose this approach in order to demonstrate the manner in which figured worlds, which ultimately create situated meanings, are formed within a collective. In considering the collective of principals involved in my study, I used Gee’s notion of intertextuality to analyze the ways the principals connected gender and leadership. This analysis informed my awareness of the creation of gendered discourses, a collective understanding around how male and female principals lead. Because I clearly made the connection between gender and principal leadership within the formulation of the questions, the stage was set for the further creation of figured worlds, within which this connection was made significant.

In the third phase of the analysis, I read and re-read the transcripts again and created a chart in order to guide my thinking (see Appendix D). I created the chart so that I could visually pinpoint which principal referenced which discourse. I listed all of the most common discourses of female and male principal leadership that had come out of the interviews. Each of these
discourses were created from my note-taking, and the phrases and words used by each participant. In fact, the headings used for each discourse were taken from the words used by the participants to describe each discourse, as it was these words which created meaning and opened the door to understanding the figured worlds that were being created. These headings are reflective of what I felt was the meaning intended by each participant, and, as such, they too are part of the discourse. When a particular principal spoke about or referred to one of these discourses, this was indicated on the chart with a √. Once the chart was complete, I was able to visually pinpoint which discourses were more prevalent amongst the female and male principals, as well as which were reflected in both female and male responses. This was particularly helpful when ascribing particular discourses to each gender.

Deciding how to arrange and organize these discourses in such a way that sense could be made of them was difficult because discourses are fluid; they intertwine and hence never truly stand alone as representative of any one category or idea. I felt, however, that it was important to create categories for these discourses so that they could be analyzed and then represented in the manner that made the most sense. At this time, I decided to create three categories: discourses of female principal leadership; discourses of male principal leadership; and a discourse of reluctance and denial. Each of these discourses was revealed through the creation of figured worlds by the principals, as a means of making sense of their role and how it interacted with their gender identity. I found that connections could be made amongst the different stories told, as principals expressed their shared experiences. I recognized that by choosing a male and female category, I was, in a sense, enhancing and reaffirming the gender binary. I felt, however, that the binary was already being affirmed through the responses from the participants, and that these categories were reflective of this affirmation. Each of these categories was created out of the
chart referenced above. I looked at the discourses and determined the category based on the number of male and female references to the discourse. In the case of the third category on reluctance and denial, as both male and female participants referenced this discourse quite frequently during my discussions, I felt it was important to create a stand-alone category to capture this important and prevalent discourse. Throughout my analysis of the data, the presence of gendered stereotypes became abundantly clear, which ultimately informed the organization and presentation of the data. I wanted to explore the presence of hegemonic masculinity within principalship, and, as the discourses unfolded, the gender binary was referenced again and again. While I critique the presence of the gender binary in current literature, I began to recognize, and could not ignore, its prevalence within the data I had collected.

Decisions around which discourse was assigned to each gender identification were based on two factors: the number of times the discourse arose when speaking with participants who identified as male or female, and whether the discourse referenced male or female principals. For example, the discourse titled “I’d Rather Work For a Man” was referenced by male participants only, and hence fell under the category “discourses of male principal leadership.” Alternatively, the discourse of the “Micromanaging ‘Bitch’ Factor” was referenced by both women and men equally, but was assigned to “discourses of female principal leadership” because the comments made were about women and not men. I considered the manner in which principals were making meaning using language; what they made significant and what was cast aside, and how this related to their practice as principals; the connections that were made between various ideas, as well as how principals revealed those who are in possession of the “social good” and who maintains its ownership. The comments that best reflected this meaning making were chosen for inclusion in the thesis in order to reveal each principal’s story. Gee’s (2011) building blocks of
language were helpful when analysing the data as they pointed toward how meaning was created, made, and presented. Some of the discourses, although mentioned a few times by the participants, were not chosen to be part of the study. This decision was made when I felt that the tenets of these discourses were also captured within other discourses that were reflected in the study. As was pointed out in chapter 1, gender is largely invisible or non-existent in documents such as the OLF, and this thesis sought to challenge this, making gender visible. The purpose of this thesis necessitated the selection of discourses that underlined the prevalence of hegemonic masculinity. The resulting limitation was that some discourses were excluded from the discussion in this thesis. I was looking for moments within the data when figured worlds were being created collectively by the participants, as one of the goals of this thesis was also to name gendered discourses as a beginning point, opening the door to further study of these complex figured worlds.

**Summary of Methodology and Procedures**

This thesis is framed as a narrative study using Denzin’s (1989) conception of the “personal experience narrative,” referring to stories of shared experiences. In interviewing principals, my plan was to draw out personal narratives and stories about moments when gender and leadership had intertwined. In this chapter, I have made the case for my choice to use interviews as a research tool to reveal and discover these stories, and discourse analysis as my chosen manner with which to analyze and interpret the data. I have also outlined how I used the work of Gee (2011), as it aids in understanding how language is used to make meaning (building tasks), and provides tools for interpreting and making meaning from participants’ stories (situated meanings, figured worlds, and intertextuality). Each step that I took in the process of my analysis has been described in order to explain the decisions I made and the reasons behind
them. Maxwell’s (2010) conception of “reflexivity” has been used to describe the methodological assumptions I made during the process of my analysis. In relation, I have included mention of my own biases and my positioning as a gay, white male. Finally, I have discussed my reflexive writing procedures using Luttrell (2010) and Chase’s (2010) work, in order to describe how I have made sure to represent each principal’s narrative voice.

In the following chapters, I engage in a discourse analysis of the transcripts. This discourse analysis, described above in the methodology section, revealed three types of discourses: discourses of female principal leadership, discourses of male principal leadership, and a discourse of reluctance and denial. These discourses are discussed in detail in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven respectively. Each type of discourse tells a shared story that arose out of the experiences of the principals interviewed. Each story represents the creation of figured worlds formed out of situated meanings, and the ways in which principalship is gendered are revealed therein. I make use of post-structuralist theory to frame these figured worlds and make sense of them, so that the reader is able to understand how these discourses work upon and regulate principals’ bodies. The next chapter begins the analysis of discourses of female principal leadership.
Chapter 5: Discourses of Female Principal Leadership

Overview

After my interviews with 15 principals and after analyzing the data, various discourses of female principal leadership began to emerge. As discussed in Chapter 4, these discourses are analyzed using three of Gee’s (2011) tools of inquiry: situated meanings, figured worlds, and intertextuality. Each of these tools of inquiry is used to ask questions about what Gee (2011) referred to as the building tasks: significance, practices, identities, relationships, politics connections, and signs, systems, and knowledge. Through this analysis, the following discourses emerged: the strong, micromanaging bitch factor; I understand because I am a mom; men have it easier; and the empathetic, emotional, and nurturing leader. As described in the previous chapter, these discourses came out of the process of analysis and appeared frequently during my discussions with the participants. These discourses are representative of the stories told by both female and male participants about the way women lead schools. They are representative of shared experiences and stories amongst both the female and male principals, and they largely define a great deal of the thinking around women and principal leadership uncovered during our conversations. Each discourse title was taken from words used by the participants to describe their experiences of when and how their gender had intersected with their leadership style. These discourses have a way of intermingling as one often relates to another. For the purposes of organization, I have separated them out for discussion and analysis, however this is not meant to suggest that these discourses are in any way static. They changed and grew as the participants talked about them, and some of them were linked with other discourses by the participants in the study. I will endeavour to make connections where they exist in order to fully capture each
participant’s story.

Both female and male principals referenced the notion that women need to show strength as principals in order to demonstrate that they can in fact do the job. There was a strong sense that women need to prove themselves as leaders, and, as a result, get labelled as “bitches” and/or “dragon ladies.” This was referenced in the research quite often as the women reportedly had found themselves in a position of having to fit into a masculine model of leadership. Emma, one of the women interviewed, said it perfectly: “But I think there is a perception out there, I would say that I feel that there is a perception that being a principal is a male’s role.” Men are often portrayed as being very “task-oriented,” whereas women are portrayed as being more interpersonal (Eagly et al., 1992). This discourse highlights the fact that women are often caught between either being too soft and deemed ineffective as leaders, or too harsh and hence bitchy. Women are somehow still not seen as suited to leadership roles (Pittinsky et al., 2007, p. 465).

In the next discourse, “I understand because I am a mom,” almost every woman I spoke to somehow blended their identity as a mother and a leader of a school. Most of the women reportedly used the fact that they are mothers to their advantage as leaders. They seemed to feel that it gave them an edge. These women saw “motherhood” as a state that enabled them to be successful and effective principals. The problem here is that this notion of leadership maintains hegemonic notions of what it means to be a man and/or a woman. The act of “mothering” is an interesting concept within the context of schools, and it is particularly significant that these principals had woven this into their identities as school leaders. In her article, “Coordinating Family and School: Mothering for Schooling,” Griffith (1995) commented on family/school relations.

Mothering work constructs the family’s relation with the textually-organized discourse of schooling in a number of ways. We might visualize it as a tapestry made up of a number of
threads between the school and the family. For some families, the tapestry is thick and lush as the mother coordinates the activities and organization of the family with that of the school – getting the child to school on time, going to report card conferences, monitoring the child’s school progress and so on. In others, the tapestry is threadbare and the teachers and principal may wonder if the mother really cares about the child – getting the child to school after the bell but before the lessons actually start, missing report card conferences, waiting for the teacher to telephone before attending to the child’s school performance. In the family, the tapestry woven by the mother will be unique to her biography and circumstances. But where the threads connect to the school, there will be more similarities than differences in the mothers’ work. (pp. 5–6)

Griffith links mothering with schooling as if it were a tapestry, thick and lush, with the mother heavily involved in school life, or threadbare in the case where the mother is less involved. Mothers seem to be the ones to take on responsibility for making connections with their child’s school. This being the case, it seems advantageous for these principals to present themselves as mothers so as to be able to relate to other mothers in the community. But to what extent does this re-inscribe hegemonic notions of femininity and motherhood? The women to whom I spoke perceived this discourse of motherhood as a benefit, something that gave them the edge over their male counterparts. However, as I have discussed while making use of Blackmore’s (1999) work, taking up these views of female leadership only hinders it, thereby depoliticizing the issue of gender entirely. That being said, one might also perceive this reference to motherhood within a postfeminist stance, and argue that it is perfectly legitimate to make a claim to motherhood.

McRobbie (2000) wrote,

Becoming aware of what it is to be a young woman today almost inevitably means being touched by elements of feminist discourse. There is novelty, absurdity and anomaly in a situation such as this. The dilemma it poses to socialist feminists like myself is that here we have what started out as a small and embattled movement now entering into the society as a whole and undergoing dramatic change and transformation in the process. On the one hand it remains unpopular, indeed reviled; on the other hand it has also become normalized, a kind of legitimate banter between women and men….It is part of a democratic process whereby sexual politics is actively reconsidered, where its field of effectivity is extended and also renewed. (pp. 211–12)
Here, McRobbie lays bare the struggle that exists between the “embattled movement” of the past and a renewed understanding of feminist discourse. Perhaps it is both possible and productive to use motherhood as a means of engaging in a dialogue about being a successful female principal. The use of motherhood positions women principals as separate from their male counterparts, and, rather than relegating women to the household, it positions women as prepared and ready to take on the role of principal. The question becomes, is this discourse reductive or progressive? This question will be discussed further on in this analysis.

The notion that “men have it easier” came up again and again as I spoke with female principals. At one point, Maggie stated, “certainly there have been moments where I have thought, ‘Boy I wish I were a man.’ I do remember thinking that at times, right? Men will be able to do this so much easier, right? Men would just say it, it would be well received and we would move on. Whereas, I feel like I still have to explain and dance around things more than a man would have to.” Maggie’s desire to be a man in this regard reveals her frustration about the fact that, as a woman, she felt she was not able or permitted to just make a decision and move on. Other women also shared this frustration. For Maggie, it seems, leadership was not the issue as much as the expectations of others, that she should explain her thinking about a decision rather than just accept it. In their research, Blackmore and Sachs (2007) highlighted that during periods of change within the educational system in Australia, female principals were placed in the position of having to enact their authority in ways that did not allow for them to find success, creating power imbalances that made decision making difficult. This suggests that perhaps men would have been better able to navigate the change, especially when it came to others “taking orders” from them more readily than they would have from a woman.

An essentialist belief that is commonly used is that women are emotional and nurturing and
men are hard and tough (see Eagly et al., 1992; Pittinsky et al., 2007). When it comes to discourses around women as emotionally connected, empathetic leaders, some women embrace this identity whereas others reject it. Moreover, it is important to note that the male principals I spoke to not only embraced this notion, but attributed it as part of the way women lead. Overall, this discourse provides an interesting look at how some women ascribe to these notions of leadership as a means of finding success as leaders. Again though, I would ask the question, is the act of embracing this notion progressive or reductive? Regardless of the answer, it appears that female principals may not have much choice in the matter if they are to appear successful.

**The Strong, Micromanaging Bitch Factor**

Out of the 15 interviews I analyzed, four women and four men referred to female principals as strong micromanagers, and, in one case, as “bitches.” In particular, there was a tendency for both female and male principals to talk about “strong” leaders. This notion of strength in leadership was defined in different ways, particularly when the principals were describing male and female leaders. One of the most notable differences was that many principals expected female leaders to be “strong,” whereas men seemed to be perceived as already imbuing strength – or at least their strength as leaders was not really brought into question. These different expectations suggest that a female principal needs to be strong in order to be successful. In other words, women need to lead like men. Another element to this discourse around female principals was a need for them to prove themselves. More than one principal referred to this need, which again suggests that women are somehow not suited to the role and need to prove that they belong. A discussion of this discourse – the strong, micromanaging bitch factor – revealed the way women’s bodies are regulated by masculine notions of strength, in keeping with Foucault’s (1978) notion of bio-power and governmentality. It appears that women
have no choice but to comply, and, in this way, are subjected and dominated by power relations created and maintained as a means of promoting hegemony. Connell’s (1987) notion of “emphasized femininity” was prevalent in the discourse that became apparent as well, referring to the manner in which women are forced to comply to their subordination by men. The idea that women can only become strong leaders by succumbing to this male notion of strength, thereby proving they belong in principalship, will be explored in this section. The questions I seek to answer here are: to what extent is this proof related to one’s strength as a leader? What does “strong” mean in this context, and what are the implications of this word for both male and female principals?

Maggie was a relatively new principal in a large urban school with a very diverse student body. She had worked as a vice principal for many years before becoming a principal three years ago. She was not new to administration and had seen many changes in administration over the years. I begin with Maggie’s response to my question about how she felt her gender impacted her leadership as a principal.

So I think that it can play a big part. I think gender has evolved over time, particularly in the role of principal. When I first became a principal, I would say it was the expectation for the principal to take a very hard line like their male counterparts had been. So I worked for a very strict principal who had, I feel, had to overcompensate for being female by being incredibly strong and when I first began in administration, I think that that was the model I tried to follow too. Very tight by the rules…

Here, Maggie references the need for female principals to be strong like their male counterparts. She defines this strength in terms of taking a “hard line,” being “tight” with the “rules,” and being “strict.” Maggie also clearly positions men as being the keepers of the social good, models of good principal leadership. Women are expected to identify with this “hard line” approach and overcompensate for being female. In this passage, Maggie gives significance to the word strong and privileges this leadership trait by making it the goal of all leaders to attain. Leading with
strength is, for Maggie, a socially recognized practice, as she connects this word to the way one is expected to lead. However, by stating that female principals need to overcompensate for being female, she suggests that females are not typically recognized as possessing strength in leadership, and are only legitimized as leaders once they possess it. The social good of strength is clearly in the hands of men, and, as a result, women are forced to attain it from men by following their example, modeling their own behaviour to fit that of their male colleagues. Here we can appreciate Butler’s (1990) notion of gender as a performance. Through gestures and acts, women perform and construct their identity – one that really has nothing to do with any internal identity. Maggie thus reports here her experience with performing an identity of strength as a leader, enacting what is traditionally seen as a masculine trait. We are, of course, not made aware of Maggie’s internal identity; however, it is clear that she had certainly enacted a trait in her role as principal that she defined as masculine. It is interesting to note Maggie’s statement at the beginning of the passage that “gender has evolved over time.” One might also take a postfeminist stance here, as Maggie takes on the masculine notion of strength and owns it. As discussed in the work of McRobbie (2000, 2004), in the process of owning traditional masculine traits, women have gained parity with men and hence the freedom to express themselves as they wish. After all, Maggie reports leading in a manner that is “very tight by the rules,” much like her male counterparts from the past.

When I asked Maggie if she felt she had to act a certain way because of this expectation, she stated,

So I find that if the answer is no, um, to the question that they might ask, I would think that the reaction is oh “bitch”…yeah, as opposed to my role that I think that they think I am taking a harder line than I have to, that I am out to try and prove or [out] to get them in a certain way. So I think… that if a man were to deliver the same message I think they would say “Oh ok that’s the way it is,” right? I do still think that that is true today.
Here, Maggie has clearly linked the show of strength from the female principal as a sign of “bitchiness,” of being “harder” than she needs to be, and yet, the expectation that the female principal take the hard line remains. Maggie suggests that she is called a “bitch” because she has to prove herself or is “out to get them.” She makes the point that if a man were to deliver the same message, he would get away with it without being labelled a “bitch.” Maggie connects the word “bitch” to the notion of taking a “harder line.” The word “bitch” is further defined to include having to prove herself or being out to get her staff. Maggie illustrates her belief that she cannot properly perform her duties as a principal (i.e., following rules and guidelines) without her staff questioning her or assuming that she is out to get them. She situates her leadership within a framework that makes her fearful that, if she does not give staff what they want when she is asked for something, she will be seen as “bitchy.” In this passage, Maggie confirms the existence of hegemony. So, while it appears that Maggie is willing to take on what might be considered to be traditional masculine traits, she also recognizes that she is being regulated by the very same notions of masculinity.

Alina took a different approach to this issue. In her first year as a principal, she was working in a small kindergarten through Grade 6 community school with a relatively small number of staff. During our interview, Alina often referred to her experiences as a vice principal working in different schools with different principals. She indicated at the beginning of our conversation that she had found that teachers preferred to work for male principals, because they felt that female principals were “on top” of them all the time. She stated, “In the most part when they say that, I think it is a principal that isn’t on top of them, micromanaging them all the time.” This is a similar sentiment to that made by Maggie above, in that the standards seem to be different for male principals and female principals. I asked Alina to elaborate on this point and
she stated, “That women micromanage (laughter). Some do, some do, and so I consciously try not to. I try not to maybe to a fault, but um, but these last couple of months, you know, the last six months have been such that we can’t really anyways.” Making use of Gee’s (2011) building tasks of language, it is clear that Alina situates the act of micromanaging within the realm of female principals, and, at the same time, seems to suggest that it is perhaps both a desired and undesirable practice. When Alina comments that she tries not to micromanage “to a fault,” she also suggests that she feels the pressure to micromanage her staff in order to get the job done. She later stated,

Sometimes I want to micromanage and then I will stop myself and just think, how will that look, but if the situation demands it or if I really have to, I think I will. I know I want to give, because it’s a balance, you want to give teachers the space to teach, you know, but it has to be up to a certain standard, right?

Here, Alina clearly expresses feeling the pressure to micromanage teachers when the “situation demands it,” but qualifies this by stating that it is a balance of giving teachers space and micromanaging them to ensure the instructional program is sound. It is also interesting to note her worry about how it will look to her staff when she micromanages – perhaps for fear of being labeled a bitch. Moreover, Alina alludes to social relationships with her staff, and her worry over how she will be perceived if she micromanages them; at the same time, she expresses worry that if she does not micromanage her staff, she is somehow not performing her duties and responsibilities as a principal. Hence, the practice of micromanaging is presented as something to be both desired and avoided. Alina’s worry in this passage is a good example of the manner in which this discourse is regulating her, and this mechanism is reflective of Foucault’s notion of bio-power. As a principal, Alina is expected to regulate how her teachers instruct their students. In this way, Alina becomes part of the “institution of power” and this causes some discomfort. In fact, later in our conversation, she referred to herself as the “micromanaging dragon lady.”
Although Alina did not use the word “strong” in her description of the female principal, there are elements of this notion in her use of the word “micromanaging.” In her narrative, she connects the micromanaging female principal to both having strength as a leader and to the leader as “dragon lady.” She situates women principals within this continuum of micromanagement, where they move back and forth between being a strong principal and being a dragon lady. The fact that she made no mention of men as micromanagers in our conversation suggests that male principals do not find themselves caught between these two dichotomies. Perhaps men embody this institutional power more readily because they are men and it is expected of them.

Sahar had been a principal for five years in the same school, a relatively smaller school of about 250 students in grades kindergarten through Grade 6. A very active principal within her school community, Sahar had also worked as a vice principal in a number of different schools. Right from the beginning of our conversation, Sahar referred to the notion of being a strong leader. When I asked her about how she might tie her leadership to her gender she stated,

I don’t, I think it has nothing to do… I don’t think it has to do with gender, I think it has to do with personality, so whether you are male or female like I, you know people will say that I am a strong alpha female kind of individual and that the leadership style that I have. It has nothing to do with being… it’s not the gender, philosophically, I don’t believe that. I have seen strong male leaders, strong female, I have seen equally, you know, ineffective male leaders and female, so to me I don’t think it has to do with that.

Sahar refers here to herself and her leadership style as a “strong alpha female,” and positions this in a positive light by making reference to both effective and ineffective leaders. She states that because she had seen both strong male and female leaders, as well as ineffective male and female leaders, gender does not come into play in terms of leadership. Yet, she clearly brings gender into the equation when she labels herself as an alpha female, gendering her leadership style and taking on a seemingly postfeminist stance. Her use of the very masculine word “alpha” is interesting. In doing so, she has clearly taken ownership of the word, placing herself squarely
within the alpha male group in order to add a sense of strength to her leadership ability. The question becomes, is she owning that label or borrowing it? What access does she actually have to that label? Why does she feel it necessary to use this word or even label herself in this way? I suggest that it is because she has no choice but to use it. If she wants to be known as a strong leader, she needs to align herself with masculine identity, hence the alpha. By juxtaposing the words strong and ineffective in describing male and female leaders, Sahar suggests that strong leaders are effective, and hence if you are not a strong leader, you are ineffective. It is also interesting to note that Sahar does not limit her use of the word strong to either men or women, but insists that both men and women can be strong leaders. Later in our conversation, however, Sahar made some distinctions.

When I asked her to comment on how she felt people react to strong female and male leaders, she stated,

Yes I do, so I have seen whether you have been a strong male or ineffective male leader, people just kind of ride it out. With a female, they make more issue out of it. So as a teacher, I remember having an ineffective male but no one really did anything about it, just you know, whatever, went along with it. Whereas with the female, people griped about it, people made comments about it, people had to find ways to see if they can get that changed.

Here again, there are different standards voiced for male and female principals, when Sahar indicates that ineffective male leaders get away with it because they are male, whereas female principals do not. When I asked Sahar why this was, she stated, “I don’t know, I don’t know if it’s because it’s the male/female, it’s always been traditionally a male dominant role, I think that is changing now but I remember as a teacher seeing a lot of that.” Earlier in the interview, Sahar had insisted that gender has nothing to do with leadership style, and yet here she is conceding that the role of principal has been traditionally male dominated, and that, as a result, men seem to be able to get away with not being strong leaders. This is a good example of how discourses and
situated meanings changed throughout the course of my dialogue with Sahar. Her narrative shows that she began to re-formulate her thinking with respect to the manner in which gender had intersected with her leadership. Intertextuality is at work here, as Sahar moves between these discourses of gender and leadership, describing the different ways staff responded and reacted to both male and female principals. Sahar makes clear, however, that women principals continue to be placed in a position where they need to show strength as leaders, otherwise they are somehow not legitimate and need to be replaced. Later, Sahar stated, “No, I don't ever remember sitting for example as a teacher in the staff room where people talked about the ineffective male, but they sure wanted to beat down the female.” In her story, Sahar clearly situates herself and identifies with the alpha female as a means of not being seen as weak or ineffective as a leader. This suggests that those who are deemed alpha are in possession of the social good as strong and effective leaders. Sahar also creates a figured world in order to make sense of the differences between the way male and female principals are treated by staff. She suggests that she will be “beaten down” by the staff as a female principal, and so presents herself as an alpha female leader in order to demonstrate and imbue strength. Earlier, I referenced the possibility that Sahar was taking on a postfeminist stance. It is unclear from her narrative, however, whether Sahar truly embraces the alpha, masculine persona, or if she feels she has no choice but to perform this role. Regardless, Sahar’s story indicates that there exists a struggle amongst women when they feel the need to lead as men do.

Later in the conversation, she stated that female principals do in fact need to prove that they can do the job.

I will be honest with you, at the other school where I was VP, we had to prove ourselves… Yeah so, um, I was a VP for two years and it was an elementary school midtown, very high-profile community, parent group. Um, we were both – myself and the P – were females. The P was there a little bit longer than I had [been] but [was] still
struggling with… working with parents to build that trust and the understanding that we could run the school and that we didn’t need them to run the school. We didn’t need them to tell us how to do the operational piece, the curriculum piece, but they were always at our door about something. Whereas since then, there is a male P there and from what I hear from staff, because you know you still have conversations, yeah, no one bugs him.

Here, Sahar describes having to prove to a parent community that she and her principal were capable of running the school. She also notes that, at the time of her interview, there was a male principal in the same school with the same parent community and no one seemed to be questioning his authority. It is also interesting to note that Sahar was somewhat reluctant to admit that she had been placed in a position to have to prove herself. In this case, according to Sahar, to some degree, gender does matter in the case of principals and leadership, while previously she had stated that it is not a factor. This suggests that Sahar does not want to believe that gender matters in terms of principal leadership. Perhaps her reluctance speaks to her desire for it not to matter. Or perhaps this is Sahar’s way of maintaining her alpha female persona. At this point, I shall turn to some of the comments made by male principals around this discourse.

At the time of his interview, John had been a principal for four years, and had spent the last three of those years in a kindergarten through Grade 6 urban school. Previous to his leadership, his school had been led by two male principals in succession, and John commented that the staff seemed very used to being led by male administrators. In fact, he said, the staff preferred working with male leaders, as they as they knew what to expect. It is important to note as well that the staff at the time were mostly women. As a result, John appeared very comfortable in his role as principal, and the general tone of our conversation indicated that John had a great deal of confidence in his style of leadership. When I asked John to explain whether he thought men and women principals led differently, he stated,

Uh, stereotypically I would say that. In my practices, um, as a VP I [saw] that there are some commonalities. I think what really happens is that there’s an attention to detail
stereotypically that I see women principals have that um, that male principals don't necessarily have. So as an example, there might be a learning um, an initiative that’s taking place and um, with the female principal, they might be able to go into a little bit more detail in terms of how things should be executed, and they might manage it maybe somewhat differently, in terms of how they are going to manage all of the minor details. As opposed to the male principal who would be more, ok, I just expect you to get this done and just give me the product.

Here, John is clearly referring to women principals as micromanagers. He does not use this word, but he certainly implies it when he states that female principals will pay greater attention to detail than male principals. He admits to being stereotypical, and at the same time indicates that he does not wish to be stereotypical when he distinguishes between the two different leadership styles attributed to men and women. I suggest that John recognizes his privilege as a male leader, and hence feels entitled to make this call. He does it carefully so as not to offend, but he makes the essentialist based distinction all the same.

Later in our conversation, John referred to one of his former principals, who was a woman, as strong. Describing her leadership style, he said:

She was just as willing to step into the situation and in fact she was so much so that she said, “You know what, I will deal with the follow up for this.” So she was at that approach where she was extremely strong, and you know, we have had conversations about that as well just in terms, not necessarily male female, but more along the lines of how to best run the particular school.

Once again, the use of the word “strong” has implications for female principals. John says that his principal was strong because she was willing and able to take on the difficult parts of the role, and provided him with advice around how to run the school. Here John makes a connection between strength and effectiveness as a principal. It is also significant that he is making these connections in reference to a female principal, clearly connecting a woman’s ability to lead a school to her level of supposed strength. Moreover, his use of phrases such as “she was just as willing” and “in fact” indicates that John was somehow comparing his female principal to
himself. Her strength, therefore, is described only in relation to the kind of strength exhibited by male leaders. This is in keeping with Bourdieu’s notion of “symbolic violence” as it works upon both the male and female principal. As Bourdieu (2001) wrote,

And I have also seen masculine domination, and the way it is imposed and suffered, as the prime example of this paradoxical submission, and effect of what I call symbolic violence, a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims, exerted for the most part through the purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition (more precisely, misrecognition), recognition or even feeling (pp. 1–2)

In this passage, Bourdieu describes masculine domination as something that is “suffered,” as it is imposed on each of us, silently, and in a way that is seemingly “imperceptible.” John does not make the connection between strength and leadership in an overt manner. In fact, his connection is rather subversive, and this is precisely how symbolic violence works. The violence is imposed on both the female administrator and on John himself, as he describes her willingness to step into difficult situations, just like a man – for he too is expected to step into these situations – and reports this willingness as a kind of measure of her effectiveness as a leader.

The next participant, Khalid, was a seasoned principal and had been the principal of three different schools over the past 15 years. At the time of his interview, he had been at his current school for five years, a small kindergarten through Grade 6 school in a middle-class neighbourhood. Previously, he had worked at inner-city schools, as well as large kindergarten through Grade 8 schools. My conversation with Khalid was quite different from that with John. When I asked him if he had experienced any situations where people had certain expectations of him based on his gender, he stated,

Yeah that’s a great question for sure. Um, the two female principals that I worked with they weren’t particularly cuddly with the kids I would say, no that wouldn’t be [quite right]. They were really firm with the kids you know, fair, firm and friendly like I would like to say. I don’t think there was any expectation… the community called her [one principal] “Judge Judy” because she was tough, right, but she said she felt it was because she was tough and fair. So, in that regard, I would say no, I don’t think the community
had those expectations. You know, I might be inclined to say maybe at [school x] there may have been an inclination that I might be a strict disciplinarian when I went to that school and you know, kind of lay down the law, that sort of thing. But you know, I don’t think anybody ever explicitly said it to me [like] that.

It is interesting that Khalid begins by saying that the two female principals he worked with were not cuddly, but firm with the kids, and that this made them strong as leaders. He insists that there were no expectations that these women be tough, and yet the community called one of these women “Judge Judy.” All one needs to do is watch one episode of the television program “Judge Judy” to know that this reference is not exactly forgiving. The character of Judge Judy is a decisive disciplinarian, but can easily be spun as a “bitchy dragon lady” as well. Here we have another example of how women are caught between this identity that imbues strength and “bitchiness.” This principal is presented in this way by Khalid, but clearly this representation is not necessarily reflective of this principal’s true identity. Khalid constructs an identity for this principal through his male gaze, in keeping with Butler’s understanding of the manner in which gender is constructed. From the narrative, I am left unsure of whether this female principal embraced this identity, or if this is just Khalid’s representation of her; nevertheless, it is important to note the hegemonic notions at work here. It is also critical to note is that, when asked about the expectations others had of him based on his gender, Khalid immediately went to this sense of strength as a leader, equating it with being a strict disciplinarian, and suggesting that in order to be a good leader you must identify, and be identified by others, as strong. In this view, the practice of good leadership is a demonstration of strength, and hence the good and effective principal must identify as a strong leader. This, however, becomes problematic for women, as they are caught between this identity around strength and being constructed as dragon ladies.
This is an issue that also came up in my discussion with Rachel, a retired principal who began her career as a school leader at a time when the role was dominated by men. I asked Rachel if she had ever experienced times when others had expectations of her based upon her gender. This is how she responded, recalling a conversation she had with her vice principal:

Rachel: Because of my gender? I remember ____ (female vice principal) telling me not to wuss out!

Researcher: Tell me about that.

Rachel: Oh, I don’t even remember what it was but I can remember her saying that to me. I don’t know, maybe sometimes I guess she thought I was too lenient on staff and that you know, that I would have sat on a hard decision right? I don’t know, because well, she could be really hard. I remember her saying that.

Researcher: Did it bother you when she said that?

Rachel: It did bother me that’s what I am saying. I still remember her saying that. I look back on my practice right, am I really like that? But you know, it was kind of like I was like, was this a hill I was willing to die on? It was like for her, I was upset, but if I was going to die on it, I would. It was like choosing my battles.

In this part of our conversation, Rachel expressed that the female vice principal’s comment had bothered her, and that she had thought back upon her practice as a leader and considered the decisions she had made in that role. By telling Rachel not to “wuss out,” the female vice principal clearly sought to point out that Rachel was somehow weak and lacked the strength to make difficult decisions, and this had bothered Rachel. Principals must be strong, and Rachel seemed to still wonder if she was strong enough. It is interesting to point out that, in this case, a woman accused another woman of being weak. However, gender is constructed, produced, and maintained by both men and women in society (Butler 1990), so it is not surprising that women, as well as men, might maintain and reaffirm hegemony. This brings us to the notion of women being “hard” on one another.
To return to Khalid’s interview for a moment, in the latter part of our conversation, he brought up the notion that some women tend to be hard on one another, and spoke at length on the matter.

I think women would say that um, would say you know, women hang onto grudges a little longer. That is a total stereotype so I feel funny saying that, but I have heard that from women. They hang onto things, right? So often, you know, I mean, people come into your office and tell you everything, right, and you think like, “oh my God, I can’t believe you are going to tell me everything.” “You know what, before you came here,” this is one comment, “there was a lot of back-talking, you know, before you came here, and I really appreciate how you’re straight up with stuff and you’re always talking about maintaining your professionalism, and when people” (pause). “There was a lot of cliques here, Khalid, and you really worked to make sure everyone feels included in decision making and going to people.” So those are the kind of comments that I hear, and “You don’t understand, before you were here there was a lot of talking behind my back about things, you know, and people would say things about that.” So, I get that sort of comment, Ken, from women. I don’t think I really intentionally did anything at all, Ken, just being up front with talking about stuff right? So those comments, I’ve heard, right, where people are kind of hanging on to previous struggles, you know, longer than they need to, right. My line tends to be, you know, like, we can be friendly with each other here, but we don’t all have to be best friends, right? We have to work together right.

Khalid is very much aware that what he is saying here is a stereotype, and he admits to that fact by saying that he feels funny saying the words. He uses the example of teachers coming to him to talk about how women on staff were “cliquey” and back-talked one another, in order to illustrate his point that women tend to hold onto grudges longer than men. In this particular example, Khalid indicates that he was told it took a male principal to set this right and put an end to the cliques of women in the school. To qualify this statement, Khalid says that he does not think he really did anything, but, it is crucial to note that, by making the reference, he presents women as bitchy and men as the saviours who can raise these women up from their struggles. Khalid positions himself as a reluctant hero, but he is clearly making a hegemonic distinction. Again, as a man, Khalid is somewhat free to make these distinctions and to conveniently position himself as a saviour. This is a good example of where one might say that the finding points
toward the existence of sexism within principalship, and I do not dispute this. It is clear that Khalid’s approach here is sexist, however, I suggest that it is part of something larger than sexism. In this moment, Khalid is very much aware of the power relations at work upon him, as he feels “funny” when saying these words. This is, in fact, symbolic violence working through Khalid to regulate women, and his discomfort is indicative of the suffering that occurs as a result of this violence. However, his suffering is not enough to cause him to resist. As a man, Khalid feels pressure to affirm the gender divide, relegating women to “bitchy cliques,” while presenting himself as their “saviour.” Khalid thus can be observed as creating a “figured world” (Gee 2011), where he makes sense of the relationships between women and the position of men in the context of that relationship. Khalid creates this figured world as a means of making sense of what he perceives to be conflict between and amongst women. Once he makes sense of it, he positions himself as rising above this presumed pettiness, as he who is able to solve all of the women’s problems. This is more than sexism. It is an example of the continuance of the divide between and amongst people based on gender, and it speaks to the workings of symbolic violence and the creation of figured worlds as a result. This seemed to be a pattern when I talked with male principals, as we shall see with George’s narrative.

George had been a principal for two years, and in that time, had worked in a kindergarten through Grade 8 urban school. His school had previously been led by women for quite some time, and during our conversation, he presented himself as a very popular principal amongst his staff and parent community, largely due to his gender. When I asked George to comment on whether men and women lead differently, he said,

So I do a lot of coaching in terms of my… I am a volleyball coach, I work with both men, both boys and girls, and certainly even at a young age, I find that even their approach to sport there’s a difference between them. The way you coach women and the way you coach men is different. So, having said that, I think, yeah, I think there is a difference
between the way men and women lead, even it starts from a young age, right. Um, now I don’t know if this is my style of leadership, but I certainly find that comments such as I am more approachable, more relaxed, um, not really ahem, not really having to pull my authority a lot on them. I am more, I am more of the kind of collaborative… we do a lot of things in collaboration. I think it’s kind of my style, um, whereas I find that people are saying that the female administrators in the past have been more of [an] authoritarian, top-down approach…. Whereas, my approach has been more of let’s figure this out together because we are a team and that’s sort of the approach I have taken on.

Here, George makes a very clear distinction between the way men and women lead. The only leadership trait that he ascribes to women is that of the authoritarian leader who takes a “top-down” approach. It is interesting that he takes this typically male leadership trait and assigns it to women, claiming for himself a leadership approach that is collaborative. In other words, George flips the two figured worlds of female and male principal leadership. What is interesting to note is the fact that these women he talks about do not appear to be able to get away with performing this leadership style without being portrayed in a negative light. Even though the figured worlds are flipped, women are still not presented as successful leaders. Later, he went on to elaborate on what he meant by autocratic leadership:

Very autocratic [referring to women’s leadership style] and that has been with the females that I have worked with. Every single school that I have been in as a VP and I have had to work, every school that I have been a VP, the principals have been females and I found that that has always been… I find that the women that I worked under had to make sure that I knew my place. That I had to follow the instruction and I quote, “You will do what the principal tells you to do.”

George defines this style of leadership as “putting him in his place” as a male VP. He seems to hold this opinion around women’s leadership styles based upon his experiences of working for female principals. It is interesting that he does not use any words related to the word strong in the way he describes female principals. His references are very negative, and I was interested to know why he felt this way. With a little probing, George admitted the following:

There are examples where I had certainly felt that decisions were made that… and I don’t know if I made the generalization, but things were happening in one principal’s life
where I have made the assumption that she hates men because of things that were going on in her life. She was putting men in their position so that she felt that she was dominant.

In this statement, George makes an assumption about his principal’s leadership style and the way it is linked to her personal life. This assumption presumes that women are unable to separate their personal lives from their work life, and that they lack the professionalism required of someone in the role of principal. George, like the other male principals interviewed, measures the female principals with whom he has worked by referencing himself as a leader. In his descriptions of his own leadership, George presents himself as a collaborative and approachable principal. He also labels his former female principal as a man-hater, stating that she was always putting him in his place. He clearly did not appreciate that, as he feels as though he is the one in possession of the social good. He is the good leader, she is the autocratic “bitch.” If we presume that George’s experiences and resulting opinions of female principals are, to a certain extent, reflective of how others may actually view female principals, then we can appreciate the kind of uphill battle women must face while leading their schools.

There was a trend within my conversations with male principals in that they made very clear distinctions between the way they led as men and the way they viewed women principals as leading. It is interesting to note that although women interviewees made distinctions between the way men and women lead, they did not generally position themselves in a favourable light and then smear men as principals in schools. Perhaps this is because women are used to working within the confines of patriarchy, whereas men simply assume the patriarchy and view women only in relation to themselves. Moreover, perhaps this is another example of how Bourdieu’s notion of symbolic violence works on male principals. Thus far in the narratives presented, men
cannot be observed to be suffering under masculine domination, but rather are actors ensuring its existence. Does there exist a kind of unwritten or unspoken pressure to uphold this domination?

At the time of his interview, Fred had been a principal for almost 10 years and was in his third year at his current school, a mid-sized kindergarten through Grade 8 urban school. Fred presented himself as a very competent and resilient leader, and expressed concern around how he was perceived in terms of his ethnicity. In general, he did not believe that gender was as important a factor as race, and instead highlighted moments when his race had seemed to come into play in the way he would lead his schools. Having said this, Fred actually ended up having a lot to say about gender. My conversation with Fred is yet another indication that men do not seem to mind “trashing” female leaders, while extolling their own styles of leadership.

Absolutely I think they [women], I think deep down inside they, um, they feel that they have to prove themselves more, you know, like, and there’s another part to this, I feel that some people are just, maybe it’s just their personality, and there’s this feel that, you know, um, they… power becomes a little bit too much for them (women). To understand that power is not something that you abuse and I find some of them cross the line sometimes. Um, and I don’t want to generalize and say, ok I am defending my species, my male colleagues, but I have rarely seen where um, you know, well I wouldn’t say rarely seen, but it’s never happened, but I have seen some men who operate you know, beyond the limits that they should be. Their behaviour is not really the type that I would say is appropriate leadership material. But on the other side with women, I find it’s more that they need, they seem to need to prove themselves that I can do this job like a man, so to speak. Or you know, I am capable, I am in charge and people need to see me being in charge.

I had asked Fred if he thought that women principals have to prove themselves and his response brings into question the suitability of women for the role of principal. Here, Fred reports feeling that “power becomes too much for them [women].” He then goes on to suggest that women abuse that power and that he has rarely ever seen men abuse the same power. As a result, according to Fred, women principals find themselves having to prove that they “can do this job like a man” and they feel that people need to see that they are in charge. Fred confirms here what
the female principals were saying all along in their narratives, and even takes it a step further to suggest that because women have to prove themselves, they have the tendency to abuse their power. Hegemony is made visible within Fred’s comments, which very clearly subject women to its power. Fred also positions himself amongst his male colleagues, “defending my species” as the dominant one, and at the same time, places women within the category of the dominated. In this way, Fred maintains and promotes hegemony.

Each of the male principals interviewed criticized their female colleagues for having to prove themselves. However, they failed to recognize their own complicity in this power dynamic. They either approved or disapproved of their female counterparts, and, when they did validate a female leadership style, they did so only in reference to masculine notions of strength. These men recognized and maintained their privilege in holding female principals to account and judging their suitability as leaders. This figured world is created by male principals as a means of making sense of women as leaders in schools. In order to maintain their dominance and hold on to a time when men outnumbered women principals, they judge and evaluate women against the standards they create for themselves – or, that have been created for them. It is assumed that because they are male they are meeting the standards, however women are continually under the surveillance of male counterparts, having to prove themselves as leaders, subject to the male gaze.

Monica, a seasoned administrator in her last year as a principal before she retired, commented on this abuse of power during our conversation. Monica, on more than one occasion, insisted that leadership has nothing to do with gender and only relates to skills and ability. I asked her to talk about how she presents her gendered self, and this was part of her response:

I like to collaborate with people, I listen to you ok, so I don’t feel that I am abusing my power as a principal because we all know that from all the courses and from our
experience, you want everybody coming to school feeling happy like a family. So the way to conduct the school, the way you set the tone of the school is from the principal so I don’t think it is because of gender. Again, it’s because [of] the way you are, the style [of how] you like to work with people It’s not because I am a principal.

Monica presents herself quite differently to the way the male principals presented their female colleagues. She states that she is collaborative and wants her school to have a “family-like” atmosphere with a staff that works together toward common goals. It is interesting that Monica chose to state that she does not abuse her power. I had not mentioned anything to her about this issue and yet it seemed to be an issue for her. Perhaps there were times when she had been accused of doing just that. The point to note here is that Monica seemed aware of the fact that she might be accused of abusing her power because she is a woman. Earlier in our conversation, Monica had shared that the staff had not been happy that she was coming to their school four years ago, and that she had faced obstruction from teachers in the school. There was some apprehension around Monica’s leadership. Monica did not seem fazed by this at all, perhaps because she felt confident in her leadership style and ability. And yet, she felt it necessary to point out that she was not abusive of her power as a principal, as if to suggest that, in fact, she believed others might think this was the case.

Within the discourse of strong, micromanaging bitch, the word strong was made significant by most of the principals interviewed. This word gets associated with stereotypically masculine styles of leadership around decision-making and disciplinary structures. This discourse of strength acts on women in such a way that they are caught between being a strong leader and being a bitch. Female principals will, interviewees reported, micromanage others from time to time in a show of strength, but are careful not to micromanage too much for fear of being labeled a dragon lady. The women principals expressed differing positions with respect to the way they wore these masculine traits. Some appeared to embrace these traits and utilize them
within a postfeminist stance, while at the same time, they seemed to recognize how hegemony worked upon their bodies. The male principals with whom I spoke assigned the word strong to women principals, but only in relation to themselves, as if to suggest that these women have successfully taken on a masculine role. According to my analysis, the men continue to hold the social good, and the power required to not be subjected to questions from staff or be labeled as bitches. If the male principals allow the female principals to take on all the power, it becomes too much for the women to handle, and as a result, the women get identified as man-haters. Hence, female leaders are subject to what Foucault calls disciplinary power, as women are subjected to notions of leadership and power as defined by men. The fact that women have to somehow prove themselves as leaders only highlights this fact. All principals are under surveillance as subjects of disciplinary power, however men seem to be able to manage this surveillance, whereas women find themselves having to prove themselves worthy of principalship. In other words, male principals appear to meet the requirements of this disciplinary power, largely due to their promotion and maintenance of its effects, whereas women, who are in part under the surveillance of their male counterparts, find themselves having to succumb to its oppression by proving themselves worthy. Hence, the creation of a figured world in which male and female principals are differentiated and separated, where the male is dominant and the female is subject to this dominance.

“I Understand Because I am a Mom”

Just about every female principal interviewed referenced motherhood in some way in relation to their leadership style and/or in the way they were perceived by others. There was a strong sense amongst the women that, as mothers, they were able to deal with situations in such a way that gained the trust of parents and staff. Indeed, principals come into the role with other
personal and professional identities already intact. I have often wondered how these alternate identities affect the way one chooses to lead one’s school. Motherhood appears to be one of those identities that gets much use. Reynolds (2002) commented on the limitations of the label of mother, when she compared the experiences of female principals in the 1940s and 1950s with those of the 1960s and 1970s.

While women in the previous generation had been limited by being positioned as “other”, it appears that all of the women studied in this generation were limited by being positioned as “mother”, whether or not they had any biological offspring. They ran into trouble when their individual actions, which they saw as unrelated to gender, were viewed as gender related by others. (Reynolds, 2002, p. 45)

It appears that the label of mother gets assigned to women regardless of their status as a parent, however this label comes with certain expectations around gender. Some women find that actions that may not have been intended as “gendered actions” actually get interpreted as gender related. I and other scholars have found, however, that women principals use the mother label in different ways and for different purposes. In their article about mothering and women principals in South Africa, Lumby and Azaola (2014) commented on the way female principals used motherhood to trouble gender. The authors wrote of one group of female principals that they would “attempt to trouble gender by creating capital from gender in the workplace. They aim to distinguish female and male approaches to leadership, portraying the latter as less appropriate and less effective. They depict the ‘other’, their male counterparts, as lacking mothering experience and, as a result, lacking the knowledge and skills necessary to lead a school” (Lumby & Azaola, 2014, pp. 37–38). In this case, female principals positioned their male counterparts as the other, distinguishing a female mothering mode of leadership as distinct and superior to male ways of leading. The women to whom I spoke also engaged motherhood as an identity that helped them to do their job as principals, giving them an edge. It is important, however, to note
that, in order to do this, women must differentiate between male and female ways of leading as principals, and this can be problematic. The implications of this reference to motherhood will be explored in this section. By actively and purposefully identifying as mothers in relation to their roles as principals, are these women in fact limiting themselves, buying into the hegemony?

Maggie spoke about using the fact that she is a mother to her advantage:

Well I would say, in a lot of ways it [being a mother] benefits. Sometimes, when I am talking to parents I use the mom card a lot, right? I will often, if I am in a difficult situation or you know things are going awry with a parent, I will often make a story relevant to something I have experienced as a mom. I find I get a lot of buy-in from parents that way when they can see me as a parent as well. And so, I use that all the time, right, I tell stories of my own children to parents… I ah… even with staff too, you know. Often when staff are having personal problems at home, I tend to use my own experiences as a woman, as a wife, as a mother to make myself more relatable and to break the barrier…. so that they see me as a person as well as a principal, right? I do find that has worked to my advantage in many ways.

Pulling the “mom card” is intentional and becomes a means for Maggie to draw upon discourses of parenthood that she hopes will make her more relatable. She connects the figured worlds of motherhood, with all of the notions of what it means to be a mother, and principalship, which brings its own set of rules and responsibilities. Maggie is a mother, so indeed motherhood makes up part of her identity. However, in this case, Maggie uses her identity as a mother to her advantage in order to build relationships. It is a persona, a conscious choice to imbue this identity, and she privileges it by showing others that she understands, as she is a mom. She ceases to be a principal and becomes a wife and mother. In this passage, Maggie appears to be taking on a postfeminist stance. She makes a conscious choice to present herself as a mother and presents this choice as empowering. A similar stance can be observed in Sandberg’s (2013) book when she writes, “We all want the same thing: to feel comfortable with our choices and to feel validated by those around us. So, let’s start by validating one another. Mothers who work outside the home should regard mothers who work inside the home as real workers. And mothers who
work inside the home should be equally respectful of those choosing another option” (p. 168).

The key here, within a postfeminist stance, is choice, and the freedom women have to choose what they want to be and do, free of politics (McRobbie, 2004). Maggie chooses to reference her identity as a mother in order to take hold of what she sees as a benefit to her role as a principal.

We began to talk about whether she thought men could do the same thing, and use the fact that they are a father to their advantage.

That is a shift too. At the beginning of my career I probably would have, I wasn’t a mom either, I probably wouldn’t have used a personal narrative with a parent because I was worried probably about not being seen as professional, right, by using that and perhaps that did have to do with gender. But as I have grown in the role, I feel more comfortable with that. I don’t know if a man can do that in the same way. Um, like I say, personal narrative always, I think, helps to build a bridge but I don’t know if it would be as effective to be honest.

It is interesting that Maggie says here that she would not have used the “mom card” early on in her career for fear of seeming unprofessional. She may not have been a mother at the time, but the fact that she would have deemed its use as unprofessional troubles the use of the “mom card.” Perhaps, over time, it has become more acceptable for women to do this and still maintain professionalism, in what can be named a postfeminist approach. Or, perhaps there is an expectation that women principals be mothers, so that they can properly address the needs of the students, parents, and staff. In her narrative, Maggie presumes that adding the personal touch to one’s leadership style by using stories from one’s own experiences as a parent helps one build bridges, for both men and women. Maggie also uses the phrase, “That is a shift too” in pointing toward a shift in leadership approaches over time, bringing into focus the postfeminist notion of the freedom of choice without the burden of politics (McRobbie, 2004). By using this phrase, Maggie suggests that current approaches to leadership allow principals to invoke aspects of their personal lives or alternate identities within principalship. Women have the freedom to choose
how they wish to portray their identities. Using Butler’s notion of gender as a construction, we can see how being a woman and being a mother are constructed identities, a conflation of two separate and yet related identities. Here, Maggie conflates being a woman with being a mother, using motherhood as a means of legitimizing her ability to lead a school. Some questions arise such as, is this a problem? Is it acceptable for principals to drop their principal identity and enact their inner mom/dad? Is this approach subversive, allowing one to find agency and perhaps reshape the discourse? What if one does not have children? Viewing this assertion through a postfeminist stance makes clear that, indeed, women are free to choose roles and identities as they see fit – and yet, hegemony remains.

Lumby and Azaola (2014) approach this invocation of motherhood differently, presenting it as a moment when women appear to align themselves with motherhood as a means of rejecting masculine ways of leading.

Women are often held by others and by themselves to be incapable of or unwilling to share the norms associated with men as a group. They are also criticized for adopting them in order to join a group, in this case “leaders”, where the norms are perceived as closely aligned to that of another group “men”. The women here emphatically align themselves with a group of “mothers” and reject using men as a reference group of aspiration. They also colonise a third reference group, “school leaders”, importing their norms as mothers to reshape practice informed by stereotypical masculine attributes. (Lumby and Azaola, 2014, p. 40)

Here, it is suggested that by aligning themselves with motherhood, these female principals are able to reformulate notions of how to best lead a school, rather than measuring themselves against a masculine model of leadership. Like the principals to whom I spoke, these South African female principals also referenced the advantages of having one’s own children to the individuals as leaders, and, notably, women who were childless also made claims to a mothering style of leadership (Lumby & Azaola, 2014, p. 38). There seems to be present a certain capacity for agency and choice here, in terms of an opportunity for women to be measured against and
aligned with a standard created by themselves, as opposed to that which is followed by their masculine colleagues. This is especially true as women redefine what it means to lead a school effectively, and perhaps even better than their male counterparts. As I will show in the next section, however, hegemony remains.

At the time of our interview, Sahar did not have any children. In fact, her leadership ability had been brought into question by a parent when it was discovered that she was not a mother.

Some of them parents, once they found out I didn’t have children that…you could see that that they posed questions around that because they always felt … that one, I remember actually saying to me, “Well if you don’t have children, how do you lead a school of children?” So, I would say to them for example, actually I have 240 children and I deal with them every day for close to 6 hours a day, so it’s more than just putting them to bed and feeding them and maybe doing some homework at night.

Here is an instance where a female principal, who was not a mother, is questioned as to her suitability to look after a school of children. None of the men to whom I spoke had that same expectation placed upon them. When I asked Sahar about the expectations others had of her, she said, “But you see, I have heard the opposite to that, whereas I am not nurturing enough because I don’t have children.” Here, being a mother comes hand in hand with the expectation that female principals be nurturers, for only mothers can be truly nurturing. This is where the manner in which women’s identity as mothers gets tied to hegemony is revealed. In order for women to be the nurturing leader they are expected to be, in other words, they must be mothers. I asked Sahar to comment on how she felt about this expectation given the fact that she was not a mother. She responded,

Well you know, culturally I kind of get where they [parents] come from because you have been brought up in a society for years where that was what the female role was. To change that perception is really… it’s taking a while. So, it’s almost like their ignorance, they don’t get it, they don’t realize that, you know, you have to have children to be nurturing, you can be a very nurturing individual and not have children. Like it’s got nothing, one has got nothing to do with the other. I think they think that, you know, that as an adult your comfort… they don’t see me as a comforting, do you know that oozing kind of feel good…
they don’t see that, they think I am not like that because I don’t have kids of my own.

Sahar relates this issue to the parents’ cultural background, which means they expect women to be comforting and motherly. Here Sahar’s story is an illustration of how we live intersectional lives, as Sahar links motherhood and being female to race. It makes sense to Sahar that these parents would feel that way and she does not appear to be overly upset by it. There is, however, a suggestion that Sahar does feel the need sometimes to appear as a mother, as she responded to the parents quickly with “I have 240 children and I deal with them every day.” She is also quick to point out that one can be nurturing without being a mother. Sahar recognizes that people link nurturing and motherhood together, and so she embraces the nurturing mother construct for herself and ensures that she embodies this image so that parents no longer question her. In fact, later on in our conversation, Sahar stated that, after five years, she was no longer questioned by parents about this issue. So, it seems that it is necessary to be perceived as mothering if one is a female principal, otherwise one may not be up for the job. Sahar is careful to present herself as motherly, even though she is not a mother, as a means of legitimizing herself in the role of principal. This appears as yet another example of the workings of symbolic violence, as well as of hegemonic notions of being a woman. Sahar does not really believe that being a mother has anything to do with being nurturing – as she stated, “one has got nothing to do with the other” – and yet she finds herself having to prove that she is nurturing and can lead her school as any good mother would. Hence, this story illustrates the creation of yet another figured world, in order to make sense of and formulate an understanding of female leadership and its connection to motherhood. It is clear that, although Sahar resists any connection between motherhood and her leadership, she finds herself having to defend and position herself as a mothering leader. In the process, figured worlds are created in order to define and promote mothering as a positive female
contribution to principal leadership. The question becomes, does the creation of this figured world represent a moment of agency?

Alina made reference to the “matron side” of female principals who are mothers when she responded to the question about how her gender affected her leadership style. She said, “You know what, and again this is generalizing but, women principals, if they are mothers they tend to have that matron side of them, um, and I think at least for me, that sort of plays out with the kids and in terms of discipline.” Alina later qualified this, saying, “Thinking you know, how would my daughter or son like to be treated and be spoken to.” In fact, Alina linked her perception of her gender with motherhood right from the beginning of her description of her leadership style, as if being a mother was an integral part of her gender identity.

When I spoke with Emma, a principal in her first year, she said she had openly and intentionally defined herself as a mother when she introduced herself for the first time to her staff.

I would say that this staff – and I think a lot of it had to do with the first staff meeting that I had with the staff – that I was very open and up front, like I just talked to them about who I am as a mom and as an educator, and then I told them a little bit about my vision for this school and how I feel that I am a leader. And so, a couple of them came to me afterwards and said, “You know what, that was a really great way to introduce yourself. you kind of laid the ground rules in terms of my door is always open.”

Her narrative shows that Emma clearly identifies with being a mom, and places this role at the same level as her status and experience as an educator within a professional context. It seemed to work for her as her staff felt connected to her on a personal level. Again, the fact that Emma is a mother bodes well for her in terms of gaining the respect of staff members in such a way that it makes her a suitable candidate for the job. Emma also described being readily accepted by parents when she used the “mom card”: “I find that moms are ok with having a female because sometimes they connect with me differently like, because I am a mom or some of them know I
am a mom, or they will say, ‘Well you know, you have children you would understand.’ So there’s kind of that mom factor I find works sometimes to my advantage of being a female.”

Here again is an example of female principals using their identity as mothers to help them navigate principalship. Like Maggie, Emma saw it as an advantage, and even took it a step further, saying that it worked to her advantage as a female. It appears that as women navigate the principalship with its masculine, hegemonic power structures, they look for ways to find and use their differing identities to their advantage. I believe that Emma would say that being a mother sets her apart from male principals, and, as such, this part of her identity gives her an advantage. From a postfeminist stance, it appears that Emma has found agency through motherhood, using the fact that she is a mother to exemplify her prowess as a leader. It also enables Emma to challenge masculine power structures. Like Sahar, she is creating a figured world where women are better able and prepared to lead schools, especially when they are mothers. If one views this through a postfeminist framework, it is easy to see how this choice would position women as capable and well suited to principalship. If we consider, however, the power dynamics of hegemony and how this works upon female bodies, relegating them to the household as mothers, we see a different side to the argument. The problem is that motherhood becomes yet another power structure that limits and further regulates women.

Lucy had been a principal for 10 years at the time of our interview, and was in her second year in her current school, a large, suburban kindergarten through Grade 8 school. She worked with a very large staff in a relatively newly built school, and felt very welcomed by staff and parents in the community. Lucy took the concept of motherhood even further, suggesting that she was some sort of pseudo mother toward her staff when asked how her gender affected her as a leader.
I think so, yes. Um, because I am a mom and I put... and this is a personal leadership style, I don’t know about leadership, I am not talking about leadership, I... as a parent and honestly, I don’t think I am the best parent (laughing). My kids are like, “Oh we need to do the washing,” and I will be like, “Well the washing machine is there, do your laundry (laughing) do your own thing, hm?” But so ... I am a mom, and I think I do treat my staff as, you know it’s sort of my own family, my own... it and (pause) I am older person so [I have] a lot of younger staff members, I do treat them you know like ...I don’t know...not my children necessarily, but you know with a bit of that maternal instinct. I do have that little bit when I deal with them. So for example, you know, when they are ill and they need to go home early or whatever, I will cover them. I won’t say well your prep time is supposed to be here, you know, and I do value family and I am not saying men don’t, but because for me as a mom, um, and a wife, I guess, you know, family means a lot to me. So, when people come and say, “Oh my little one is sick and I need to take them to the doctor,” or whatever, I would do what I can to help them be able to make that appointment and little things like that. I think I do lead as a woman who is a wife and a mother.

Lucy makes it clear that she leads as a woman who is both a wife and mother. Like Alina, Lucy includes motherhood within her description of how her gender affects her leadership style. This is an example of what Blackmore (1999) would call a “feminized leadership discourse.” It represents a certain view of leadership and is created as a means of fitting into a very masculinized role. The women I interviewed who were mothers all indicated in some way that they used the fact that they are mothers to their advantage in building bridges and relationships with staff and parents. In doing so, however, these women place themselves squarely within the gender binary that limits them. But, they embrace it, because they need to find ways to succeed as principals.

Evidence of the existence of this feminized leadership discourse was only heightened by the fact that none of the men to whom I spoke made reference to being fathers in terms of their leadership style as principals. Nor did being a father come into play when these men spoke of their gender identity. The only male principal to make any reference to fatherhood was George, and, quite frankly, his reference screamed of heteronormativity: “So, I am not sure if that’s the culture, I am sort of the man of the family right, and so I’ve got to make sure that, and I have two
daughters at home, and I have to make sure that I play the male role at home as well.” George
talks about being the “man of the house,” so to speak, and when I asked him how he would
define this role, he stated,

I guess the traditional male role. I mean, I look after the household, I look after the
finances, my wife has absolutely, doesn’t take interest in that at all. Um, she looks after
sort of the traditional kind of cooking and cleaning, looking after the kids, and I think that’s
cultural as well, that’s a bit, part of our culture. Um, we have been brought up that way,
um, and I think also, you know, even at school I kind of carry myself that way as well, I
think. So, I think that, kind of, behaviours I take on you know, at a… like, for example, I
think even some of the behaviours, my experience has always been with sort of the older
adolescent kids, right? So sometimes when a kindergarten student comes to me, I think the
staff also feel like I am a very, I wouldn’t say non-nurturing, that’s a kind of, still my
behaviour is that of, I kind of stand off a bit and [am] not really the hugging kind of, you
know, kind of person, right?

Here is a male principal who ascribes to what he calls a “traditional male role,” a hegemonic
notion of what it means to be a man. He admits to taking on traditional roles at home as a man,
and relegates his wife to what he calls the “traditional kind of cooking and cleaning, looking
after the kids” type of woman. This narrative inspires the question: when the female principals
referenced above engage their identity as mothers, are they in fact reinforcing hegemonic gender
roles as well? They are certainly privileging motherhood as a means of connecting with and
relating to parents and staff. Perhaps these women have no choice, given the kinds of barriers
they face when it comes to leading their schools. So, is this then a pathway for women to build
relationships while still maintaining an image as a strong principal? These are important
questions. But what is most important to recognize is that George’s comments are an example of
the fact that hegemonic masculinity is alive and well and cannot be ignored.

I have shown thus far how female principals are normalized and regulated by particular
standards and power relations that are at play in principalship. Women are expected to be strong
 principals as judged by their male counterparts, and, as such, must continually work to not be too
strong as to be named dragon lady. Motherhood becomes, for many women, a discourse upon which to build a feminized leadership identity. The question becomes, is this discourse of motherhood a place of resistance for women, or does it merely act upon women and subject them to still more regulation? Referring to Griffith’s (1995) notion of motherhood as a tapestry that can either be thick and lush or threadbare, I believe it is safe to say that these principals are presenting themselves as involved, caring mothers, and hence as thick and lush. What presents itself here is yet another discourse of motherhood that suggests that good mothers demonstrate continued and active care for their children in relation to their school life. Children are on time, have eaten, and are ready for school. Mothers on the other side of this continuum present a more threadbare tapestry of motherhood that causes others to question the extent to which they care for their children. It seems to me that, by presenting themselves as caring and responsive mothers, these principals are further subjecting themselves to yet another discourse that limits and positions women within a negative space. Focusing on their identity as mothers may very well help them connect with parents in their schools. However, they also place upon themselves, and perhaps the parents as well, another set of discourses that act upon and further subject women to hegemonic notions of femininity and motherhood. As I’ve discussed above, Ringrose (2013) pointed to what she termed “the paradox,” in which women are seen to have achieved parity with men in every way and are thus free to choose whatever they wish to be and do, and yet we still see evidence of hegemonic masculinity pervading our society and education system. Is this choice to embrace motherhood really a way of working around hegemony without recognizing its presence, or is it truly empowering to make this choice?

“Men Have It Easier”

In this chapter thus far, I have illustrated that, through the discourse of the strong
micromanaging bitch, female principals are in the position of having to take on a very masculine
version of strength in leadership. Research also shows that masculine traits are often conflated
with ideas around what makes good leadership (Pittinsky et al., 2007). What we perceive as
female stereotypes do not match the expectations we have around leadership (Oplatka, 2016).
It is therefore not surprising that every woman I spoke to stated that male principals have an easier
time on the job. If men in fact have it easier as principals, then this would surely impact the
manner in which women approach the same job. When I asked Maggie if she thought that male
and female principals lead differently, she stated,

I think they do. I think women principals second-guess their decisions far more often than
male principals. I think that they look for approval um, more so than a male principal
would. I think that women principals tend to struggle with the types of decisions that they
make. By that, I mean that I think that women in general question more than men do. I feel
men typically are able to make a decision given the information that they have, make a
decision and stick with the decision, where I feel women principals are always questioned
about their decision and feel apologetic if the decision that they made doesn’t go in their
favour. Whereas a male principal I think would just say that’s the way it was, that’s the
decision I made, and I am sticking with it. But I think female principals would look back
with regret.

Maggie suggests that female principals struggle when making decisions in an attempt to ensure
that it is the right decision and does not go wrong. Men, on the other hand, seem to Maggie to be
able to make quick decisions with little or no regret. Women are presented here as “second-
guessing” their decisions, whereas men appear to go with their gut. Maggie differentiates
between male and female principals by presenting males as more task-oriented or autocratic, and
females as more interpersonal or democratic. Eagly et al. (1992) make the same reference,
stating that leadership researchers often make task-oriented or autocratic and interpersonal or
democratic leadership styles gender stereotypic. There is a strong sense in Maggie’s response
that she feels it is unfair for women principals to be placed in positions where they find
themselves second-guessing or regretting decisions. She wants the social good and feels it is
unjust that she cannot have access to that power and privilege. In light of this desire, Maggie tends to highlight residual consequences that come about when leading as a woman.

Sahar shed some light on this issue when she made reference to the way teachers approach what they perceive to be an ineffective principal. “… so I have seen whether you have been a strong male or ineffective male leader, people just kind of ride it out. With a female, they make more issue out of it.” According to Sahar, there is no room for the female principal to make mistakes or poor decisions. Men can get away with it, but women are taken to task. This suggests that female principals are in a continual state of having to demonstrate their ability to lead as principals. Men do not have to do this because the fact that they are men – and hence keepers of the social good – guarantees them the right and privilege to lead. Women need to earn this right.

It is interesting to note that, generally speaking, most teachers are women within the elementary panel. So, it would seem that, according to Sahar, female teachers are consciously making the choice to hold their female principals to account, but ignore the failings of their male principals. This would suggest that either these women have bought into the idea that their male principal has all the power and that there is nothing they can do to change that, or there exists a perception that because he is a man and he is not bothering us, we cannot expect much more of him so we will ride this out.

When I spoke with Emma about the expectations that others had of her as a woman, she had this to say:

Yes, I feel that um, just because I am a woman that the expectation is that I will listen to anything that you want to tell me. Um, that I have to always show compassion and that um, I would say that I need to, but if I say something that hurts somebody that there’s this expectation that I am going to go back and speak to them about it. That I can’t just kind of, that’s what I said and then leave it alone. And some of that is the pressure that I feel and I think that’s some of the pressure that I put on myself because I think that as a woman I feel that I need to make (pause), I need to have everybody like me and I need to make sure that everybody is ok. And so I have had to learn as I go through this role those difficult
conversations, and I will tell you that I’ve asked most men for support around having those difficult conversations, um, and I think that’s just from working with different men that I felt that they managed that better than I did.

Researcher: Because they are men?

Emma: Because they are men. I felt that they had an easier detachment from it than I was able to do.

Researcher: Do you think that detachment has to do with the expectations that others have about how you are going to react as a woman?

Emma: I do, I do. I think that there have certainly been times in my role as a leader that I have gotten more push-back just because I was a female and that’s from both men and women.

Here, Emma confirms that she has experienced push-back from both male and female teachers when she has not responded to them in the way they expected. She explains that, as a woman, she feels this pressure to have everyone like her and to ensure everyone is all right with her decision-making. She claims that these are expectations that she has placed on herself and feels that men seem to be able to deal with these situations better than she has in the past. But, perhaps Emma experiences push-back when she does not adhere to the natural order of hegemonic masculinity. She also attributes men’s success to their supposed ability to detach themselves from the situation. Women seem incapable of this detachment, or, if not incapable, they are subject to scrutiny if they ever try and detach themselves. It would appear, for example, that within Emma’s scenario described above, that had a male principal upset someone, there would be no expectation that he would follow up with the person to ensure they were okay. Emma, on the other hand, says that she is expected to follow up in order to maintain her status as a principal/leader in the eyes of her staff.

What gives men this power, this natural right to lead as principals? Why are female principals subjected to a different level of standard than their male counterparts? Both Emma and
Lucy also referred to the existence of a boys’ club, the members of which would come together regularly and socialize. Emma referred to its existence in the past, when male principals would meet together for dinner and exclude women from these meetings. Lucy reflected on the existence of a boys’ club within her board that makes it difficult for women to be promoted.

Right now, my sense is, you know, unless you are part of that elite club then you are not – and I say this jokingly to people, but really it’s true to a certain extent, you know – I don’t have coffee with any of them, I don’t fish with them, I don’t go barbecue with them, well, you know, I am not going to get anywhere, right?

Here Lucy makes a joke around the existence of the boys’ club, but insists that it does exist and that it excludes women. These clubs do not appear to have anything to do with one’s leadership ability, but are simply based on gender. The references made to the existence of boys’ clubs places men within advantageous positions within the working community. Lucy later commented that female principals often look at who is being promoted to superintendent within the board and wonder how these promotions can be possible. I suggest that the boys’ club is yet another figured world, created as a means of making sense of the domination of men over women. The boys’ club becomes a manifestation of hegemony and of the promotion and maintenance of masculinity.

Rachel, the retired principal, had a different perspective on the old boys’ club. She talked about when she first started as a vice principal 16 years ago, and said she felt that, over time, men had changed.

You’re really digging back into the past, but you know what, the male principals are different today. I’ll tell you 16 years ago, they were very vocal, very dominating at the meetings you know, whereas today, the young males that are coming in, I find they listen way better, or maybe it is just because they are beginners, I don’t know. I find that today’s males are a lot different than they were 16 years ago. Maybe because they have to work with so many women, I don’t know but I think there is a difference between the male 20 years ago with the male today.

Rachel’s comment is interesting because she worked as an administrator during a time when men
dominated the role, and had retired at a time when women were more represented within the role. She suggests here that male leaders have changed over time, perhaps because there are more women in the role, meaning that somehow, women have had an effect on how men lead. Rachel acknowledges the existence of the boys’ club in the past, but expressed feeling that those times have passed, as men have become better listeners and less domineering. Men, in other words, have begun to lead more like women. One might refer to this as the feminization of the role of principal as a result of the increased number of women in the role. As I have shown, however, even though there are more women in the role, men continue to enjoy a privileged position within it, and women are left to find success within a role that is continually defined in a very masculine way.

Many of the female principals I interviewed engaged in a discourse around the idea that men have it easier. And it almost goes without saying that none of the men to whom I spoke made mention of having an easier time in the job. Male principals seemed happy to be holders of the social good, but were not necessarily willing to admit this fact. Rachel suggested that men have changed since the days of the old boys’ club and are leading more like women lead, but this does not seem to change the fact that men continue to hold the social good. By mentioning the existence of a boys’ club and positioning men as better able to handle and manage decision making, these women privilege stereotypically male styles of leadership. They resent this privileging of autocratic, task-oriented leadership, and rightfully so. With each passing discourse, it became clearer to me that women principals are continuingly negotiating their leadership practice within the confines of a stereotypically male leadership framework. The question becomes, however, in response to this male leadership framework: are women not formulating new girls’ clubs in which they are confined to a gendered role such as motherhood? A discussion
of the next discourse presenting women as nurturers may shed some light on the answer.

“The Empathetic, Emotional and Nurturing Leader”

Research has shown that discourses around women as nurturing, empathetic and emotional are very common. Further, the “great woman theory of leadership” (Pittinsky et al., 2007) is an attempt amongst women to capitalize on a positive stereotype in order to legitimize their claim to leadership. Other researchers question this theory of leadership and claim that, as femininity is fluid, we really cannot talk accurately about female ways of leading (Reay and Ball, 2000). On the one hand, being kind, caring and nurturing leaders makes women effective as leaders, enabling them to build the necessary relationships required when leading a school. On the other, it becomes a problematic stance to take as it assumes that there is somehow a common leadership stance shared amongst all women.

Kate, a principal in her fourth year at her second school was the only principal to make reference to personal leadership resources. During our conversation, Kate described herself as a very driven leader with very clear goals and a plan to make them come to fruition. When I asked Kate to comment on whether men and women lead differently, she had this to say:

I do believe that the gender is impactful. I think when you look at personal leadership resources and the whole piece around managing one’s emotions, I think that men and women tend to do this differently. And I say this as a woman and um, not only do I think it impacts our leadership style or approach, but I think the way that we are received by other people is impacted, and so for that piece I would say that we do lead differently. So as a broad generalization and stereotype, women tend to be very much multitaskers. We are very um, I would say, many women in leadership are highly driven. That is not to say that men aren’t, but I think that women are more so because perhaps we have had to work a little harder to get there perhaps. Um, the managing the emotions piece I think, is handled differently for men and women.

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4 In this instance, Kate refers to a set of leadership traits called personal leadership resources found within The Ontario Leadership Framework. These resources speak to a leader’s ability to manage and control emotions, and so on.
When talking about how men and women lead differently, Kate chooses to first mention one’s ability to manage emotion as a decided difference. She makes no comment around that except to say that men and women manage this expectation differently. Kate then moves into another explanation of difference, presenting women as driven multitaskers who need to work a little bit harder than men. This comment is in keeping with how Kate carried herself throughout the interview, presenting an image of strong leadership without actually coming right out and saying it. By stating that women have had to “work a little harder to get there,” she is really saying that men do not have to work as hard as women and that they enjoy certain privileges as leaders of schools. Kate thus points to differences in how male and female principals practice leadership.

When I asked Maggie to comment on how she was perceived as a female principal, she expressed some frustration around the expectation that she be a compassionate and understanding principal.

I think I can be seen, and I am expected to be, I think, especially by parents, to be more empathetic and compassionate or even by staff, right? So if something goes wrong, I always feel like people feel they could empathize or use my compassion because I am a woman, to understand this situation they find themselves in, right? Whereas I don’t think… you know let’s say for example, a staff member is ill or their child is ill. I get a big explanation as to why they might be taking time or they ask me to bend the rules in ways because they think I, as a woman or a mom, might understand the circumstances that they find themselves in… it is not always necessarily true of male principals that they get the same explanation that I would get.

Maggie highlights the expectation parents and teachers have that she be understanding when a teacher’s child is sick and they need to go home. She feels that it is not right that this expectation exists for her, but does not for her male counterparts. Perhaps she feels that teachers would be less likely to ask a male principal to “bend the rules” or make accommodations for their needs. Her apparent resentment of the expectation that women be more compassionate and understanding comes out again when she speaks of how principals in the family of schools
reacted to their new female superintendent.

You know, it even goes back to, I remember again when I was first promoted, we had had a male superintendent and a female superintendent took over and there weren’t a lot of female superintendents at that time. And I remember the principals questioning the female superintendent around her ability to interact and communicate with others around the fact that she never spoke personally to anybody, didn’t mention any of their personal business or personal anecdotes, and yet the previous superintendent of course had not done any of that, nor was he expected to, but because the superintendent was female, it was expected that she would be warm and fuzzy as opposed to businesslike.

Here Maggie refers to the double standard that she feels exists for men and women principals, or in this case, superintendents. The previous superintendent did not have to demonstrate any interest in the personal lives of his administrators. However, that expectation was made of the female superintendent and when she did not deliver on that expectation, she was questioned for it. Again, Maggie resents this expectation as she feels that it acts upon her in such a way that she finds she is expected to meet the varied requests coming from parents and staff. By resisting the expectation that she always be a compassionate and considerate administrator, Maggie resists this discourse as it acts upon her. Maggie seems to find resistance within her frustration with the varied expectations others have of her because she is a woman. She has made it no secret that she believes this is wrong and, in this way, has found a form of agency to react against hegemony. It is not the compassion and kindness that Maggie resists, but rather the expectation that she will let a teacher go home early to tend to a sick child, and the seemingly simultaneous lack of expectation for men to do the same.

Whereas Maggie rejects the expectation that she be compassionate and empathetic, Emma embraces it more readily. In this quotation, Emma is talking about how male and female principals lead differently.

I think yes, but I think it depends on the male. So like, just the female administrators that I know, I feel that a lot of us lead by heart and by emotion. We are more of an emotional leader so we take things, I feel, sometimes more personally. Um, comments made to us, or
situations with children, we really take it to heart and I would even divide that even more that I would say that female administrators with children lead even differently than female administrators without children. But I have worked with some male administrators who are very emotional and very attached to what happens in their building. So, it’s hard to say [there is] really a huge difference. I think, it depends on the actual administrators themselves.

Emma begins by confirming that women lead with their hearts and by using emotion. It is interesting to note that in another part of our conversation referred to earlier in this chapter, Emma talked about struggling with her emotions and commented that men seem to be able to manage their emotions better than women. Emma appeared to be unsure as to whether leading with her heart was a positive or negative leadership trait. In this passage, however, she presents emotion as an integral part of her leadership and states that she has also seen men lead with emotion. It is also interesting that she makes a distinction between women principals with and without children, suggesting that women who do not have children may not lead with an emotional lens. Again, this notion speaks to Sahar’s experience of being questioned around her ability to be nurturing as a woman without children. In her narrative, Maggie rejects the fact that others expect her to be emotional, whereas Emma embraces it as part of her leadership style and presents it in such a way as to suggest that most female principals lead with emotion. Is leading with emotion considered a positive, feminine leadership style?

Alina went back and forth between stating that women principals are kinder than male principals, and later said that she had also worked for a very kind male principal. She had this to say:

I think the female principals, or that I have seen, um, for the most part seem kinder or gentler, with the exception of one that I have interacted with.

Researcher: Are you talking about when you were a child?

Alina: No, as a vice principal. As a vice principal with a principal. Um so, but mind you, having said that, the male principal that I had was quite a fun-loving person and well-loved
by everyone. I must admit.

Researcher: You brought up an interesting notion, as a VP working with both male and female P’s?

Alina: Yes

Researcher: I am getting the sense that this was a different experience. Can you elaborate?

Alina: Um, I found with the male principals that interacted with me, they seemed quite laid back and let me do whatever I wanted. They made me, they empowered me and they encouraged me, whereas the female one, I found that in my opinion, there was some friction and it may have been that we had to get used to each other’s styles. Um, I think I sort of likened it to living with my mother-in-law (laughter).

Alina’s conflicting views are interesting because she begins by “toeing the line,” so to speak, positioning women as kinder and gentler than men, but then realizes that she was wrong to say that, giving an example of a kind male administrator and a not so kind female one. Here, Alina is creating different situated meanings that appear as competing ideas. On the one hand, she conforms to the dominance of men over women in presenting women as kinder and softer, in a scenario where men are in possession of the social good. Alina appears to feel discomfort around this assertion, however, changing her stance to recognize that men can be kind, too. She knows that her assertions are wrong, and yet she upholds them as if she has no choice but to do so, revealing the existence of disciplinary power as it works upon her body. She also alludes to some friction that existed between herself and her former female principal, comparing the situation to living with her mother-in-law. I imagine that this reference relates to the stereotypical difficulties two women in power might be presumed to have when working together. Here, Alina subjects herself to the stereotypical notion that two women cannot hold the power within the home or workplace. By making the reference to her mother-in-law, she purports the notion that women are catty and competitive, in yet another situated meaning. This is clearly a very hegemonic
notion of what it means to lead as a woman. By presenting women in this light, Alina supports and maintains “emphasized femininity,” maintaining the hegemonic construct within a masculinist framework. Alina thus asserts that only men can hold the power and that women are expected to adhere to this power, preventing each other from gaining a piece of it.

Lucy also shed light on this issue by making reference to one of her male principals as having difficulty “showing his softer side”:

So yes, I have had and you know it’s interesting I have had a principal, I have worked as a vice principal with a male principal and two female principals before I became a principal and definitely each of them has a different style. But the male principal I worked with um, is very kind and very professional, very knowledgeable. Um, but I think it was more difficult for him to show his softer side when staff comes in and cries in front of him. It was harder for him to deal with it. Yeah, but it might be because it is his personality because another male principal might be different, right? Because honestly, I think we are different, but in my experience from working with him, so as a vice principal when staff needed to cry, they tended to come to me rather than to him. But that’s not to say that he’s not kind and listening and empathetic. Um, but you know, it came across a little bit different, he was, you know, a guy (laughter) sitting there having to be empathetic.

Although Lucy states here that it is possible for male principals to be empathetic, she says it is awkward for them, suggesting at the end of her comment that her male principal’s empathy came across differently than hers did. Here again is the stereotypical notion that women are, by nature, empathetic, whereas men are not. It is interesting to note that Lucy laughs when she ascribes the stereotypically female trait of empathy upon her male principal. Lucy considers it funny to have a man take on what she sees as a feminine leadership style, and, in the end, she states that it does not work as he is a “guy” after all, who is “having to sit there and be empathetic.” In this moment, the male principal is shamed by acting like a woman, as if being sympathetic is unnatural for a man. This is emphasized femininity at work, in the poking of fun at any suggestion that a man acts like a woman. In this case, the maintenance of hegemony appears in two ways. On the one hand, it works upon Alina as she characterizes the notion of a male
principal acting empathetic as comical, reinforcing the dominance of men over women by making ridiculous the notion of any man acting as if he were a woman. On the other hand, this hegemony works upon the male principal as well, in the sense that he is not permitted to be empathetic or nurturing, and to do so would be ridiculous. Here, Lucy firmly places the notion of empathetic leadership within the realm of female styles of leadership. She appears to identify as an emotional, empathetic leader because, as she says, she is better able to comfort staff when they are troubled. It is acceptable and expected that a female principal will act with empathy and compassion, but this is not so for a male principal for fear of being made ridiculous. Hence, herein lies the creation of yet another figured world where women are meant to be emotional and nurturing leaders and men are not. The creation of the figured world helps Alina position men and women as different kinds of principals with different approaches to leadership, and ensures that this division is maintained by making it ridiculous to suggest that men lead like women. This also maintains traditional notions of masculinity, expecting men to adhere to the “honour code” (Sussman, 2012), unable to appear weak by showing emotion.

When I spoke with the male principals about whether or not they thought men and women lead differently, two of them made reference to women as emotional nurturers. Michael is a seasoned administrator and has worked both in schools and in central positions within his district. He was currently the principal of a middle school, but, in our interview, he drew upon his experiences as a central administrator more than on the times when he had worked in schools. During our conversation, Michael indicated that he saw a difference in the way men and women socialize, saying,

Well, I definitely see a difference in how males and females socialize, right, and how they process things and how they problem solve, and kind of, when you think of the emotional problem solving of situations when they are relationship based, right, and um, and I think that the challenge for women who go into the role is because they are working
with a large base of other women. And women... the way they look at each other... you know... guys size each other up too, but it’s a... guys do it at a very superficial level right, whereas like I think a lot of women... they are harsher and then ultimately it sticks longer. Like you and I had a disagreement on something. You made a decision. If I were your vice principal for example, yeah we argue a little bit about it privately and then yeah that’s what the decision is, let’s move on, right? I don’t know if that “let’s move on” happens as quickly all the time when it’s two women.

Here Michael brings into question a woman’s ability to manage her emotions when dealing with conflict with other women. In fact, he takes it further by suggesting that men and women process information differently and therefore problem solve in different ways. Michael positions both men and women in an unfavourable light here, presenting women as emotionally incompetent individuals who cannot seem to let go of a grudge and men as superficial. It is important to note, however, that even though men are presented as superficial, they are also deemed more capable of problem solving when conflicts arise. Michael’s comments show that he questions a female principal’s ability to understand the problem and develop a plan to solve the problem in a calm manner and with confidence. He suggests women would instead be unprofessional and hold a grudge. While Alina sees leading with emotion as within the realm of female principal leadership, presenting this trait as a strength, Michael sees it as a deficit, presenting women as unable to control or manage these emotions. Michael clearly maintains and promotes his dominance over women, which is exactly what is expected of him within hegemony. Like Alina, Michael creates his own figured world here, where male and female principals are divided into two factions: women as emotionally incompetent, and men as devoid of emotion and superficial. This is in keeping with how men maintain traditional notions of masculinity, regulating not only women’s bodies, but also their own.

Michael notably takes this a step further by inviting me as a male administrator into his scenario. He assumes that if he and I were in conflict as two administrators, we would talk it out
privately and resolve the issue. He presumes that if I were a woman, this would not be possible and that I would hold a grudge against him. I felt pressure from Michael to validate his statements, as he assumed that, as a male, I would naturally agree with him, and as such, maintain the “honour code.” It felt as though Michael was inviting me to participate actively in this masculine domination. Bourdieu (2001) wrote of male privilege as a trap that men face: “Male privilege is also a trap, and it has its negative side in the permanent tension and contention, sometimes verging on the absurd, imposed on every man by the duty to assert his manliness in all circumstances” (p. 50). Men as well as women are subject to this domination as they feel the pressure to consistently exhibit their manliness. In this moment during my conversation with Michael, I distinctly felt this pressure and wondered to what extent other men might feel this as well.

I found that more essentialist notions arose when talking with Fred about the differences between the way men and women lead their schools. He provided this commentary on the matter:

I think because women have been nurturers, I think the role has actually, and then you look at superintendents moving up as well too right, I think it’s made things a little more, I think it’s made it for the better. I personally think it’s better that you have women more involved in [the] running of the school. Yes, they feel they have to prove themselves in some ways, that’s just my opinion. That they feel that they gotta do more and be in charge and prove themselves that they can do the job. But they also come with that um, part of who they are that men don’t have. Men and women are different. There is absolutely no… people can’t argue that any way for me, cuz that’s all I believe, men and women are different. They think differently and they um, feel differently and project these things differently. Um, and there are studies that prove that anyway. I mean you talk about men speak[ing] less than women, women are more linguistic than men, type of thing if that’s the way you want to look at it, but, I think it’s been a plus for the role because they come with more of a nurturing type of uh um, not personality, nurturing… Their nurturing way that they have, so that when you talk about the instructional leadership, I think the women principals, the women leaders, have an edge on us in some ways. In some ways because they can actually um, see it from pedagogical, more than we can because we have to work a little harder as males, that’s how I see it. It doesn’t mean that they are better than us, like if, it’s not like one group is better than one, you know female is better than… They have their natural way
about them that they are being the nurturers, and they can understand, say, even the um, the early years compared say to something, in the kindergarten, very early years kindergarten, Grade 1, they have that. I always say to the staff, I have no clue because my teaching was more junior, intermediate. Primary is not really my forte, um, but I want to learn and work hard, but I depend on people who have that expertise, mostly women. You know, I mean I don’t want to stereotype them but that’s just where it is, and that’s where as a female leader, a principal, you have the, they have the edge on us as males, so I think it’s been good that you have that. What’s not good is when you become, you are a female or you start thinking that you gotta do more than that, you start to over-think things, and you start to prove yourself too much. You don’t have to prove yourself. Just do the job.

Fred openly and clearly defines female principals as nurturers. He says that it comes naturally to women and believes that having women lead schools has been a good thing. He defines being a nurturer as being competent in the area of instructional leadership; understanding pedagogy better than men are able to; and being knowledgeable about the early years (kindergarten to Grade 2). As a result, he states, women have the edge on men in this respect. In digging even deeper into Fred’s response, the hegemony is obviously quite deep here. Fred contends, unequivocally, that men and women are different and that research demonstrates this. Men and women, he says, think, feel, and project things differently. Fred relegates women to the role of nurturer but that is the extent of their role. If female principals try or want to be more than that, then they cease to be good principals.

Fred appears completely unaware of the hegemony at play here. He seems to feel that by saying that women have the edge on men as nurturers, he is giving female principals their due, so to speak. Instead, he limits the female principal to knowledge of the early years and to taking a nurturing approach to leadership, and does not appear to see any opportunity for women to expand upon their identities or roles as principals. Fred makes sure that I do not think that women are better leaders than men by saying “It doesn’t mean they are better than us.” Like Michael, Fred includes me as a male principal within the “us” as if to suggest or imply that I agree with his stance as a male administrator. Again, a connection is made between the fact that I
am male and my supposed willingness to agree with and buy into the hegemony, thereby exerting our collective manliness. Fred’s tone is one of superiority as he presumes to tell female principals not only who they are, but what they can do. Fred is aware that he holds the social good. He concedes that perhaps he is not nurturing and hence not the most effective instructional or pedagogical leader, however he maintains and affirms his superior position by placing his female counterparts very neatly into a nurturing box. He attempts to frame this within a veil of positivity by suggesting that women have the edge on men, but reminds us that men are still in power when he asserts that women are not better than us. It is very clear here that Fred is asserting his male privilege in order to maintain and promote masculine domination, and that he invites me to make this same assertion. The duty to assert his manliness is acute and very much present in his comments, as he creates a figured world where female principals might have an edge over male principals by being more emotional leaders. However, this edge does not disrupt the very clear dominance of men over women, as seen in his assertion that female principals are not better than male principals. Fred indeed creates a space where both men and women can be principals. For him, this is a space where each has their own strengths and abilities, according to hegemonic notions of what it means to be a man or a woman. By invoking hegemony, Fred maintains and promotes the dominance of men over women.

The narratives discussed here have illustrated that when male and female principals talk about how men and women lead differently, discourse around women as empathetic, nurturing, and emotional leaders comes to the forefront. Some female principals resisted this label, desiring to be able to be less emotional and more task-oriented, and other female principals embraced it, but not without some trepidation. Some of the female administrators admitted to leading in emotional ways, but they also had a sense of leading with too much emotion and expressed some
concern over the consequences of being too emotional. This discourse is distinctly feminine, and this is highlighted by the fact that the male administers relegated their female colleagues to a rather narrow view of female principals as nurturing leaders, but nothing more.

**Summary**

Maggie’s comments below actually summarize a lot of what has been revealed through the discussion about discourses of female principal leadership. At the end of our interview, we began to talk about sometimes feeling ineffective as leaders, and this is what Maggie had to say:

So yes, I have had several moments feeling ineffective as a leader. Um, there are, you know, I have caught myself thinking, many times actually, I wonder if a man would handle this the same way. I do, you know, when you think leadership you think strong, being able to carry the weight of the world, being emotionally, actual emotional strength, and I think that sometimes I do feel like I have to challenge that. Um, but I have come to terms with that too, and I think that, like I say being a woman, leading a big school as a woman, I have to use my feminism to an advantage as opposed to a disadvantage, so I think that is something that I have grown into over the course of my time in administration, but certainly there have been moments where I have thought, “Boy I wish I were a man.” I do remember thinking that at times, right. Men will be able to do this so much easier, right, men would just say it, it would be well-received and we would move on. Whereas I feel like I still have to explain and dance around things more than a man would have to. And I do think, you know, I still think even amongst female colleagues there is, there are still some women who believe that they have to be very strong and unattached to their school emotionally because that is how, what a leader is seen to be, and I do see colleagues that are like that. I don’t know if that is a natural expression of who they are or if they know that they think that they have to fulfill it.

Here, Maggie employs what Gee (2011) referred to as intertextuality, as she highlights a number of the discourses that came out of my interviews with the principals. In this passage, various discourses are intertwined as Maggie situates herself within the figured world of female principal leadership. It is clear from this statement that female principals are expected to embody and identify with a very masculine notion of strength in leadership that is related to making decisions, sticking by those decisions, and not really worrying about what others might think or the implications of those decisions. The word “strong” is given significance as that which all
principals must aspire to be – however, for women, it is a double-edged sword. I have discussed how the use of this word has taken on different situated meanings as it is used in different ways by different principals. Too much strength, and you are labeled a “bitch,” as expressed in some of the conversations with female principals. As a result, women practice their leadership trying to find a balance between being strong and being a “dragon lady.” In the wake of this challenge, and with the knowledge that male principals essentially hold the social good, female principals turn to feminized notions of leadership such as motherhood and the woman as empathetic nurturer, in order to identify as a different kind of leader to men. Maggie refers to this as “using my feminism to an advantage as opposed to a disadvantage.” Her use of the word “feminism” is interesting as she links discourses of motherhood and women as empathetic nurturers to feminist ideals. I suggest that she is actually referencing ideals one might more readily ascribe to the postfeminist movement. It is somewhat questionable as to whether these feminized notions of leadership actually constitute feminist ideals, or if they actually continue to promote hegemony.

The male principals acknowledge in their narratives that women are good at empathizing with others and classify all women as nurturing; however, they continue to relegate women to these roles without giving them credit for other forms of leadership. They may refer to female principals as strong, but they do this only in relation to their own masculine definition of strength. At the same time, Maggie uses these discourses as strategies of empowerment, creating a paradoxical situation. Such is the figured world of the female administrator. The result is an administrator like Maggie stating that there are times when she just wished she was a man, and then it would be so much easier to lead her school. I have shown here how figured worlds are created by both men and women within these discourses around how to differentiate between male and female principals in terms of leadership style. These worlds position female principals
as mothering, and hence suited to the role of principal as nurturers; present and describe masculine domination through the creation of the boys’ club; and differentiate between the emotional female leader and the unemotional male. These figured worlds are created as a means of making sense of how gender intersects with leadership, and they reveal a great deal about the way the discourses discussed in this chapter work upon both female and male principals.

Returning to Butler’s (1990) notion of performativity, what comes out of all of this is how gender is a constructed identity that is both constructed and performed via actions and gestures and words. As Butler (1990) wrote, “Significantly, if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief” (p. 141). These discourses have illustrated the manners in which both male and female principals perform their gendered identities within their role as principals. The performance is believable – not only to the social audience, but also to the person enacting his/her own gender. The discourses outlined in this chapter are not based on any natural notion of what it means to be a man or a woman. They are performed and enacted upon the surface of individuals’ bodies, and, as a result, they work to regulate the way gender gets performed and presented. It does not stop there, however, for both Butler (1990) and Foucault (1977, 1978) note that within these discourses and power relations there exists resistance and agency.

This agency can be most observed in Maggie, who reveals her frustration with how she is expected to perform her gender. Maggie wants to flip everything onto its head, wishing that she were a man and that she could just lead her school as a man would and could. Maggie is frustrated and angered by masculine domination. She feels the symbolic violence as it acts upon
her and suffers its effects. In her resistance to this domination, she finds herself facing feelings of ineffectiveness. Her use of the term “natural expression of who they are” when describing the way some colleagues lead their schools is very interesting. Maggie acknowledges the presence of a dominating force acting upon both herself and her colleagues. She refuses to be defined by these dominating discourses, and, in this way, seems capable of what Butler (1990) referred to as “reflexive mediation.” Maggie is certainly mired within these discourses of female leadership, but refuses to be defined by it. She states that she challenges the expectation that leaders be strong, and, at the same time, states that she has come to terms with these expectations as a woman leading a large school. The question becomes: is Maggie successful at truly resisting the power relations at play? By expressing wanting to be a man, Maggie suggests that it would be easier to run her school as one, and this is because she recognizes the extent to which men are in possession and control of the social good. Maggie is very much aware of the presence of symbolic violence, and, in this realization, takes on the political struggle to subvert it. The fact that she talks about this violence and her feelings of ineffectiveness speaks to her willingness to be reflexive within this space of the interview. And in this reflexivity, she also expresses agency.
Chapter 6: Discourses of Male Principal Leadership

Overview

It is interesting to consider the changing dynamic of principal leadership over the past 10 to 15 years. When I began my teaching career in the mid-1990s, most principals of elementary schools were men. This did not seem to make sense, as most elementary teachers were women. As I discussed in the previous chapter on discourses of female principal leadership, principalship was largely created for men. Data from the Ontario Principal Council supports this in its report which confirms that women were under-represented in elementary principal positions in Ontario for much of the 20th century. (Shilton, 2015, p. 2) Even when women were over-represented within the teaching pool, they were still not given the opportunity to lead their schools. This is an example of hegemony at work.

Some of the retired female principals to whom I spoke began their career in administration when it was dominated by men. One such principal was Rachel, who spoke about how these male principals were quite dominant. However, she had noticed that this had changed.

“I find that today’s males are a lot different than they were 16 years ago. Maybe because they have to work with so many women, I don’t know but I think there is a difference between the male 20 years ago with the male today.” Rachel started out as a vice principal 16 years ago and witnessed the way male principals conducted themselves. She describes a time when men dominated principalship, and, as a result, excluded women. It is interesting that she notes that male principals have changed since that time, perhaps because they have had to work with more women. Indeed, when we look at schools across the GTA, we see more and more female principals in schools, outnumbering their male counterparts. Has this had an impact on how male
principals lead their schools?

The fact that male principals are now somewhat of a minority does not appear to have changed the fact that female principals continue to experience challenges fitting into a role that has been largely inhabited by men. Male principals continue to hold the social good in terms of leadership in schools, however they do not appear to be aware of this. In fact, I have shown how some of the men have enforced hegemonic masculinity, particularly in the manner in which they portray themselves as being in opposition to women, or as the saviors of women in times of conflict. Thus far in this thesis, I have discussed how certain men cling quite closely to the gender binary. The interviews with male principals have revealed a certain discomfort with the number of women who are now leading schools. There exists a discourse amongst men that the women are taking over, and there is a lack of gender balance in the role. These men express some concern as they see women being promoted into senior positions, and wonder to what extent gender has influenced those promotions. This notion is akin to what Martino (2012) referred to as the phenomenon of “failing boys” who cannot seem to keep up with the girls in our education system. Martino (2012) pointed out that this line of thinking is part of a “common sense” discourse, where differences between girls and boys are perceived as inherent and “natural” and as based on “biological givens” (p. 168). Instead of “failing boys,” might one refer to “failing male principals” too? This is a question that arises within this discussion.

The male principals I interviewed also clearly distinguished themselves from female principals through a discourse of detachment. They presented women as emotional, and, in contrast, portrayed themselves as having the ability to detach from emotion and look at situations in a rational manner. Being able to detach one’s self from emotionally charged situations gets positioned as not only a leadership trait inhabited by men, but also one that is desirable.
Emotional detachment has its drawbacks, however, as these men also spoke about the expectation that they be tough, creating yet another discourse around being tough enough to handle a difficult school. Some men talked about not being all together comfortable with this discourse, yet recognized that the expectation exists largely as a means of contrasting male and female leaders. Sussman (2012) commented on the need for men to maintain a sense of “manliness”:

The sense of manliness as continuous unbroken performance highlights the pressure on men to keep to the script, to follow the code – not to break character – for any divergence would show that one is not a true man but womanly or even gay. In its most radical form, such a model suggests that there is nothing natural or innate in men, perhaps not what we commonly call a “self.” For men, there is only a set of socially constructed rules for playing a role. Furthermore, the idea of manliness as performative also suggests what the history of manliness shows: if the social script is changed the behavior of men will change. (pp. 8–9)

Understanding manliness as a “continuous unbroken performance” enables one to imagine the pressure placed on men. Sussman suggests here that the performance of manliness takes the form of a script that must be followed, otherwise men are at risk of being perceived as womanly or gay. In fear of being labeled this way, men maintain this masculine performance. Thus far, I have illustrated how this role plays out in the form of hegemony, however there are moments when men also appear uncomfortable with this role-playing. Sussman states that viewing manliness through this lens of performance enables one to imagine new ways of being a man by changing the social script. The question becomes, do male principals take this up and formulate new scripts, new ways of being male principals?

One of the questions I asked every principal was, “Have you ever heard any statements from a parent, staff member or child about a preference in terms of working for a male or female principal?” Every male principal to whom I spoke indicated that, at some point, others had expressed their preference to work for a male principal as opposed to a female principal. The
resulting discourse positioned male principals as more desirable. When these kinds of discourses prevail amongst male principals, it becomes difficult to imagine new ways of being and enacting the role of a male principal. When one enjoys the privileges and liberties that come with being the preferred candidate for principal amongst staff, students, and parents, indeed one has very little reason to change the scenario.

**The Women are Taking Over**

Most principals with whom I spoke recognized that most elementary schools are led by women. Different ideas were shared with respect to why this is so, with most thinking that it is a change in the right direction. Fred commented about this change, referencing that, historically, men have been in this role.

It goes back to the whole thing we talked about … I think things are changing a lot because you know, um, over the last, I would say over the last 25 years or so, women have increasingly [been] becoming, um, administrators in the principal role. “So you know, people, society is coming to, on side, you know, the yeah, the principal is going to be a woman, and can be a woman and it doesn’t matter.” I think some people from some cultures may still be coming to us because of the notion that you know it’s only a man who can lead, but now they come to a school and come to this country and they find, oh, the principal is a woman and you gotta live with it and you gotta run with it.

Here, Fred presents women in the role of principal in a positive light, referencing societal changes that enable women to be principals. He also makes reference to new immigrant families coming to Canada from parts of the world where women do not hold positions of power. He states that these families have to become accustomed to having women in positions of power — yet another stereotype, this time about Muslim women. In this statement, Fred brings significance to the fact that more women have been entering principalship, and he positions this

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5 In this quotation, Fred is referring to the families in his previous school community, who largely identified as Muslim, a community with which Fred identifies. He is speaking of his personal lived experience. Here, Fred points toward the intersection of race and gender, as well as the manner in which cultural assumptions become yet another form of essentialism.
as a step in the right direction, stating, “and can be a woman [referring to the principal] and it
doesn’t matter.” Initially it appears that Fred is sharing the social good with women, presenting
the fact that more women are taking up principalship because “So you know, people, society is
coming to, on side, you know, the yeah, the principal is going to be a woman, and can be a
woman and it doesn’t matter.” However, by referencing Muslim women and positioning them as
somehow inferior to men, Fred negates what he originally frames as a move in the right
direction. Fred appears at first content to see women as principals, but later suggests that women
need to overcompensate for the fact that they are women.

I found that women try to be more assertive and I don’t know if it’s because male, in terms
of males we’ve had it historically, we’ve had power so that we are actually ones who you
know, we feel comfortable with being in the role of power maybe versus female. Maybe
that’s why I find women, they try to overcompensate for this. Personally, I feel it shouldn’t
be any, it shouldn’t be any of that. It should be, um, about learning to be a really good
leader, period.

There was a tendency amongst the male principals to continually problematize what they
perceived to be women’s attempts to “masculinize” their leadership style. Here, Fred comments
that women “try to be more assertive,” a stereotypically masculine trait, and then goes on to state
that, really, women are not comfortable in the role. Fred also confirms that men have historically
been, and continue to be “in charge.” This is significant, because Fred normalizes principal
leadership as inherently masculine, and presents female leaders as the “other.” In his previous
comment, he celebrated the fact that more women are leading schools as principals, however, in
this comment, he places women back within a discourse of having to overcompensate for their
femaleness. This is an example of how notions of masculinity also work upon women’s bodies,
and it is in this way that masculine identity becomes somehow destabilized.

On the topic of destabilization, Sussman (2012) wrote, “Yet whatever one’s views about
the so-called crisis of masculinity, there seems to be no question but that many elements of
contemporary life have destabilized masculine identity” (p. 153). In his narrative, Fred makes reference to the fact that more women are becoming principals, a reality of contemporary life within principalship. Fred has a problem, however, with the fact that women are taking on masculine traits within the role, and reveals his belief that they are overcompensating by being more assertive. This reveals a certain anxiety within Fred around the idea of women taking on masculine traits. Fred tries to smooth all of this messiness out by stating that it should be about learning how to be a good leader and not about gender at all. Fred thus builds up a situated meaning around female principal leadership that fits neatly into his own figured world, where true leadership is inherently male. This is another example of the discursive power that works upon the principal. In this one moment, Fred simultaneously supports hegemonic masculinity, relegates women to a lesser version of leadership, expresses some anxiety about women taking on masculine traits, and then softens this blow by trying to say that gender does not matter, a statement negated by his previous comments. This dynamic played out even more clearly within George’s comments.

In the following excerpt, George expresses some concern around the number of female leaders within his family of schools.

I have always been interested to see, um, it was, it was interesting that the male superintendent I felt, um, in the families that I work with seem to have promoted a lot of females and I always felt like that was the situation. They were getting promoted because of their gender and not their ability. I seem to always… it’s funny that the female superintendent, I’ve always had a great rapport with and so it was, like, the male superintendent I have kind of didn’t see eye-to-eye in a lot of things. So, I wonder if that was always something and I kind of look around in the family and I always look around at leadership meetings and there’s a lot of female principals out there, a lot of females, so something went wrong (laughter).

George makes the claim here that women have been promoted by male superintendents because they are women and not because of their ability. He even goes on to say that something is wrong
with having so many women in the role and then laughs it off. This laughter brings significance to the comment that “something went wrong.” It is difficult to truly comprehend the meaning behind the laughter, however I will venture to say that it appears to indicate a certain level of anxiety about the presence of so many women in principalship. Like Fred’s comment above, this commentary acknowledges a contemporary change within the role of principal as more women inhabit the role, and, as such, suggests that George might feel somehow threatened by this fact. George’s comments are steeped in hegemonic notions of what it means to be a man and a woman. Here he completely negates women as leaders of schools by suggesting that male superintendents only promote them because of their gender. He puts forth an image of superiority as a man, and, in the excerpt included in Chapter 5, had previously referred to one of his female principals as a man hater. By stating that “something went wrong” when referring to the number of female principals in his family of schools, George creates a notion of principal leadership as a realm in which women do not belong and presents this view as a collective understanding, a figured world where gender and leadership are inextricably linked. I suggest that George’s comments may be part of the discourse around the crisis in masculinity. As Sussman (2012) wrote, some “men have, with intensity and in defense of their manliness, reasserted traditional masculinity. The rise of a macho, aggressive style and dominating male-centered sexuality informs contemporary life in parallel with the domestication and even emasculation of American men” (p. 157). Sussman makes reference to the reassertion of traditional masculinity in response to the apparent emasculation of men. I am not suggesting that George’s comments are as intense as what has been described here, however, it is clear that by saying “something went wrong” and then laughing, George appears to be asserting a notion of traditional masculinity in the face of what he perceives as a situation where women are taking
Bourdieu (2001) commented on the reaction men have when women begin to take on jobs that traditionally belonged only to men.

The violence of some emotional reactions to the entry of women into a given occupation can be understood when one knows that social positions themselves are sexually characterized, and characterizing, and that, in defending their jobs against feminization, men are trying to protect their most deep-rooted idea of themselves as men, especially in the case of social categories such as manual workers or occupations such as those of the army, which owe much, if not all of their value, even in their own eyes, to their image of manliness. (p. 96)

Bourdieu describes the presence of symbolic violence in moments when women enter occupations usually inhabited by men. This takes place, he writes, because social positions are characterized by sex. These characterizations become blurred when women take on jobs that traditionally belonged to men. In order to maintain their manliness, men resist these intrusions and defend their jobs against feminization. This is quite clearly illustrated in Fred and George’s comments. Both men put forth an image as being superior leaders, normalizing masculine leadership styles. Their comments reveal a discomfort with women taking over principalship. Moreover, George says it outright when he comments that “something went wrong” when a lot of female principals were hired.

While George wondered why all of these women are being promoted, Maggie wondered how men are navigating the influx of women as principals. She had this to say on the matter:

I would be interested to hear from the male perspective to see if they have felt, with more female administrators now around, if they have felt that they need to change the way that they are based on the women’s experience, right, whereas now there are so many women principals now. The fact that compassion is expected in our job, if men have felt that over time… [a need] to change the way that they lead.

Maggie poses a very interesting question here. Does the fact that there are more women leading as principals change the way male principals lead? Rachel appeared to think so, given her
comments about how male leaders seem to have changed over time, presenting as more compassionate and empathetic than they used to be. Sussman (2012) has commented that some men embrace emotional sensitivity and empathy, which are traits traditionally associated with being female (p. 157). Is the fact that more women are taking on the role of principal changing the nature of principalship? Certainly, the evidence thus far reveals that it has resulted in increased anxiety amongst male leaders, as they scramble to protect a leadership identity that is inherently male, referencing a crisis in masculinity. In her narrative, Maggie states that principals are expected to be compassionate and positions men as not being in possession of that quality. She also suggests that having more women in the role has made compassion a requirement of the role. The presence of women in the role has redefined its parameters and opens the door to new ways of understanding the role. Rachel also suggests this, when she comments that male leaders have become more compassionate. Maggie’s question about whether or not female leaders influence the way male principals lead was posed to a few of the males being interviewed.

When I asked Michael to consider the possibility that having more women in the role of principal has changed the role to reflect traits such as compassion and collaboration, he rejected the idea wholeheartedly, and spoke instead about the business world and how businesses expect their employees to work in teams.

Doesn’t that go beyond education? Like, when you look at the business world, the whole idea of being able to work well with others, which again is that collaboration piece, you know, business schools have people working in teams more often, more than they used to. So when you think of how corporate world works, you could also make the same argument that the character traits you just mentioned, compassion, collaboration, all of that is also not restrictive or exclusive to education and yet those… I just saw a recent article where all the top CEOs except for one are all male, the highest wage earners in Canada, right so… so that’s an interesting, a counterpoint right, so it’s, and I just throw that out there as a discussion point.

Throughout our discussion, Michael continually argued against any suggestion that one’s gender
informs one’s leadership style. In this particular excerpt, he makes a case that leadership traits such as compassion and collaboration are inherently a part of leadership beyond the educational realm, and makes the further point that the highest paid CEOs in Canada are men. Michael sees this as a counterpoint to my suggestion that typically female traits of leadership may be influencing the way men lead. By stating that most CEOs are male, Michael suggests that men already lead in this way, and that women have not brought these qualities to leadership.

When I asked Khalid the same question, he was very vague in his response, highlighting how he has changed as a leader generally.

Well that’s a good question. Hmm, I’m not sure truthfully, well, have I changed as a principal? I hope so, you know, with every year I get a little better at it. Have I changed the way I operate because there are more women principals out there? You know, I mean, I think when I first started out, Ken, I was probably more operations-focused, right, I was learning to handle the operations piece and, you know, because of, I have done if, for quite some time now, I think I have the operations stuff down pact and now I am more interested in the other stuff as well too, right, relationships and doing new initiatives and the learning of others. For me, I am still quite interested in that, right, moving the other people along that continuum. Um, I mean I think Sonia [pseudonym for the superintendent] is trying to, in her message to have those co-chairs and co-facilitators of committees and I guess it’s more of a collaborative approach from all is what she is trying to do. I would say that’s probably different than previous, I don’t remember Ralf [pseudonym for the previous superintendent] being particularly like that. Um, so yeah, I guess it’s a bit more of an inclusive collaborative approach, but that might just be Sonia’s style.

Khalid reflects briefly on how his own leadership style has changed and then goes on to suggest that the female superintendent took a more collaborative approach than the previous male superintendent, suggesting that their leadership styles are different. Technically, neither Michael nor Khalid answered my question, which suggests that either they have not considered the possibility that men have learned from women, or that they do not believe it makes any difference. Either way, generally the male interviewees were often very reluctant to concede that their leadership style may have been influenced by women leaders. This quite clearly links to Bourdieu’s (2001) reference to men as protecting their positions and jobs against feminization.
Both Michael and Khalid, it seems, feel the urge to assert and maintain their manliness.

In the words of Judith Butler (1990), “to be a woman within the terms of a masculinist culture is to be a source of mystery and unknowability for men” (p. vii). This rings true within this discourse around women taking over principalship. As men find themselves in the minority during principals’ meetings, they begin to wonder why there are so many women in the room. In response to this, male principals appear to re-inscribe masculine notions of what it means to lead, in an attempt to reclaim what is theirs. There exists a discomfort amongst the men with the perceived feminization of their role as principals. When the suggestion is made that perhaps men have had to change the way they lead due to the influence of so many female leaders, they reject the notion or avoid it altogether. The male principals in this study maintain and protect hegemonic masculinity when they feel that it is being threatened by the presence of women in the role of principal. They promote traditional notions of masculinity by stating that women need to overcompensate in the role by being too assertive. The workings of masculinity on the female principal body creates a crisis of masculinity among male principals, and, in response, they quickly position principalship as existing only within the realm of men, even when many women are taking on the role. There is a feeling amongst these men that women are getting too many pieces of the pie, the social good, and that they are forming identities that are foreign to men. In response to this threat, men begin to define, defend, and uphold what it means to lead as a man, thus defending and maintaining their manliness.

The “Detached” Male Principal

I discussed in Chapter 5 the existence of a feminized discourse of leadership that perceives women as compassionate, empathetic, and emotional leaders. This discourse appears in part as a response to the more masculine leadership traits that are imposed on female principals.
Some female principals indicated that men can also be compassionate and emotional leaders, however I found that the male principals interviewed did not, for the most part, identify in this way. In fact, a tendency among the male principals was to separate themselves out from the women. John did this by referring to himself as an alpha male when describing how his gender affects the way he leads.

I think not just my gender, but my race, also has an impact on how I lead. Um, I tend to be self-described as an alpha male in a sense. Somebody who, um, you know, very active, into sports, uh, you know, has a cause-and-effect type of mindset. And so, I do take that into consideration when I am talking with certain staff members, especially those who view their perspective through a different lens, one of whether it be more emotional or from a different, just basically different lens.

Right from the start John separates himself apart from women by first describing himself as an alpha male. As I discussed in Chapter 5, Sahar did the same when she described herself as inhabiting the masculine idea of alpha, which I propose is a means of taking a piece of the social good. Here, John describes the alpha male as someone who is into sports and has a cause-and-effect mindset. It sounds rather limiting, however it is significant, as John is intentionally situating his leadership apart from any notion of femininity. In fact, he presents himself as hyper-masculine, maintaining and promoting traditional notions of masculinity. He makes a further distinction by suggesting that his staff members (who are mostly women) have a “different lens,” which he describes as emotional. When I asked John to elaborate on this comment about the impact his gender might have on his leadership, he said,

So as an example, um, there, how I communicate sometimes, uh, may be viewed as more objective not as colourful in a particular sense. So as an example, I may say “Ok um, I

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6 John references his race here as an African Canadian man. During our conversation, John spoke of his race as having more of an impact on his leadership style than his gender. For example, at one point, he made a reference to the manner in which he dresses as a reflection of his race, and talked about how this had affected his interactions with others as a principal.
need you to be here,” um, as opposed to “Hey let me talk to you for a moment, I need you over to this particular area, is that ok?” Uh, so um, oftentimes the messages are very direct, and for some people receiving the message it might be viewed as I don’t care about you or, um, or you know you are just telling them what to do or you are commanding me to do [something], when in essence that is not what I am trying to say.

John gives an example of how his masculinity plays out in his leadership, particularly when he is communicating with staff. His use of the words “objective” and “colourful” is interesting as he juxtaposes two different communication styles. He sees himself as objective, as he has a goal in mind and he wants something done, as opposed to colourful, suggesting a gentler perhaps more flamboyant way of communicating with others. John is suggesting that he engages with a very masculine form of communication, while the other form is more feminine. He goes on to say he is direct, which he claims gets misinterpreted as commanding and unfeeling. Essentially John is saying that he makes commands and does not ask questions, clearly exhibiting a stereotypically masculine leadership style. He is aware of the potential conflict that can arise from this style, but really makes no apology for it. When I dug a little deeper and asked John to comment on how he felt his staff expected him to respond to them, he had this to say:

That is a good question. I have and I will say it’s because of how, I am going back to the point earlier, how people expect me to respond and I have said to one person, um, in dialogue because they have said, you know, I don’t understand where they are coming from and I said to them, “Well if I make a decision that’s in line with how you feel would I then understand?” And so oftentimes it’s, the empathy is not necessarily me just listening, the empathy is me going out and saying, “Ok, I agree with you so therefore I am going to do exactly what you are thinking of doing.” And I think being a male has something to do with it because how I communicate my understanding to a female staff member um, if the kind of words that I would use would not necessarily be the words that the staff member would use because again with me it’s just ok, I know I understand, but the expression of how I say those words um, it would not resonate in a sense. It would be more very logical as I said earlier, I understand how you are feeling, I appreciate what you’re going through, but then there’s that, from the receiver’s standpoint, lack of emotions, that detachment, so therefore how can I understand because we are not connected emotionally. So, I do feel that there have been many restrictions like that and it’s only because of the fact that um, how some of the female staff members communicate, it is through a lens of emotional expression, not just in their actions but in how they say things. And so how I say things, there is disconnect.
Here John refers again to the ways he communicates with staff. He states that the kind of words that he would use do not resonate with female staff. They would be logical. In saying this, John has identified female staff as emotional, which he presents as an illogical stance, completely detaching himself from any notion that his words would be in any way emotional. In fact, he uses the word detachment to describe the moment when he is communicating with a female staff member. He claims that female staff communicate via “a lens of emotional expression” in both their actions and in what they say, and as a result, there is a “disconnect.” It is also important to note that John attributes the disconnect to the women, only stating that there have been restrictions to his leadership, and that “it’s only because of the fact that um, how some of the female staff members communicate.” John is careful to say “some” and pauses just before making this statement, suggesting that there is a part of what he is saying that does not sit right, and yet he still claims this to be how communications are carried out. Here John refers specifically to the ways men are able to detach themselves from emotion, making it difficult for them to effectively communicate with female staff members. This detachment is possible, as men are portrayed as having logical objectives, whereas women are colourful and emotional, which is presented as an illogical response.

John feels that there exists a disconnect between himself and his female staff members, and he attributes this disconnect to the emotional responses of his staff members, rather than to his own ability to manage his emotional response. I argue that John’s detachment from emotion is actually an emotional response, although John does not see it that way. The very act of detaching himself from emotion creates a disconnect between himself and the female teachers. Instead, he criticizes the perceived emotional responses of his female staff, and does not recognize his own maintaining and espousing of essentialist notions of how men and women react to conflict. This
detachment to which John refers is yet another good example of how men maintain dominance over women. John speaks of this detachment in such a way that suggests that this disconnect is just part of the social fabric of society. He even refers to how he, as a man, uses words and how this is different from how women use words. This is particularly clear when he states, “how some of the female staff members communicate, it is through a lens of emotional expression, not just in their actions but in how they say things.” John clearly connects emotional responses to women. He also privileges the supposed male, logical means of response by stating that there is a disconnect. By insisting on this disconnect, John protects and maintains hegemonic notions about how men and women communicate.

Michael expressed his notion of detachment in a completely different way than John. He presents himself as a nice guy, but there is a line in the sand with respect to how nice he is going to be.

Yeah, you know what, and that’s why different experiences are good because you know what, I like to think of myself as a pretty nice guy. I try like you know, and part of that is that I treat people as I would want to be treated and that’s a good model of life. There are people out there who um, they don’t treat people nicely, right, and so in the school people are pretty nice generally. Having had that central experience, and you, when I came into your school, I was feeling the people who aren’t so nice and they have not so nice representation right and so that to me was a good experience to gain a lot of stories that I could use in a way… Like when I am having a conversation about someone and they are talking about how nice I might be and then somehow I weave into the conversation about the day I got the 13 grievances or the day I terminated an employee [and] they start thinking, “Oh, maybe he is not so nice.”

Michael sees himself as a pretty nice guy, but points out that he can be direct as well when the situation calls for it. He references situations where he received grievances or when he terminated an employee. All of these scenarios fall within the responsibility of the principal, and Michael points out that he is willing and able to do all of these things. Indeed, Michael is a nice guy, but he can detach himself from the personal relationships he has with staff, parents, and
students, and make tough decisions. Michael seems to provide this example as a means of demonstrating his ability to control his emotions when the situation calls for it, to take a tough stance when he needs to. Michael does not juxtapose his abilities and leadership practices against any of his female colleagues, however he makes sure that it is clear that he is not just a nice guy. This points toward the idea that the detached male principal is not just a nice guy, but also takes up a commanding presence in the school. Michael creates a figured world to position himself as a favourable leader and hence a nice guy, but not a pushover. He can easily detach himself from personal relationships in order to get the job done. In the discussion of women as emotional and empathetic principals, Lucy had commented on how strange it seemed watching her male principal attempt to act in an empathetic manner toward a crying teacher. It seems that this discourse of detachment has become a means for demonstrating the way male principals exhibit empathy and care for others. While describing her challenges in dealing with emotional situations, Emma commented that men often handle these situations better than she, given their ability to detach from the situation, saying, “Because they are men. I felt that they had an easier detachment from it than I was able to do.” For Emma, this ability to detach emotionally is a positive trait of leadership and it appears to belong to men.

In general, through discourses of male principal leadership, I have shown how male principals actively separate themselves from feminine ways of leading. John does this quite succinctly, relegating women to individuals driven by emotional irrational thoughts, while maintaining a persona as an alpha male, direct and completely detached from emotion. Is not detachment itself an emotional response? Perhaps it can be construed as a masculine version of an emotional response – direct and authoritative without being too colourful or soft. For John, one of the consequences is a disconnect between himself and his female staff in terms of
communication. He presents this as if men and women speak different languages, and places the blame for this squarely on the women. Michael frames this detachment differently, stating that he is a nice guy, but cautions not to push the envelope as he is more than capable of taking the personal out of his relationships with others and making difficult decisions. There seems to be a desire to be a nice guy, but not a push-over. Perhaps one might suggest that, for these men, taking on stereotypically feminine leadership qualities might bring notions of being weak and unfit to lead. This would explain why male principals might find it difficult to recognize that they can learn from their female colleagues, as there exists a fear of becoming too feminine. Within this discourse of detachment, a very clear division is made by these men between themselves and women. I suggest that this detachment is a result of the need for men to affirm their masculinity, and in so doing, separate themselves from women. This leads toward an image of the male principal as tough, able to handle any situation that comes his way.

“You’re Tough, You Can Handle It, Man”

Discourses around toughness have long been part of essentialist ideas around what it means to be a man. This can be found, for example, in Sussman’s (2012) discussion of man as warrior.

At the heart of the warrior identity is the quest for honor, for reputation, for glory, for renown in the eyes of his fellow warriors. Personal honor as performing an unwritten code exists most easily in a shame culture – that is, a society where one’s actions and sense of personal worth are regulated by the threat of negative opinions from one’s peers and by the further penalty of expulsion from the community of men. (p. 16)

I venture to say that most men have experienced moments when they were expected to be tough in their response to a situation, and most also feel a sense of shame when they do not measure up. In these moments, men and women are divided as certain situations have traditionally required a male response, e.g., to fight in a war. This division between men and women places them within a bind, both having to live up to and be relegated by tasks that they may or may not
feel comfortable enacting. There exists an expectation that men will act like men and women will act like women. For example, when there is a fight to be fought, men are expected to step up to the plate, otherwise they have no honour and will be shamed by their fellow men. It was not surprising that this notion of male and female responsibilities came up when talking with male principals. Fred talked about a time when a parent told him to be a man and do his job:

So my very first year at my prior school, there was a parent who actually said, like, I mean, the thing I learned, this is unrelated, but I learned not to call them back the same day. But I was a rookie principal, right, I should have waited [until] the next day when it was calm or whatever. She did say to me, “why don’t you be a man and do your job.”

I asked every principal if anyone had ever questioned their gender identity because I had found, from my own experience, that this has an impact on the way you lead. Principals are also in a vulnerable position at times, especially when they make unpopular decisions. As a result, they are often questioned and taken to task. I asked Fred to comment on how he had taken and/or internalized this response from the parent. He responded:

I didn’t dismiss it, I mean, um, I mean, obviously I remember it, you know, but that’s sort of my nature, certain things I don’t forget. I will never forget certain things but people always say that because of who you are, you know, you start it but, you know, what am I going to do with it now? That parent and child have gone and moved on, you know? Even a year after and stuff, I still had conversations with them because I had to be the bigger person and not let a little comment like that affect who I am. But I still remember because you know um, as you know, we [are] in the role where we actually make decisions based on probabilities and you know, our good judgement or professionalism or professional judgement and sometimes, you know, when somebody makes these kinds of comments at you, it, like, you feel, it’s like I felt hurt. Hurt and some anger too, because you know, you just want to feel like strangling that person sometimes because you don’t know the other side of the story and yet you are running your mouth and saying these kinds of things and you know, nothing about my manhood, I mean, I was just upset that you can just run your mouth and say disrespectful stuff, you know?

Fred does not appear to take this comment as a jab at his manhood. Rather, he questions the parent’s right to be rude and disrespectful toward him. He describes having to take the higher road as a professional, but still remembers the incident as it made him angry and was hurtful.
There remains, however, the expectation that he be tough like a man. This is an example of the workings of Bourdieu’s (2001) notion of symbolic violence in action – gentle and imperceptible and yet present, causing a certain degree of suffering (pp. 1–2). It is important to note that symbolic violence works upon both men and women as it maintains and promotes masculine domination.

This expectation to be tough plays out in other contexts as well within schools. George talked about being a vice principal in an inner-city school.

Yeah, certainly again it comes down to stereotypes. So, in some of the positions of the schools that I was in, things kind of were aggressive with kids, right, and it was expected that I would go and not the principal who was a female to attend to those needs. Had it been a female vice principal, I don’t know if that would have… cuz you have that sort of male match thing to go with and deal with the situation, right, and I think even the students are responding differently to a female than how they respond to a male. So, there were situations where I didn’t want to go in, chairs could be flying, things could be…I didn’t want to go in, but I had to. I was the token male on staff to go and so I had to go, right, and you had to deal with the situation.

George describes having to be the one to deal with volatile and potentially dangerous situations with students, and attributes this expectation to the fact that he is male. He is expected to take on the warrior stance and uphold the warrior code in order to maintain his manliness. He provides a rationale for this expectation, stating that children will respond differently to women than men, suggesting that men are better suited to handling volatile situations. This assumes that men are tougher than women and represent authority in a manner that women are not able to. He admits, however, that he does not want to enter into these situations, revealing a certain discomfort with having to meet this expectation. Later, he suggested that superintendents and trustees purposefully place men in tough schools because they are men and can supposedly handle it.

But I notice that in some tough schools, it’s ah, they want a male there, like I think the school that I was at for a number of years, the trustee just wanted me there and I don’t know if that was the rapport that I had with the community, or whether it was because I was male, and in the past, they had, sort of, females, but they had dominant females, you
know, but they just needed a male [George stated that his principal was a dominant female earlier in the conversation]. It’s funny, if you look at some of the tough schools you have a male there in the office.

George suggests that, even though the principal of the tough school was a “dominant female,” the school needed a male. Even though George expresses some discomfort with having to deal with volatile situations, he continues to put forth an image of males as being better prepared and more suited to deal with tough situations. He does not challenge this expectation because to do so would bring into question his manhood, and he would risk being shamed and ousted by his male peers. Again, this brings to mind Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic violence, as men are expected to uphold their manliness in order to protect the male dominated social order. I have shown how this symbolic violence is at work on female principals and the manner in which it causes suffering amongst them; in this case, this same violence is at work on a man, George, causing him some discomfort. It is important to note, however, that even in his discomfort with entering volatile situations, George maintains the image of males as tough and able to deal with it. This is the work of symbolic violence as it works upon men, ensuring the maintenance of masculine domination even in times of discomfort and suffering.

Some of the female principals also took the position that male principals are expected to be tough disciplinarians. Maggie talked about how men are expected to deal with difficult schools and are intentionally placed within those schools.

I also think there is an expectation for men principals to be tough, especially when dealing with a volatile behaviour situation. I think the expectation would be put on male principals that they should be able to handle that situation because they are male. Um, I remember even being asked to move schools, and one of the… it was time for me to move from one vice principalship to another, and I remember the superintendent saying, “Oh, I can’t put you at that school because there is a woman principal and that is a very difficult school, so I don’t want two women in the same building.”

Here, Maggie reiterates what George has claimed. She adds some credence to this notion when
I remember one time talking about feeling emotional during a staff meeting, talking with a male principal colleague, and I remember his reaction was, “don’t ever let your staff see you cry”. It would be a very valid reason [an emotional event had occurred at the school]. I can’t remember actually what the situation was. I do remember it was a very odd statement to make because I felt like principals are human too, and if it was a real expression of emotion, then why wouldn’t I let my staff see that? But I think that from his perspective, it would be a sign of weakness, whereas I don’t see it like that at all.

Maggie’s reference returns this discussion to the discourse around men as being detached from emotion. However, this is also relevant within the discourse under discussion here, as it perhaps points to why this discourse around men as tough disciplinarians exists. Maggie saw her response, feeling emotional, as an appropriate expression of human emotion, whereas her male colleague saw it as a sign of weakness. It is very interesting that a male principal would say this, as it speaks to the kinds of power relations at play upon male principals. Clearly, men are expected to always remain calm, cool, collected, and strong, and the idea of crying in front of staff is totally unacceptable. Perhaps this is why men are seen to be able to handle conflict and volatile situations better than women. Male principals must be tough and always keep their emotions in check, detaching themselves from emotion when necessary to make the necessary decisions. Maggie reports being taken aback by her male colleague’s assertion; however, if you contextualize his response, you begin to see how it is created out of discourses that are at play within male and female leadership.

This juxtaposition between men and women was highlighted in some of John’s comments when he spoke about making decisions on student placement based on gender.

I will confess that I have made decisions based upon the male staff that we have in the building. So, for example, there was a class that I saw had a few challenging boys there, and the person that I put into the program I know could make a connection, because there were a lot of similarities between this teacher and what this teacher’s interest was and the group of boys that had a similar interest. And at the same time, I have done the same thing with putting a female teacher in or looking at the personality, the make-up, which
includes the gender piece, and saying ok, this group of students would fit well with this particular teacher because of the fact that there are some commonalities, whether it be the shows that are being watched or the fashion that this teacher loves which the students have spoken about on several occasions. I do take a look at the gender piece and I include that in my decision-making.

In this case, John reveals that he will intentionally place challenging male students into classes that have a male teacher. On the other hand, when speaking of making decisions about placing students into a female teacher’s class, he refers to television shows and fashion. John’s words confirm that decisions are made based upon essentialist ideas around male and female qualities. These ideas conform to the social order as described by Bourdieu, but at the same time and within this context, these decisions seem completely out of place. To assume that a male teacher can handle challenging students simply because he is male is an example of how men are expected to uphold the code of manliness. The expectation is that the male is tough and as a result can handle the difficult children. Both male and female principals do not appear to be all together comfortable with the expectations placed upon them. At the same time, they make these gendered expectations part of their practice as they come into play when decisions are to be made.

Discourses that present men as tough are not new to essentialist notions of what it means to be a man, and it is not surprising that male principals are having to navigate this discourse in their daily work lives. What is interesting is that, although men are not entirely comfortable with this discourse, they still re-inscribe it and claim that they have no choice but to live up to it. The male principal cannot help but to be angered and hurt when a parent questions his manhood saying, “why don’t you be a man,” but at the same time, he fails to challenge this misperception. Instead, male principals take on the persona of disciplinarian, cautioning staff that they are not just nice guys, but can make tough decisions, and advising their female colleagues that crying
during a staff meeting is a bad idea. It is interesting how we all – male or female – continue to feed the discourse, even when it does not represent our true selves. But, when masculinity is positioned as a performance, it becomes clear how men are pressured to maintain a certain code of behavior, and, as such, then perform their gender identity in order to conform to societal expectations (Butler, 1990; Sussman, 2012). Are men able to break free from this discourse, subvert it, and challenge its expectations? Although the men with whom I spoke felt some discomfort with this discourse, I did not see evidence of them subverting it other than admitting their discomfort. Perhaps subversion or agency can arise as a result of this discomfort. On new possibilities for understanding and engaging with manliness, Sussman (2012) wrote, “Although there are external and internalized pressures to conform to the traditions of manliness, there is a potential, perhaps not yet fully realized, to invent new forms of manliness” (p. 157). Thus far, I’ve proposed that the entry of women into principalship has opened the door toward a rethinking around the role of principal and how this role can and should be enacted. Male principals have resisted this thinking, maintaining hegemonic masculinity and protecting their sense of manliness. Perhaps, as Sussman (2012) suggested, new formulations of manliness have yet to be realized. However, it is important to note that traditional masculinity is certainly being disrupted – just not enough.

“I’d Rather Work for a Man”

One of the questions I asked each principal was if they had ever heard staff speak about having a preference for working for a man or a woman. None of the women to whom I spoke recalled ever hearing anything from staff, parents, or students about a preference. However, every male principal to whom I spoke indicated that they had heard comments related to preference. These principals indicated that most of these comments had come from women, and
embedded within the comments is the notion that working with female principals is more challenging. Michael commented that one office administrator had asked if he could arrange for his replacement principal to be a man: “At one school I was at, as I was leaving, one of the office staff [said] if I had any voice in my successor, she would prefer a male because she found working with women more challenging.” Fred also indicated that he had heard from women over the past year at his school that they preferred to work for a man. It is interesting that he also mentioned that he had not heard men indicate a preference. Fred felt that the women who had indicated this preference did not appear to get along with their female principals.

Yeah. I have heard, I mean I can’t remember where exactly, but within my time as a vice principal and principal, vice principal and principal, some have, mostly women, women have said they really enjoy working with a male principal. I have heard that a lot. Women saying about men. Um, I have hardly heard men say anything about any, you know, uh, woman principal or a man principal. Most, but I have heard women, staff saying that they find it a lot better working with a man. It could be that they just did not gel with the woman who they had as principal. It could be, I don’t suspect my predecessor here, but maybe somebody they have worked with in the past. I am not sure.

Similarly, John made a comment indicating that even though he had been the third male principal in a row for his current school, and no particular comments were made about his gender, that staff find it a lot easier to work for a man than a woman.

Um, so I have been at this school for three years and this September will be my fourth year. Prior to me arriving, there was a male principal there and prior to his arrival was another male principal, so I am the third [male] principal in a row. Um, one question that I asked the staff was, um, was I typically what they expected, and they said, um, that they like the fact that I was a male because they figured that working with a male is a lot easier than working with a female.

In all of these cases, the male principals privilege a masculine style of leadership by presenting it as preferential to a female style. They do not provide any rationale for this preference except to say that staff have indicated that they prefer to work for men, as it is easier. Gender becomes the determining factor of this preference. Female principals are presented as difficult to work with,
and, as a result, do not “gel with the staff” or get along with the teachers. None of the male principals challenged this notion and even appeared happy to report it, as it indeed works to their benefit. The fact that women are reporting this preference is interesting and concerning. What is it about men that makes them preferred leaders of schools?

George provided some explanation around this preference when he referred to comments made to him suggesting that the former female principal was not approachable. He said that the staff were happy he was their new principal because, as a man, he had a different way of running things.

Um, I think the previous, especially the previous administrator, I don’t think the staff were too happy with. She had a different style of running things and I think, um, they kind of saw a more, um, personable person, if I could say that, a more personable attitude. And I think they appreciated that, um, as opposed to someone who really, wasn’t really approachable. So those were the kind of comments that were made by the community as well as the teachers.

Here, George is making the suggestion that women and men lead differently. In his statement, he claims that his staff has preferred his “personable” approach, as opposed to that of the previous female administrator. This is another example of discourses around a preference for male leaders, which, as George suggests, exists amongst school staff. George sees himself as an approachable and collaborative principal, and presents female principals as unapproachable and domineering. Within this discourse, supposed male and female ways of leading are juxtaposed, and, in this particular case, male forms of leadership are preferred.

It is easier, not to mention beneficial, for men to present themselves as the preferred choice as leaders of schools. The men interviewed for this research all stated that they had heard comments to this effect, mostly from female staff members. Moreover, the rationale given for this choice was, once again, at the expense of female leaders. Maggie suggested that teachers prefer male principals because there is a perception of men being relaxed leaders who will
provide opportunities for staff to have the freedom to make decisions for themselves. In addition, she said, it is perceived that the rules will be relaxed in such a way that teachers will benefit.

I do remember at another school, there was a change in administration. I was the vice principal there and the principal was yet to be announced and the staff quite blatantly were saying, “I can’t wait until um, the new principal is announced,” and they were hoping for a male principal and they very much... it was very much the feeling that if a male principal came, rules would be relaxed that they would go back to the old way of being. And to them, that meant nobody checking in on them, that they were able to make decisions for themselves, that it would be like the old boys’ club for them, right. Some of the examples that were given were, you know, that the previous principal who was a male would extend recess time so that we could have longer in the staff room. We used to all go out for lunch on Fridays and he would hold all of the classes in the gym so that we could get an extra lunch in. So that was the feeling, that if they could only get another male principal in there we could go back to the good old party times like it used to be. So, when a female principal was announced, everybody was quite disappointed even though she had an excellent reputation of being a very good administrator.

Maggie describes exactly the scenario that I experienced when I first arrived at my current school as the new principal. The staff indicated that they were pleased that I was a man, and began to make requests that I provide them with extra-long recesses and other benefits that had been provided in the past, during what the staff referred to as “the good old days.” Staff also complained to me about having to be accountable to school goals through presenting information about their students to the principal. It was felt that, because I am a man, I would not have the same expectation. Interestingly, in this particular case, having a male principal is associated with the good old days, another figured world that gives significance to what is perceived to be male ways of leading. The belief that if a man leads the school, staff will be able to enjoy the good old days when they had longer recesses, situates male leadership within a discourse around a lack of accountability. The opposite of this, of course, would be a feminine way of leading that includes accountability. As has been mentioned previously, female principals are outnumbering male principals and this has not gone unnoticed, particularly by seasoned teachers who recall a time when most principals were male. The influx of female principals has disrupted patterns in
leadership that have existed over time. A few principals made mention in their interview of the notion of a boys’ club, and Maggie mentioned this as well. It seems that female staff accepted the existence of the boys’ club as long as they were able to benefit from its existence. Further, it appears that working for women has resulted in expectations around the greater accountability of staff, and hence the disappearance of the good old days. As I have discussed, however, for a woman interested in leadership opportunities, the good old days was not necessarily a time in which this was an easy path for women to move forward. In my conversation with Lucy, we discussed how the boys’ club appears to prevail in some districts where men are promoted simply for being male and qualified women are being passed over. The preference for male principals then seems to stem from a desire amongst staff to return to a time when they were held less accountable. Does this mean that male leaders really are more lax than female ones? Is gender a euphemism for more autonomy amongst staff, for a distance from the strict application of rules and procedures?

Monica seemed to think that this is the case. When I asked her about whether she had heard staff commenting about whether they would like to work with a male or female principal, she had this to say:

A lot of them, they prefer working with a male principal. Upon conversation, they feel that the male principal is not as demanding as a female principal.

Researcher: What do you think are the reasons for that?

Monica: I guess they always find that maybe the male is more, um, not as pushy, um, not as detailed. So in that way, maybe accounted for the way, how a school is being run and probably men are easier to be approached in terms of like having issues or maybe requests, the man is [more] soft-hearted than a female, or maybe also related to the experience. I don’t know.

Monica expresses her feeling that most people prefer to work for a male principal because they are perceived as easier to work with, less demanding, and soft-hearted. Monica presents female
principals as opposite to male principals, presenting them as pushy and detailed. Kate put this in a slightly different way, but made the same distinction, referring to women as driven and men as laid back.

Well again, maybe it’s an off-point example – my chief caretaker who happens to be male, myself a female principal, we often talk about differences between the genders and how we approach problems and situations. He identifies himself as being far more laid back than me. I agree. We both get the job done in our respective fields and areas, but how we approach a problem and a task is quite different, and I would say I am far more driven. Now again, he is only one man and me one woman, but I think that would be a concrete example of where I have heard this iterated. Men tend to be quote, unquote more laid back than women. That’s how I think I have heard the examples.

Kate is more careful than Monica in her comments here, stating that both men and women are able to “get the job done” given their respective differences. It is important to note, however, that both women make reference to men as more laid back than women. Both women also make these references in response to the question about whether people have expressed a preference for working for a male or female principal. These comments suggest that both Monica and Kate may feel that teachers tend to say that they prefer to work for men rather than women. They attribute this preference to the fact that they see male leaders as laid back and easier to approach. Both women situate leadership squarely within the gender binary by presenting males and females in this way. They appear to agree that most people would prefer to work for a male principal, but qualify this by suggesting that women are more driven and detail oriented than men. This suggestion further suggests that women make better principals than men, getting the job done in such a way that garners results. In making these statements, it is implied that men are somehow able to get away with not being driven and still get the job done. Because they are men, they have the luxury of being more laid back and approachable, whereas women must be more task oriented, pushing their agendas forward.

Once again, sexist attitudes prevail here, as women are seen to have to work harder than
men in order to gain respect as leaders, whereas men are able to get away with doing less work and are still viewed as the preferred choice for a leader. I suggest, however, that there is a larger issue at work here, although the sexism is certainly concerning. Within this discourse, both men and women can be observed as upholding these sexist attitudes. For example, it is generally female staff members indicating a preference for working with men. This is particularly clear in Maggie’s comments around a staff preferring a male principal so that they could enjoy the perks that come with that, such as extra-long recesses, a product of a time when men were part of the old boys’ club. This perception amongst female teachers that their male principal will somehow be kinder to them ultimately feeds the male ego, enabling the male principal to enjoy a rather privileged place amongst the staff, supporting and maintaining masculine domination. Kate positions it differently in her narrative, presenting men as laid back and women as driven, as she describes the differences between herself and her chief caretaker. This is an example of what Connell (1987) referred to as emphasized femininity, meaning the compliance of women with the subordination of women to men. It may not appear, for example, that Kate is complying with this subordination. However, she is in agreement with the notion that men are laid back and women are driven, a very hegemonic notion of the role of men and women in society. Kate presents herself as driven, but this does not necessarily give her power over men. It only reinforces the gender binary and notions of how she is expected to behave as a leader. Being driven also results in some negative perceptions of female leaders amongst staff, as shown when they are reported to have revealed a preference for working for men. Indeed, these notions are unmistakably sexist. However, they are also tied to discourses around what it means to lead as a man/woman and the hegemonic expectations that others have around the role of principal.
Summary

This chapter has highlighted discourses of male principal leadership, which are largely represented in two ways. The first is through an expression of anxiety or concern that women are – and hence femininity is – taking over. These discourses are steeped in what Sussman (2012) referred to as a crisis in masculinity, a result of men’s worry about how the presence of women in principalship threatens their manliness. Men reinforce this manliness by separating themselves out from women as leaders, presenting a leadership stance that is devoid of a sense of emotion. Part of the problem here is that principals, both men and women, promote the idea that male and female principals are different leaders and they base this claim upon the gender binary.

Lucy’s narrative gave rise to the notion that people tend to see male and female principals as leading quite differently. She could not explain it, but she recognized a distinct difference in how they are perceived.

But I do believe that some communities need a male leader and some need a female. I do really believe it does depend on the school community and I do think that there are different perceptions around, oh, that’s a female leader and that’s a male leader. I do think so and I do think that some staff will function better with a male leader and others with a female leader. I don’t know if I can explain that. I think each gender brings different strengths to the job apart from the personality. I think there are certain characteristics of gender, you know, of the male and female gender generally, very generally, and these characteristics are significant enough in certain situations to have an effect on the staff.

Lucy highlights that there is a perception out there that some schools need a female leader and other schools need a male leader. She believes that there are qualities that one can point to in order to distinguish between how men and women lead. Certainly, the narratives have revealed a discourse of fear that female principals are taking over, resulting in a situation where male principals actively distinguish themselves from what they perceive to be female ways of leading. They react to the feminization of their role by giving significance to masculine notions of
leadership such as toughness and directness and relegate female principals to a position of the “other.” The “other” in this case becomes non-masculine ways of leading based on emotion, a much softer and “colourful” approach. In response to this threat, this “otherness,” men create their own identities as emotionally detached leaders who can make difficult decisions and still be nice guys and well-liked by others. Male principals re-inscribe notions of toughness, even when they are not altogether comfortable with it. This comes as a result of the fact that men often feel that they have no choice but to re-enact this macho warrior identity. Otherwise, their male peers will shame them and oust them from the manly club (Sussman, 2012). Some male principals reveal a discomfort with this masculine discourse and feel pressure to maintain their manhood in response to the social order of things. At the outset, this discomfort is perceived as a space where these men may begin to resist this discourse; however, hegemony is maintained as these male principals identify as personable, as nice guys, and, at the same time, as tough enough to make difficult decisions. In this way, male principals position themselves as the preferred principal. They are presented as being nice enough to allow staff some freedom and add perks to their teaching responsibilities as in the old days, but when they need to be tough and direct, it is both accepted and expected. It seems that female staff still prefer to work for male principals, even when their detachment from emotional situations results in a disconnect. Men seem to be forgiven for all of this.

The recent proliferation of female principals has caused some concern amongst men and hence has an effect on discourses of male leadership. Many people would presume that the increasing numbers of women within the role would change principalship and influence the way male principals lead. However, male principals reject this notion and instead maintain a very masculine notion of leadership.
Chapter 7: Discourses of Reluctance and Denial

Overview

In this thesis thus far, I have outlined two sets of discourses attributed to female and male principals, in which a trend emerged in terms of the way hegemonic masculinity is reinforced by both male and female principals. Female principals spoke of discourses of gender and leadership that position them as effective principals, and of carving out a space within a role that has traditionally been inhabited by men. In this process, women are subjected to various masculinities, and they either reaffirm the hegemony or challenge it. The male principals’ narratives have illustrated how they respond to the influx of women into the role of principal with a certain amount of anxiety; as a result, they reposition themselves within a discourse that separates them from female ways of leading, holding true to traditional notions of what it means to lead like a man. In this chapter, I will present yet another discourse that emerged in this study, one of reluctance and denial.

Within almost every conversation I had with both male and female principals, a comment was made linking leadership to personality and skills, in a way that appeared fundamental to their understanding of their own leadership style and abilities. There seemed to be a reluctance to link leadership and gender, particularly in the beginning of each interview. However, many comments were also made clearly linking the two. Most participants really did not want to believe that leadership has anything to do with gender. These comments were so prevalent that I felt that, as a researcher, I could not ignore this as yet another discourse around leadership. I have thus framed this discourse as a kind of “denial” that gender matters when it comes to leadership. I also found, however, that, for most principals, this denial was disrupted as
discourses of gendered leadership were revealed. This disruption seemed to lead principals toward the realization that, indeed, gender does matter. To examine this third type of discourse, I have divided this chapter into three sections, outlining what the women said and what the men said, followed by comments made around gendering leadership. I separated the women’s responses from the men’s responses only because in the previous chapters, discourses of male and female principal leadership were separated, and it also made sense in terms of organizational purposes.

What the Women Said

From the very beginning of our conversation, Emma made it very clear that she did not think that gender was linked to leadership. In the passage below, Emma responds to my question about whether or not she believes one’s gender affects one’s leadership style.

For me it’s not about gender. It’s about who is the right leader for the right building, because there are certain buildings that I don’t feel that I am the right suit for and that it would be very challenging for me to manage some of the things that go on. Whether that’s because I’m a female, because of the neighbourhood and how certain cultures do respect females, whether it’s what’s actually going on in the building and whether I have the skills to manage some of that, um, I just, you know, I have surrounded myself with administrators who I respect and aspire to be like so I would say that I would equally pick men and women. Do… I think that the role used to only be for men, absolutely. I think that a lot of principals became teachers to become principals.

In her response, Emma makes reference to the suitability of a principal for a particular school, commenting that it has nothing to do with gender. Directly following this statement, however, Emma seems unsure about what determines one’s suitability to lead a school. She makes reference to her gender initially and links her gender to parental expectations or attitudes toward female administrators. Emma then makes reference to her skill set, wondering if she would have the requisite skills to lead certain schools, then returns to her assertion that she would equally pick men or women to do the job. At the very end of her answer, Emma concedes that in fact the
role of principal was initially designed for men. She appears to have competing views here, on the one hand stating that gender is not relevant, and then making it a central issue surrounding the placement of principals at particular schools. This suggests that perhaps principals are really unsure as to the extent to which their gender affects the work they do. They do not want it to matter at all, but then seem to concede that it does.

When I asked Lucy if she had ever heard anyone express preference around wanting to work for a man or a woman, she stated,

> From what I understand, staff is more concerned about having a principal who will work with them and will listen to them more than the gender, is what I, like, that’s my own personal experience. Someone else might be different and I might just have been lucky, you know, in the schools that I have worked in. Um, it, it’s more really about the skill set than the gender issue.

Lucy is very clear in her assertion that leadership is not related to gender, but one’s skill set. She comments that people want a principal who will listen to and work with them more than they care about the principal’s gender. It is interesting to note that Lucy also comments that perhaps she had been “lucky” in the schools in which she had worked. Her suggestion that she has been lucky opens the door to the suggestion that perhaps one’s gender does actually matter. By using that word, Lucy suggests that she is fortunate to not have experienced any negative comments in relation to her gender and her role as principal and acknowledges that others may in fact have experienced this.

Monica was adamant that gender is not at all a factor in the way principals lead. She had a great deal to say about the issue after I asked her about whether she had ever heard staff indicate a preference for working with men or women. She began by making the following statement:
Um, that is an interesting question. It really depends on the individual, but somehow, I do think that it’s not because of gender. It is more because of the personality and how people develop their leadership style… I think it has a lot to do with what the person has gone through and I think their personality, um, the emotional state of that person has a lot to do with their leadership style, not gender.

Here, Monica makes a direct link between one’s emotional state and personality and leadership style. She does not think that it has anything to do with gender. It is interesting, however, that Monica brings in emotional state as a determining factor of leadership style. Monica continued to state that one’s gender is not related to how one leads as she went on:

Again, I don’t think it’s a gender-based issue. I think again, it is because you know about the person, ok, and it happened to be a male or maybe it happened to be a female, but again, I am looking at the person, human resource, like his personality, his skill or hers. It’s not gender-based. Again, I see, how does that person fit into the big picture? I never make a decision based on gender, but based on the competency, um, maybe some of their assignments, you really need to know how to work with people ok, and whether that person is willing to give more time to help colleagues. So, some assignments require you to, a person to be doing this and then for some, even particularly if it’s a chair person position, you really have to look at whether that person can fit into the big scheme of your whole school organization and move your school forward because you do need the help. You have to look for people who can do it, so it has nothing to do with gender.

In this passage, Monica is quite adamant that gender and leadership style are not related. In fact, she states it three times in this one passage. She supports her claim by stating that she does not make decisions based upon gender, particularly when it comes to hiring teacher leaders within the school. Later in our conversation, I shared with Monica the fact that when I arrived at my school, staff indicated that they were so happy I was a man. She had this to say in reference to these comments:

I think, you know what, going back to what I shared with you before, I don’t think it’s a gender issue, it’s your personality, ok? It is how you deal with people. In your case, maybe your previous principal used to be a female, maybe this staff had a very bad experience with her as a female principal alright, or maybe the year before her was another female principal, so I think a lot [has] to do with the experiences of that group of staff. Now when a male comes in, already, no matter what, if there’s a change they are kind of… they are looking for a change. It is a good change, positively speaking, plus on top, if you have the personality, that leadership style that really, like, aligns with what
they have been longing for, I think that is the reason why. I don’t think it’s because of gender. I think it is because of a lot of factors affecting their understanding or their perception of a female administrator. Just like me, like the previous one I had is the male, and in the beginning, a few of them feel that, like, even before I came, they see whether I can be stopped from coming [to the school] but after I was here for a year… Actually, interestingly, I remember the first day when I [had] the staff meeting here in June, when I was transferred over here. Two staff members, female staff members, came to me and said, “We are so happy you are here.” And so again, it depends on how they look, different staff have different perspectives. They are longing for some kind of change, ok? Some of them, even before I came, they wish[ed] that I [could] be stopped from coming, so again, I think it has nothing to do with the staff. They have their own perception, their own experience, whether it is a positive or negative experience, and coupled with when you went into that position, what do you offer, and I think that is more like the factor that I will look at instead of gender-based.

Monica begins by again reiterating her belief that gender has nothing to do with leadership, but rather personality and “how you deal with people.” She then goes on to explain why she feels the staff responded to me in the way they did. Monica believes that this staff had a very bad experience with the previous female principal and that they were wanting a change. The change came in the form of a male principal. Monica feels that I just happened to have the leadership qualities that the staff were hoping for, and again states that it was not because of my gender. At this point in our conversation, I was not altogether convinced of Monica’s argument, and I wonder if Monica sensed this because she began to make a case for her position.

Monica makes reference to a situation she experienced when she first arrived at her school. A small group of teachers on her staff tried to stop her from coming to the school by attempting to convince parents that she was not a good principal for their school. She states that this was because they had some sort of perception of her as a leader and did not want that kind of leadership at the school. Monica points out, however, that two teachers came to her after her first staff meeting and expressed gratitude that she had arrived at the school. For Monica, the issue is people’s differing perceptions and experiences. If, for example, teachers have had a bad experience with a female principal, they may welcome the change that comes with a male
principal. This argument does not particularly remove gender from the equation, although here it is obvious that Monica feels it does. The principal for whom Monica took over was a very well-liked male principal. Monica had commented earlier in our conversation that the staff liked working with him. Monica makes the point that it was her leadership style or personality that may have caused teachers to want to try and stop her from coming to the school. Monica takes issue with the comments around her leadership style, rather than recognizing gender as an explanation for the teachers’ preference for working with the previous, male, principal.

Monica rejects the notion that people might prefer working for a man rather than a woman, or vice versa, and believes that if staff do state a preference, it has more to do with the leader’s style and personality. Sahar agreed with Monica initially in our conversation, but then quickly gendered principalship in almost the same breath:

I don’t, I think it has nothing to do… I don’t think it has to do with gender. I think it has to do with personality. So, whether you are male or female, like, I… you know people will say that I am a strong alpha female kind of individual and that the leadership style that I have. It has nothing to do with being… it’s not the gender. Philosophically, I don’t believe that. I have seen strong male leaders, strong female. I have seen equally, you know, ineffective male leaders and female, so to me I don’t think it has to do with that.

Like Monica, Sahar is quite adamant that leadership has nothing to do with gender. However, immediately following this statement, Sahar genders her leadership style by describing it as one belonging to an alpha female. In a previous chapter, I noted that, in doing this, Sahar takes on a very masculine notion of leadership, presenting herself as a strong leader. In this excerpt, Sahar then goes on to say that she has seen equally effective and ineffective male and female principals. Clearly, for Sahar, one’s effectiveness as a leader has nothing to do with gender and both male and female principals can be strong. Later in our conversation, Sahar made the following comment:
I wish it was more based on you as an individual, as the person, and not, not the culture, not the race, not the sexual orientation, not the gender, but on your worth, what you’ve done… Um, but I guess the thing is that having just, talking to you right now, I mean, we always talk about you don’t judge a book by the cover, but that’s initially in many situations what happens. I don’t know if it’s human nature, but that’s what we do.

In this statement, Sahar appears to concede that, at times, judgments might be made about a principal based upon their gender, or at least due to how their gender gets portrayed. She says she wishes that this were not the case and that she feels that one’s “worth” is actually more important than anything else such as gender, sexual orientation, race, or culture. There appeared to be a strong desire amongst the female principals that they be judged by their worth as principals, for their skills and leadership abilities. Some held to this belief and did not waiver from it. However, here Sahar concedes that perhaps gender comes into play even though it shouldn’t. There remains an elephant in the room, as it were, and a recognition that one’s gender appears to come into play as principals carry out their duties. I have illustrated in the previous chapters how gendered discourses arose during my conversations with both male and female principals. The extent to which principals recognized the manner in which their gender was connected to their leadership differed from principal to principal, as this related more directly to the extent to which each principal had found agency (a topic discussed in the following chapter).

At first, most of the female principals denied that gender had anything to do with their leadership. It was only later that they conceded this point (with the exception of Monica), by re-inscribing or giving examples of the hegemony at work within their daily work lives as principals. Sahar’s comments above are important to note because she actually references “judging a book by its cover” when stating that, as human beings, people tend to judge principals based on gender as well as other categories. This is significant because Sahar essentially states that one’s gender matters and has an effect on the way a principal leads his/her school. It is also
worth mentioning here that Sahar uses the words “just talking to you right now,” which indicates that, during our conversation, Sahar was creating meaning on the spot. This is a perfect example of situated meaning (Gee, 2011), where the subject creates meaning through the discourse. Here, she is beginning to see how judging principals against the gender binary is problematic, indicating that our conversation has engaged some thinking around this issue.

The assertion that gender has nothing to do with leadership is a clear attempt at denial, or at explaining the gender factor away, which is akin to the postfeminist approach, in that it is a denial of the power structures and hegemony that work to relegate women to traditional roles. This denial becomes muddied, however, when discourses of gender and leadership are revealed. The muddying of this denial is important because it indicates a reluctance and discomfort with gendered discourses around leadership, as well as a recognition that gender does in fact matter when it comes to leadership. The work of Foucault suggests that in order to alter the dominant discourse, one needs to disrupt it. This is precisely what is happening here, as the principals move from a position of denial to the realization that gender does in fact matter when it comes to their leadership. In these moments, the principals create situated meanings in which gendered discourses of leadership disrupt their thinking. This requires further exploration. However, it is important to hear what the male principals had to say in order to get a more fulsome understanding of the interaction between gendered discourses and principal leadership.

**What the Men Said**

In general, the male principals tended to agree with the female principals in terms of their assertion that leadership is not about gender, but about skills. However, even though this assertion was made, there appeared to be conflicting views with which principals seemed to
grapple. Fred’s comment in response to my question about whether men and women lead differently is a good example of this conflict.

I don’t want to make generalizations, you know. I don’t think it does. The thing, it’s like, I have worked with as a teacher, I have worked with women in leadership roles as principals and I have found their leadership style is a little different than male leadership styles. I don’t know if it’s, if it’s something that has to do with, um, uh how we’ve been trained um, I don’t know if trained is the right word, but, how we’ve been taught over time what to be and how to be as a man or as a woman and what your place is, type of thing. It could be that. I found that women try to be more assertive and I don’t know if it’s because male, in terms of males we’ve had it, historically, we’ve had power so that we are actually ones who, you know, we feel comfortable with being in the role of power maybe versus female. Maybe that’s why I find women, they try to overcompensate for this. Personally, I feel it shouldn’t be any, it shouldn’t be any of that. It should be, um, about learning to be a really good leader, period. But that’s just me and my ideals and you know, I say this because there is also the other dimension I look at because I think about this from time to time about, over time about me being a person of colour. In that, you know, I am different than a person, like, say, for example, you being a white male uh, or all my other colleagues are white males and how they perceive and how they perceive leadership and leadership to them, how it came to them and how they take on the leadership role in that I spend a lot of time thinking about the actual um, skills that leaders have. You know, and I spend a lot of time researching my own leadership, looking at historical figures even um, reading about good leadership styles um, good leadership, uh skills, strategies and that sort of stuff, so that’s the way I look at it.

Fred begins by saying that he does not want to make generalizations, but that he does not think that men and women lead differently. After having said this, however, Fred goes on to describe how men and women in fact do lead in different ways. He links these differences to ways men and women are “trained” to behave in certain ways. Fred acknowledges that men have traditionally held positions of power in society, but then follows this with a comment around how women need to overcompensate when taking on traditional male roles. In excerpts provided in other chapters, Fred’s comments suggested a very hegemonic notion of what it means to be a man or a woman. In this case, however, Fred backs away from this point, stating that “there should be none of that,” referring to the fact that women feel they need to overcompensate. He then goes on to say that it should be about learning how to be a really good leader. Fred states
that he has researched and thought a great deal about good leadership. In particular, he refers to the skills that good leaders have.

Fred moves through a series of differing opinions in a matter of moments, moving from a denial that men and women lead differently, to an admission that they in fact do, and finally stating that none of this should matter, only leadership skills. Fred rejects gendered discourses. However, the rejection is weakened by his assertions that gender does in fact come into play. I suggest that unlike the female principals discussed above, Fred does not come to a realization that gender matters, but rather states it outright. He says that it shouldn’t matter, but it actually does. Fred’s denial of the link between gender and leadership is compromised by his assertion of hegemony almost within the same breath. The extent to which Fred is aware of this is not known, however, it is still significant that Fred states that gender does not matter only to refute that statement later in the same conversation. This ambiguity is important because it points toward a disruption of the discourse yet again. Fred begins his statement by saying that he does not want to make generalizations, and then he does just that. This suggests that there is some awareness around the fact that making generalizations about men and women is wrong, but it does not prevent him from doing it. I observed a similar ambiguity in George’s comments when talking with him about how he was perceived as a new principal at his school.

Researcher: So, the parents appreciate the fact that you have an open-door policy?

George: Yeah, I think it’s my personality. I don't know if it’s a gender kind of thing, I think that the previous principal had a different way of running things.

Researcher: Did they specifically say anything to you that made it about gender… “we are glad you are a man”?

George: I mean I heard that, I have heard that, not directly that quote, but I don’t know if that was said because of the style. If I had the same style as the previous principal I don’t know they would have said that, but because I had a different style they kind of made the connection or they made the jump that it’s because I am a man that that style is fitting for
a man. But mind you, they have never had a male leader principal at that school, so a lot of the staff who has been there for 25 years, um, actually I shouldn't say that, for about 15 years, there was a previous principal, the first principal was a male, but then after that it has always been females, so most of the staff have worked with female administrators.

Like some of the female principals, George refers to his personality rather than his gender at first when describing the reaction of parents to his open-door policy. In a similar fashion, George then turns to gender as a determining factor, ensuring that it is understood that his style of leading is quite different than that of the previous principal. He admits to hearing comments around the preference for working with a male principal, but initially attributes this preference to his style of leadership. Later in the statement, however, George recalls that there have not been many male principals at his school, suggesting that perhaps having him as a male principal has provided some sort of relief. Again, there is a great deal of ambiguity around this issue, in that George seems to have both a willingness and unwillingness to make the link between gender and leadership, and yet the link appears present within the comments made. George’s assertion that gender does not matter is weakened when he comments about the fact that, before him, his school had not had a male principal in over 15 years, suggesting that it was time for a change.

Khalid did not appear to be quite as conflicted as Fred and George, and clearly stated that he did not believe that men and women lead differently.

Um… yeah hm. Yeah, it’s a bit loaded, you know. I think people’s styles are different depending on who they are truthfully, you know, do men make different leaders than women leaders? Well, I have served with two female principals and um, yeah I would say no, truthfully. I would say they had the same, you know, principles that they were prepared to, you know, um, fight and die on, and others that they were willing to let go and I found that similar to um, men as well too. Yeah, I, yeah, I found, you know, female principals that I’ve worked with have all been strong principals as well too, right.

Khalid’s comments are very interesting. He does not believe that leadership has anything to do with gender, and states that male and female principals do not lead differently – I suggest, as long as female principals continue to lead like men. Khalid references two female principals he
worked for, and comments that they were strong leaders, willing to die on some hills and let others go. I showed in Chapter 4 that references made to strong leaders are problematic for female principals as they are then expected to lead as men do. In this case, Khalid calls upon this reference when making the point that gender and leadership are not linked and unknowingly makes the very connection he refutes.

Michael took a different approach to this question. He focused on the act of leading as having more to do with one’s approach than one’s gender identification.

I don’t know if it can be attributed to gender as opposed to individual leadership style. I think that um, you know, when I am dealing with a situation um, I would like to think all administrators do this, they try to get at various points of view before coming to a decision rather than making a summary decision. So, whether it’s something that impacts teaching and learning within the school, whether it is something that impacts a discipline situation with staff or student, um, or whether it’s a community parent situation, you would not think that people would gather input from both males and females. Um, people in different positions with different perspectives to give you the best possible data to make an informed decision, and whether or not that is a male or female trait, I don’t know, umm I think that that’s just good decision making.

Michael attributes good leadership with good decision making and separates it out from any gendered perspective. I asked him to clarify his thoughts and he responded with a lengthy description of different types of leadership without linking it to gender, until the very end of his statement when he said, “Um, so again it’s, I don’t think, so the gender question is a good one because I think, you know, based on the facial kind of evidence people often think there’s a link and there could well be, but I think it’s a complicated question.” In this final statement, Michael seems to make reference to gender as something visible using the phrase, “facial kind of evidence.” He alludes to the notion that perhaps when people come across a male or female leader they may make certain assumptions based on the gender they portray visibly. This is similar to what Sahar mentioned about judging a book by its cover, making assumptions about how someone might lead based on how the person presents their gendered identity. In a sense,
Michael presents the same question that I have with respect to leadership: does gender matter? Michael is unsure, first presenting a case for considering what good leadership may look like, and in the end, conceding that perhaps gender comes into play. Once again, it is clear how the principals are reluctant to make any connection between leadership and gender. Michael recognizes the complexity of the issue saying, “it’s a complicated question,” when referring to whether or not people link gender to leadership. Like many of the principals to whom I spoke, Michael’s initial response is to deny the connection. However, in this and in previous chapters, the narratives illustrate that the principals either knowingly or unknowingly end up gendering leadership.

One of the interesting aspects of this particular finding around denial amongst the participants in the study is that the denial was exhibited by both male and female participants. In previous chapters, discourses of male and female principal leadership are separated out in order to make sense of the discourses as they emerged throughout our conversations. In this particular case, I found that both men and women denied the notion that gender matters only to confirm in fact that it does. What is most interesting is that taking a look at the language used by both men and women at the moments when they deny results in the observation that there actually are differences in the way they do this. Denial among the male participants appears as somewhat tentative, whereas denial among the female participants is more matter of fact. For example, Michael begins with “I don’t know if it can be attributed to gender as opposed to leadership style,” whereas Emma begins with, “For me it’s not about gender…” In fact, looking at all of the responses, there exists a pattern of hesitation amongst men and a more forthright response from women. The question now is: why is this the case? Monica, for example, is absolutely convinced that gender does not matter. Sahar, on the other hand, comments that she wishes gender did not
matter, only to admit later that it does. In the previous chapters, I have shown that women certainly struggle as leaders, as the role of principal continues to be defined within a masculine paradigm. It is also interesting to note that the men and women do not differ in terms of the recognition that gender in fact does affect their leadership. The way they describe this is quite different, however hegemony seems to prevail even when attempts are made to deny its presence. This process of denial and recognition is complex and uncomfortable. One wonders if the denial is the result of having found agency, as hegemony is denied and attempts are made to disrupt the discourses. Or is the denial futile, as hegemony appears to prevail and is recognized by the participants as playing a role? What is clear is that this denial is disrupted as the gendered discourses come into play. In moments throughout our conversations, principals found themselves, on the one hand, denying that gender matters and, on the other, gendering their leadership. These are moments when the postfeminist approach to gender and leadership is taken by some principals as problematic, largely because it does not address the problem of hegemony. One might deny its existence, and yet, it remains. This disruption arrives for some as a realization that gender matters, and thus it opens the door to a disruption of the discourse. These are moments in which situated meanings are created through discourse. The following section will investigate these moments further.

Gendering Leadership is Uncomfortable

One of the most interesting and significant aspects of this research was the fact that the principals with whom I spoke had competing views around the issue of gender and leadership. In fact, some principals would make one statement early on in our conversation and then make a reference to something completely different later in the conversation, drawing upon completely different discourses. One example of this can be seen in the case of Sahar, where she adamantly
states that gender does not matter and later states that perhaps gender does come into play. As well, Michael talked about good and effective leadership and then later stated that indeed gender may be a factor to consider.

When gender is factored into the picture, it causes upset amongst the norms of educational leadership. It is uncomfortable as principals seem to feel it is wrong or unjust to consider gender when discussing educational leadership. As was mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, the issue of gender is not often considered when looking at principal leadership. I discussed how, in the work of Fullan (2014), for example, the focus is largely on the skills and attributes that make an effective and responsive principal. Rachel expressed her discomfort when I asked her if there was anything else she wanted to add.

Being a female… yeah, I just found that the female staff were pretty comfortable coming in and seeing me when they had issues. I don’t know if a male would be as sympathetic if they started talking about a kid being sick and stuff, but maybe they would. They are hard questions, Ken.

Researcher: Why?

Rachel: I don’t know, because I don’t think I have ever thought about it.

This was Rachel’s final comment during our conversation and it is clear that she was somewhat bothered by the questions I had been asking. In fact, I could see the bother in her facial expressions as she said these words. Again, this issue of gender and leadership emerged as a new idea for her within our conversation, causing some discomfort for Rachel. In this statement, she states that female staff were comfortable coming to her as a female to discuss their issues, then goes on to state that a male administrator may not be as sympathetic, but that perhaps they would be. Rachel is clearly going back and forth between differing views, unsure as to what position to take, finally admitting that it is hard to respond to these questions as she has never thought about these issues before. This is important to note because it is likely that most principals to whom I
spoke had not been asked to consider if their gender impacts their leadership style. Thinking about this issue on the spot was difficult at times for the participants, especially since these issues may not have been considered in the past. However, such moments are exciting because they point to the fact that, in these moments, we are making meaning, situated meaning in which some ideas are privileged and connections are made. The resulting confusion and contradictions are understandable given that these principals were not being asked to comment on a subject with which they necessarily had familiarity. Meaning making is uncomfortable sometimes because it forces us to look at our ideas and wonder if they still hold true. Had I asked them about school improvement, I am sure the responses would have been somewhat more polished and well thought out, as this is an area where most principals thrive. There was a similar discomfort evident when I talked with Khalid. In a few of his responses to the questions, he began by making statements such as, “Another loaded question, it’s good, it’s interesting,” or “Well that’s an interesting question, Ken.” At a few points in our conversation, Khalid also wondered if he had answered the question, saying “I don’t know, I don’t know why, I haven’t really answered your question.” It is clear that Khalid felt somewhat put on the spot, and this also suggests that he might have been wondering if he was saying the right thing. Regardless of the reason, it is clear that these questions caused some discomfort.

In order to understand this discomfort, I again turn to the work of Bourdieu, specifically his notion of symbolic violence. Schubert (2014) made a link between symbolic violence and suffering, stating, “According to Bourdieu, contemporary social hierarchies and social inequality, as well as the suffering that they cause, are produced and maintained less by physical force than by forms of symbolic domination. He refers to the results of such domination as symbolic violence” (p. 179; emphasis original). Here, it is suggested that forms of symbolic domination
cause suffering amongst those being dominated and that the result of such domination is symbolic violence. This violence is internalized and it can be seen emerging within the conversations as the participants feel the effects of this violence. The resulting reaction to the internalization of this violence is denial. The principals do not want to acknowledge that their gender matters because to make this acknowledgement is to recognize and face the dominance at play in their role as principals. Bourdieu (2001) made reference to emotions revealed by the dominated in moments when the relationship between the dominant and dominated is recognized. As he described, these are

The practical acts of knowledge and recognition of the magical frontier between the dominant and the dominated that are triggered by the magic of symbolic power and through which the dominated, often unwittingly, sometimes unwillingly, contribute to their own domination by tacitly accepting the limits imposed, often take the form of bodily emotions – shame, humiliation, timidity, anxiety, guilt – or passions and sentiments – love, admiration, respect. These emotions are all the more powerful when they are betrayed in visible manifestations such as blushing, stuttering, clumsiness, trembling, anger or impotent rage, so many ways of submitting, even despite oneself and “against the grain” [à son corps défendant], to the dominant judgement, sometimes in internal conflict and division of the self, of experiencing the insidious complicity that a body slipping from the control of consciousness and will maintain with the censures inherent in the social structures. (pp. 38–39; emphasis original)

In this passage, Bourdieu makes reference to the kind of suffering that occurs as a result of the magic of symbolic power (Schubert, 2014). Bourdieu does not use the word suffering in this particular passage, however he refers to bodily emotions, passions, and sentiments. These emotional responses are linked to moments when the dominated accept the limits imposed on them. He remarks that these emotions become even more powerful when they are betrayed in “visible manifestations,” such as blushing, anxiety, and so on. I am not suggesting that the principals to whom I spoke experienced such a response. However, I am linking Bourdieu’s (2001) notion of suffering as a response to symbolic violence to the discomfort felt by the principals during our conversations. Schubert (2014) stated that, although symbolic violence may
not be as hurtful as physical violence, it is no less real. As he said, “Symbolic violence may in some ways be ‘gentler’ than physical violence, but it is no less real. Suffering results from both forms of violence. The social origins of this suffering are often misrecognized and internalized by members of society, a fact which only serves to exacerbate suffering and perpetuate symbolic systems of domination” (Schubert, 2014, p. 180). In the case of the principals, the misrecognition and internalization of this suffering lead to the continued production of an understanding and belief that leading as a principal is about personality and skill, which takes the form of denial. What one does with this suffering becomes critical in determining whether the hegemony/domination is perpetuated or resisted. Once some of the principals began to consider that their gender impacts their leadership, they expressed their discomfort, their suffering. It is interesting to note Bourdieu’s (2001) reference to this suffering as happening in moments when the dominated recognize their own domination. There were moments in our conversations when some principals seemed to recognize that gender indeed affects the way they lead, and in some cases, this realization revealed their suffering.

The discourse analysis conducted in this study overwhelmingly reveals that gender, and the manner in which it is perceived, indeed impacts elementary principal leadership. Most importantly, however, is the extent to which the participants in the study realized this. I take the position that through our interaction, conversation, and story-telling, principals began to make connections between the way they lead and their gender. For example, Sahar had initially denied that gender had anything to do with leadership, and then later in our conversation, she stated that female principals feel that they need to prove themselves while on the job. She began her statement with, “I will be honest with you, at the other school where I was VP, we had to prove ourselves….” It is interesting that Sahar says that she will be honest with me, suggesting that she
feels strongly about this statement as it is a clear admission that, indeed, gender does matter. She said she had also felt that she had to prove herself as a leader and later commented that the male principal currently at the same school did not have to do the same. There was a reluctance when Sahar made this admission. It came in the same way reluctance creeps up on us when we first make a realization that things are not always the way they seem to be. For Sahar, it appeared as an admission of being subject to hegemonic masculinity. Some of the female principals described situations when they had felt pressure to act or be a certain way as women. Emma commented on this pressure, stating, “And some of that is the pressure that I feel and I think that’s some of the pressure that I put on myself because I think that as a woman, I feel that I need to make (pause), I need to have everybody like me and I need to make sure that everybody is ok, and so I have had to learn as I go through this role those difficult conversations…” Emma expresses her suffering here as a form of pressure to behave in a certain way. Her expression of this pressure becomes a realization for her as well, as she states that she also puts pressure on herself to make sure that everyone is ok and that everyone likes her. It is important, however, not to confuse this realization as a form of agency. Bourdieu (2001) wrote, “When the dominated apply to what dominates them schemes that are the product of domination, or, to put it another way, when their thoughts and perceptions are structured in accordance with the very structures of the relation of domination that is imposed on them, their acts of cognition are, inevitably, acts of recognition, submission” (p. 13; emphasis original). To merely recognize the presence of masculine domination in any given situation is not to resist it, but is yet another form of submission. Emma had put pressure on herself to meet the expected traits of a female principal. She had recognized that these pressures existed for her, and in doing so, submitted to this
dominance. This recognition was not without suffering, as Emma struggled to meet the expectations laid out for her by others as well as herself.

This pressure or suffering through submission to masculine domination through symbolic violence was felt by some principals to whom I spoke. Bourdieu (2001) wrote of how women are kept within a state of insecurity: “Masculine domination, which constitutes women as symbolic objects to whose being (esse) is a being-perceived (percipi), has the effect of keeping them in a permanent state of bodily insecurity, or more precisely of symbolic dependence” (p. 66; emphasis original). The manner in which women are perceived and constituted within masculine domination causes women to exist within a state of insecurity, symbolically dependent upon that which dominates them. I suggest that this insecurity manifests itself as a kind of suffering or discomfort amongst principals. An example of this suffering can be observed in Alina’s comments about whether or not she felt she was meeting people’s expectations of her: “You know what, I think people want me to be harsher…um, but I find it difficult to be harsher… but I don’t know if that touch, you know, beat-you-down kind of principals works either. They are doing out of fear.” Here, Alina is responding to the expectation that she take on the seemingly masculine trait of harshness as being difficult to navigate. She expresses her feeling that taking that kind of approach is akin to leading with fear. This suffering is not felt only by women, as there are times when men are expected to adhere to expectations around what it means to be a man. As Bourdieu (2001) wrote, “Male privilege is also a trap, and it has its negative side in the permanent tension and contention, sometimes verging in the absurd, imposed on every man by the duty to assert his manliness in all circumstances” (p. 50). Even though men maintain dominance over women, they too are subject to the expectations of masculine domination. This imposed duty to maintain one’s manliness becomes a site of permanent tension, pressure, and
pain. George spoke of having to walk into volatile situations with students and expressed his 
discomfort with the expectation that as a man, he should be able to handle the situation: “I was 
the token male on staff to go and so I had to go, right, and you had to deal with the situation.” 
Here, George describes moments when masculine domination works on men as well, especially 
in situations where they are expected to perform their duties as men, such as by dealing with 
volatile situations. Fred made a similar comment when he described a situation where a parent 
questioned his manhood: “I felt hurt… you know, nothing about my manhood…” These 
reactions from male principals are not so different than those of the female principals. In fact, 
suffering is expressed quite clearly by these two men, as George is forced to enter a situation he 
would rather avoid and Fred’s manliness gets questioned. These moments of suffering are born 
out of the realization that they too are subject to certain expectations. As pointed out by Schubert 
(2014), this suffering is very real and is present even within the most mundane of moments. In 
the following passage, he makes reference to Bourdieu’s example of the use of the fork as a kind 
of symbolic violence regulating social class.

Once again, it is important to remember that though the symbolic violence that 
characterizes late capitalist societies is indeed in some ways “gentler” than other forms of 
violence, its manifestations in terms of the ways in which people suffer are many and can 
be severe. We can see the gentle in things as mundane as the ostracization that comes as 
members of different social classes chew their food and maintain their posture differently 
during meals. We can see the severe and the brutal by looking at differing morbidity and 
mortality rates for different categories of agents. The violence is symbolic, but the 
suffering and the reproduction of class hierarchies that results are very real. (p. 188)

Schubert makes clear that we cannot trivialize the suffering that comes as a result of symbolic 
vioence. He points toward moments when it appears as both gentle and severe to illustrate the 
point that, regardless of its severity, it is no less real than other forms of violence. This is an 
important point because it legitimizes the suffering felt by these principals as a result of the
manner in which they are regulated by perceptions of their gendered selves. I am not talking here about severe forms of violence, but rather gentler forms as they work upon the principal. The suffering is real, however, and is clearly a result of the violence that plays upon the principal in very discreet and sometimes mundane ways. The recognition and revelation of this suffering is important because, as I have shown, its recognition has the potential to lead toward resistance.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I have discussed how, amongst both male and female principals, there was a reluctance to state or believe that gender has anything to do with leadership. Most of the participants made reference to skills and personality as determining factors of leadership style, and did not reference gender at all. It was noted that both female and male principals resisted the idea that gender has anything to do with leadership, but in different ways. The women were more adamant in their resistance, while the men were more cautious, perhaps because women have more to lose in terms of the intersection of gender and leadership. The discomfort around recognizing gender as a factor that affects leadership revealed a certain amount of suffering on the part of some principals, as they began to realize that in fact gender does matter. It is important to note that this suffering only arrives as a result of recognition after first being thwarted by denial. Through our dialogue about gender and leadership, some principals began to recognize the presence of hegemony within their working lives and began to express how they struggled with its effects on their leadership as principals. I have traced how the principals moved through discourses of denial, followed by recognition and suffering, and now the question of what comes next arises. In the following chapter, I turn to resistance and agency as a way forward.
Chapter 8: Agency and Resistance

Overview

This chapter explores the possibilities that arise with the recognition that gender does indeed matter when it comes to leadership. I will show how this recognition becomes a means of exposing hegemonic discourses using the work of Foucault (1977, 1978). Butler’s (1990) notion of gender identity as performative reveals the manner in which principals performed their gender identity during our conversations. This passage from denial to recognition led some principals toward discovering what Butler (1990) refers to as “agency,” moments at which the dominant discourse is recognized, challenged, and resisted. This chapter also explores my own agency as it pertains to my own experiences and my motivation to engage in this study.

The Discourses are Exposed

In the previous chapter, the suffering and discomfort revealed by some principals was discussed as being a part of the process by which these principals realized that their gender has an impact on their leadership. This realization became problematic for some, hence the discomfort. Their initial reaction to this problem was to deny its existence; however, as the discourse evolved, new discourses emerged and were exposed. As revealed in the work of Foucault, it is precisely at these moments of discomfort when discourses are exposed, altered, changed, and reimagined. I suggest that the gendering of leadership that occurred during my conversations with principals in this study provides an opportunity to reimagine the discourses at play in the day to day lives of principals. This gendering also perhaps introduced new discourses that exist within principalship, producing the resulting discomfort. As Foucault (1977) said, “Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it,
renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (p. 101). As I have shown, my conversations with principals revealed some rather limiting notions around what it means to lead as a man or a woman. Whether they realized it or not, some principals revealed the various ways they had both themselves been regulated and the manner in which they had regulated others in terms of gender. There also appeared a difference in how male and female principals indicated that gender does in fact matter. For the women, it came as a realization after denying or explaining it away. For the men, it was presented as a reality that should not matter. This exposure of the discourses around gender and leadership is important, because, ultimately, it opens the door toward new discourses that can displace the old. The question becomes whether or not principals will decide to engage these new discourses.

Within the engagement of discourses, Foucault’s (1977) notion of governmentality can be seen at work as the principal is revealed as an “institution of power,” regulating bodies as an agent of the institution. Consideration of comments such as the following made by Fred uncovers how bodies can be regulated by the position a principal might take: “But they [women] also come with that um, part of who they are that men don’t have. Men and women are different. There is absolutely no, people can’t argue that any way for me, cuz that’s all I believe, men and women are different. They think differently and they um, feel differently and project these things differently.” Here, Fred is quite adamant about his opinion that men and women are different and says that no one is able to convince him otherwise. He exposes a very hegemonic discourse around gender and leadership and is adamant about its existence. Although the discourse is exposed, it is not challenged by Fred, as he actually goes on to describe women as nurturers, constructing, once again, a very limited notion of gender. His statement that “people can’t argue that any way for me, cuz that’s all I believe” speaks to the sheer power of governmentality, as
Fred has clearly regulated male and female bodies to their separate and defined roles, and cannot be convinced otherwise. Presenting principalship as an institution of power causes concern in this case as one can imagine the manner in which Fred’s assertion might inform his decision-making and action as one who wields power over others. Alternatively, this assertion can be viewed as a kind of performance of his gender identity. While Fred may be making this assertion with the knowledge that he in fact benefits from it as a man, he may also be supporting and promoting the hegemony as part of his performed gender identity.

**Gender as Performance**

In many cases, I observed moments when principals seemed to perform and construct their gender identity in a manner in keeping with Butler’s (1990) notion of gender as performative. Butler (1990) wrote that, “Significantly, if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief” (p. 141). I suggest that during our conversations, principals were performing their gender in a way that speaks of Butler’s notion of gender as a constructed identity. Each principal presented what they wanted the viewer to see and not necessarily their internal identity. One example of this was when Sahar and John referred respectively to themselves as alpha female and male. It is clear that within their leadership as principals, both present themselves as strong leaders, and, in their interviews, they both defined and ensured that this strength was understood and accepted through the use of the word alpha. The use of this word is significant as it ensures that the listener understands the speaker to be a strong leader. Maggie also alluded to constructed identities when she stated,

And I do think, you know, I still think even amongst female colleagues there is, there are still some women who believe that they have to be very strong and unattached to their
school emotionally because that is how, what a leader is seen to be and I do see colleagues that are like that. I don’t know if that is a natural expression of who they are or if they know that they think that they have to fulfill it.

Here Maggie describes her belief that women are expected to be strong and unattached to their school, and admits that this act, this construction, is not necessarily a true expression of who they are. This is an excellent example of Butler’s (1990) notion of a constructed identity or performative accomplishment. Maggie is unsure of whether it is a construction or a “natural expression of who they are,” but nevertheless, she suggests that it is entirely possible that female principals find themselves having to perform a certain gendered role in order to be seen to be leaders of their schools. Maggie’s lack of certainty around whether this expression is performed or natural points toward Butler’s (1990) understanding of how the performance becomes believable not only to the onlooker, but also to the actor doing the performing. The performance, being “internally discontinuous,” is perhaps not a true expression of the self, and yet is presented in such a way that it is entirely believable and accepted as true. Perhaps this is where the discomfort and suffering also lies for these principals, within a space where they feel the need to present a certain persona that is not in keeping with who they feel they really are. The fact that there is discomfort at all opens the door toward a disruption of the discourse, or what Butler (1990) refers to as agency.

**Agency and Resistance**

While I was engaged in conversation with these principals, discourses of gender and principal leadership were formulated, revealed, and produced through our dialogue. Similarly, moments of resistance and agency were also revealed. Foucault (1977) understood resistance to be very much a part of power, writing that,

> Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power…Their [power relationships]
existence depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support, or handle in power relations. These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network. Hence there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case; resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent; still others that are quick to compromise, interested, or sacrificial; by definition they can only exist in the strategic field of power relations. (pp. 95–96)

It is clear that, for Foucault, one need only look within the discourse and hence at power relations to find resistance. He describes these points of resistance as possible, necessary, and improbable, but also as spontaneous, savage, and solitary. These points appear when they are least expected, and not necessarily as by way of a mass revolt or revolution of some kind. They can appear at any time within a discourse as part of the way power relations work upon our bodies. Butler (1990) wrote of being “vested with agency” and said that agency is “usually figured as the capacity for reflexive mediation, that remains intact regardless of this cultural embeddedness. On such a model, ‘culture’ and ‘discourse’ mire the subject, but do not constitute that subject” (p. 143; emphasis original). Butler takes the notion of resistance further by stating that the subject, although mired by the discourse, is not defined by it, and that it is through the subject’s capacity for reflexive mediation that they will find agency. The capacity for agency lies with the subject, and so agency is possible even when the effects of discourses and power relations are endured. The subject may indeed have the capacity for reflexive mediation and by extension be vested with agency. However, I suggest that there must also be a willingness on the part of the subject to engage this agency. One may certainly be in possession of the capacity to do something without having the will to do it.

In this study, there were few moments when this capacity for agency appeared. The most striking of these moments was during my conversation with Maggie. She made a statement that
really encapsulated the problems revealed within this study. At the end of our conversation, Maggie and I were talking about moments when we feel ineffective as leaders. She had much to say, however the following section I believe is the moment when she resisted the discourses at play.

…certainly there have been moments where I have thought, “Boy I wish I were a man.” I do remember thinking that at times, right. Men will be able to do this so much easier, right, men would just say it, it would be well-received and we would move on. Whereas I feel like I still have to explain and dance around things more than a man would have to. And I do think, you know, I still think even amongst female colleagues there is, there are still some women who believe that they have to be very strong and unattached to their school emotionally because that is how, what a leader is seen to be, and I do see colleagues that are like that. I don’t know if that is a natural expression of who they are or if they know that they think that they have to fulfill it.

The moment at which Maggie actually wishes that she were a man so that she could lead her school as a man can be interpreted in two different ways. On the one hand, this can be seen as a moment when Maggie succumbs to masculine domination, admitting that men have the upper hand and that it would be so much easier to lead if she were a man. By wishing she were a man, Maggie rejects her femininity, and expresses a willingness to embrace the dominant masculine persona. However, it is what follows that points more directly toward a resistance of some kind. Maggie states that there are some female administrators who think that they have to be very strong and unattached to their school. She comments that she is unsure whether this is a natural expression of who they are, or if it is a set of traits that these women need to acquire or an expectation that they need to fulfill. I have already discussed how this statement reveals Butler’s (1990) understanding of gender as performative, however, in this moment, Maggie also brings into question the discourses at play in terms of leadership and gender. She wonders about whether these women are really naturally strong and unattached, or whether they are simply performing a role. She also points to other women and does not include herself amongst them,
thereby suggesting that perhaps she is resisting this particular set of expectations or expressions of leadership. She suggests that being strong and unattached are typically masculine traits, and in this way, confirms a very masculine discourse around leadership. However, Maggie does not seem to include herself within that discourse. She views it as if it were somewhere “out there.” She observes it in others and reflects on its existence, wondering if it is a natural expression or part of a performance. It is in this moment of reflexive mediation, I believe, that Maggie resists the discourse at play. She resists the fact that women feel they have to lead like men. She does not include herself amongst these women, suggesting that she has moved beyond this discourse. Her desire to be a man becomes a kind of resistance as well, as it indicates that she is aware that the discourse mires her, and it is within this realization that she is able to resist it.

What really sets Maggie’s comment that she wishes she were a man apart from other comments made by some of the other principals I interviewed is the fact that it is an admission that there is a problem here. In this moment, Maggie does not deny that men are dominant. The narratives show many of the principals denying that gender has anything to do with leadership at all. For example, Sahar denied it “philosophically”: “It has nothing to do with being… it’s not the gender, philosophically, I don’t believe that. I have seen strong male leaders, strong female, I have seen equally, you know, ineffective male leaders and female, so to me I don’t think it has to do with that.” Michael also denied any connection between gender and leadership, stating, “I don’t know if it can be attributed to gender as opposed to individual leadership style. I would like to think that um, you know, when I am dealing with a situation um, I would like to think that all administrators do this, they try to get at various points of view before coming to a decision rather than making a summary decision.” Sahar claimed that because there are both strong and ineffective male and female leaders, their gender has nothing to do with their leadership.
Michael, on the other hand, said he likes to think that all principals make decisions in the same manner, and hence gender does not matter at all. These denials are interesting because they indicate an unwillingness to admit, or a discomfort with the idea that gender matters when it comes to leadership. This is, in effect, a denial of masculine domination. Bourdieu (2001) commented on the fact that masculine domination does not require legitimization. He wrote, “The strength of the masculine order is seen in the fact that it dispenses with justification: the androcentric vision imposes itself as neutral and has no need to spell itself out in discourses aimed at legitimizing it” (p. 9). I argue that the principals’ denial is exactly as Bourdieu describes the way the masculine order dispenses with justification. The denial is a neutral position. It assumes that there exists an order to things, and hence gender is not a factor to consider. After all, Michael contends that all principals make decisions in the same manner. However, as I have shown, during the interviews most of these denials gave way to a kind of realization or revelation.

This thesis has also explored an additional form of agency/resistance that occurs when the female principals appear to invoke a postfeminist stance. This stance, understood primarily through the work of McRobbie (2000, 2004) and Ringrose (2013), takes the position that women have achieved equity with men, and, as a result, have the freedom to choose and be whatever they desire. The female principals reported using motherhood, for example, as a means of separating themselves apart from masculine ways of leading, but also to engage a leadership framework that would give them an edge over their male counterparts. The problem with this stance is that when this discourse of motherhood is unpacked, it reveals women relegating themselves to the essentialist notion that women alone are responsible for child rearing. While
the choice to engage motherhood within the discourse of gender and leadership appears, on the surface, to resist hegemonic masculinity, it truly only reinforces it.

I noted during my dialogue with the principals that the realization that gender does indeed matter was manifested through suffering. This suffering was apparent in Maggie most of all, in how she described how she was expected to lead her school. It is interesting to note that within Maggie’s comments are the best examples of resistance and agency. It is as if the suffering she feels as a result of her realization of hegemonic masculinity ultimately results in the beginnings of agency. I, too, can relate to this suffering. In fact, it was my concern around the way I was expected to lead my schools that prompted this study in the first place. This study has become, for me, a reflection and manifestation of my agency.

My story – My agency

I began this study telling the story of how I came to arrive at my current school and the way my gender entered into the equation. I was intrigued and at the same time concerned with the fact that it was my gender alone that made me the preferred candidate for this particular school. I wondered if my skills and abilities as a leader were also considered when the superintendent placed me at this school. When the school’s office administrator said, “Thank goodness you are a man,” I felt both relieved and confused. I was relieved to be the preferred principal for the school, but also confused, wondering if my reputation as a leader was somehow meaningless and that my most prominent and desired trait was the fact that I am male. I also felt a sense of dread and wondered how I was going to meet the expectations of this staff. Am I “man enough,” I wondered? At my previous school, my manliness had been brought into question by a parent who told me to “grow a pair and be a man.” When this happened, like in Fred’s case, I was hurt and angered. My first thought was, “How dare this person say such a thing to me! Who
is this person to question my manhood?” In that same year, during a particularly difficult day at work, another seasoned, male principal had come to my school to help me deal with some difficult situations with students. During one of our conversations, he said the following words, “Ken, you are one of the nicest people I have ever met, but I wonder, are you just too nice when dealing with these students?” Instantly, I felt as though I did not have the requisite skills to lead the school. I began to wonder if I was too feminine. Coupled with the fact that I am a gay man, this troubled me, as I already had this very large handicap with respect to my masculinity, from the heteronormative point of view. In that moment, my ability to lead and my manliness were brought into question, and I instantly felt pain. I realize now that this was the work of symbolic violence. I wondered if other principals had similar experiences to share, and I decided that I needed to find out. I needed some clarity around gender and leadership.

When I started talking with elementary principals, I was surprised that, for the most part, other principals had not thought of this issue before. However, our dialogue revealed a great deal about gendered discourses around leadership. When women spoke to me about the challenges they faced in leading their schools, particularly with respect to the expectations placed on them as female principals, I was not surprised. I found myself very sympathetic to their plight. Some of their comments caused me concern, and I wondered to what extent some of these women were aware of how they were complicit in their own domination. In these moments, I wanted to say, “Wait a minute! Don’t you think that is just wrong?” When talking with the male principals, I was very surprised when their comments were so blatantly sexist. There were many moments when I felt as though the men thought that I agreed with them, as if we belonged to some sort of club in which we all needed to band together as men and maintain our dominance over women. I realize now that these were moments when these men were themselves subject to symbolic
violence in feeling the need to maintain, prove, and express their manliness. At times, I felt anger, and a strong urge to refute these comments. It was in these moments, when these discourses were at play, that I felt a strong need to resist them and find ways to address them. This study became, for me, my own pathway through realization, suffering, and agency.

My analysis of discourses of both female and male elementary principal leadership is the result of my own reflexive mediation. This study is essentially my own personal resistance to the gendered discourses at play in elementary principalship. It confirmed for me that, indeed, gender does matter when it comes to the way we lead our schools as elementary principals. It highlighted the fact that these discourses are at work on principals other than myself in their daily work lives, and it was particularly interesting to observe how the principals to whom I spoke engaged in a process of denial followed by realization, which then, in some cases, resulted in reflection and resistance. This study highlights that gender matters when it comes to the way we lead our schools, not only in terms of the kinds of expectations others have of us as principals, but also in how we engage with these discourses. It matters whether we choose to deny their existence, accept them, reify them, or resist them.

If we deny the existence of these discourses and the fact that they work upon us as principals, we are either trying to uphold and maintain masculine domination within principalship, or we are simply blinding ourselves so as not to muddy the waters of principal leadership. The fact that most principals denied that gender has anything to do with leadership suggests that, as principals, we do not want to believe that our gender has anything to do with how we lead. Gender complicates leadership, as we have seen through this discussion of male and female discourses of principal leadership. If we accept this fact, we begin to feel the effects of masculine domination as it regulates us. At these moments, we feel pain, frustration, and even
anger. These moments are critical, as they present opportunities to resist the dominant discourses at play. If we allow ourselves to feel this pain and frustration, we may find ourselves thinking of ways to resist this domination. Principalship provides an opportunity for our resistance as leaders within our school system. If we consider the old adage, “What we permit, we promote,” we see that, as leaders, we must understand that our actions, decisions, and attitudes have an impact on our schools. If we as principals begin to ask questions about gender and people’s perceptions of us based on the manner in which we perform our gendered selves, we may find that we can disrupt dominant discourses and inspire new ones. In the following and final chapter, the implications of this research and the possibilities for further research will be discussed in order to understand its impact on current thinking around gender and principal leadership.

Summary

This chapter has explored how discourses are exposed and subsequently resisted through agency. I have discussed how the exposure of hegemonic discourses makes way for the creation of new discourses. However, new discourses are not created unless there is a willingness within the subject to do so. These are the moments when the subject can both resist the dominant discourse and find agency. Although there were few examples of principals who engaged in the reflexive mediation required to engage agency, it did indeed play out within Maggie’s comments. This study is also presented as a tangible result of my own agency at play. In fact, the study itself was born out of my own desire to resist dominant hegemonic notions of gender and how they relate to my own leadership as a principal. I have highlighted moments when I have felt the effects of symbolic violence in my work life, and attempts made to regulate me as a principal according to my perceived gender identity. Bringing all of these thoughts together
within this study has become my attempt to shed light on this issue, and hopefully it will also inspire others to take it up themselves.
Chapter 9: Summary, Discussion and Implications

Overview

In this final chapter, a summary of the study will be provided along with a discussion of the findings. One of the core questions raised in this study asked: which gendered discourses regulate and act upon the elementary school principal? Interviews with principals revealed both male and female discourses around principal leadership. I have shown that these discourses act upon principals in such a way that causes discomfort and pain, particularly for women. Principals had a difficult time admitting that gender had anything to do with the way they lead, and, as a result, they engaged in discourses around personality and skill. This denial, however, often led to a kind of revelation of sorts, when some principals began to recognize that their gender and discourses around gender impact their leadership. A few principals found moments when they resisted these discourses, questioning them and exploring the beginnings of agency. I position this study as a form of resistance as it enabled me to find and reflect upon my own agency. Finally, the implications of this study on current theories and further research will be discussed, positioning this work within the framework of current research in the area of principal leadership.

Summary of the Study

In the previous chapters, discourses around female and male principal leadership have been discussed as well as discourses around personality and skill with respect to leadership in schools. What is common amongst all of these discourses is the presence of disciplinary power and power relations. Foucault (1977) wrote about the “omnipresence of power: not because it has the privilege of consolidating everything under its invincible unity, but because it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to
another. Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from
everywhere” (p. 93). Foucault makes clear that power is not something that comes from “on
high,” but rather it gets produced and reproduced through day-to-day relations. It comes from
everywhere from one moment to the next. Discourse becomes an avenue through which power is
produced, transmitted, and maintained. This study has focused on gendered discourses that act
upon both female and male elementary principals. Connell (1987) set the stage for understanding
how hegemony and what he called “emphasized femininity” limit and further regulate women in
our society. He wrote, “It is the global subordination of women to men that provides an essential
basis for differentiation. One form is defined around compliance with this subordination and is
oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men. I will call this ‘emphasized
femininity’” (Connell, 1987, p. 185). For Connell, women are constantly in a state of being
subordinate to men and have no choice but to adhere to and comply with the desires and interests
of men. Bourdieu (2001) expressed a similar notion in his understanding of masculine
domination and how this domination is assured through “symbolic violence,” which he called “a
gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims, exerted for the most part through
the purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition, …. recognition, or even feeling”
(pp. 1–2). Here, Bourdieu presents masculine domination as something that permeates the social
order, working on its victims, both men and women, without them realizing it. I also made use of
Butler’s (1990) notion of performativity as a means of describing the ways both female and male
principals perform their gendered selves while in the role. As Butler (1990) wrote, “There is no
gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by
the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (p. 25). This conceptualization of gender as a
performance helps in seeing the manner in which gendered discourses are revealed and realized.
The dialogue that ensued as a result of the principal interviews revealed a number of gendered discourses that shed some light on the complex relationship between gender and leadership within elementary principalship.

In terms of discourses of female principal leadership, female principals were presented as strong, micromanaging bitches. Female leaders are given no choice but to engage with and utilize masculine notions of leadership, and, as a result, get labelled as micromanaging dragon ladies. Female principals are put in a bind, unable to lead as they are expected to lead without being labeled as bitches. In an attempt to formulate a more positive and successful leadership style, I discovered, the female principals engaged in a discourse around motherhood, linking their identities as mothers to their ability to lead their schools successfully. Even women who were not mothers made use of this discourse when describing their leadership style/approach. This discourse backfires on these women, however, working to only further regulate them to hegemonic notions of what it means to be a woman. These female principals conceded that men seem to have it easier. They recognized that men are in possession of the social good, describing the existence of boys’ clubs and men as being better equipped to lead elementary schools. This concession appears as a kind of admission that the role of principal is truly designed for men.

This discussion turned into a discourse around women as empathetic, emotional, and nurturing leaders. It was a discourse embraced by most of the women, but not without trepidation. There was a concern amongst the women of being seen as too emotional and hence not able to fulfill their duties as principals. Leading with empathy, an example of a positive and progressive means of leading schools, becomes feminized and deemed as soft, and hence without strength.

The discourses of male principal leadership also adhered to hegemonic notions of men and women. Amongst the male principals, a discourse around fear of the female principals taking
over the role emerged. As more and more women have moved into the role of principal, men have begun to fear a kind of feminization of the role. In an attempt to protect and maintain their manliness, the men resist this feminization. They do this by reinscribing masculine notions of leadership, and, I found, resist any idea that they might be able to learn from their female colleagues. Interviews showed that the male principals defined themselves as detached leaders, and that they defined this detachment as the ability to manage one’s emotions. These male leaders presented their female colleagues as emotional and incapable of rational thought. Male leaders, on the other hand, were labeled as rational leaders who get tough when necessary. This tough approach to leadership is necessary so that male leaders do not become too feminine in their leadership style. However, the following discourse, “you’re tough you can handle it,” revealed that while these men would uphold this tough, no nonsense approach, they were not all together comfortable with it. It becomes necessary for men to assert their masculinity. In order to assuage this discomfort, the male principals then turned to discourses around a preference for working for a man. All of the men interviewed indicated that at some point they had heard individuals (mostly women) state that they preferred to work for a man rather than a woman. Many of the female principals interviewed pointed to what they described as a greater acceptance of male principals. It seems that men are better able to get away with being bad leaders, and that they have an easier time leading schools than women. The good old days were described as a time when mostly men led schools, and, according to participants, they did so with a lax attitude, not placing too many demands on their teachers.

The last discourse to be discussed was one of reluctance and denial. Virtually every principal to whom I spoke insisted at some point in our conversation that leadership has nothing to do with gender and is really only about one’s skills and abilities. This insistence revealed a
kind of discomfort with the issue of gender and leadership, as if principals did not want to believe that it had anything to do with how they lead. Comments about skills and abilities were made confidently, perhaps because each principal wanted or expected leadership to just be about who is best for the job. Comments that gendered leadership were somewhat hesitant. Some principals were unsure about what to say, stating that they had never thought about the issue of gender and leadership before. Discourses of gendered leadership emerged as revelations and realizations for most principals, and, as a result, caused some discomfort in the form of acceptance for some, while for others there was a sense of frustration or even anger. This insistence became a denial that gender matters, followed by an acknowledgement that there might actually be something to this.

This cursory summary of the discourses analysed within this study reveals the workings of masculine domination and hegemony at work within principalship. This is not particularly surprising as hegemony is deeply entrenched within our society, or, as Bourdieu (2001) called it, the social order. What is interesting is that both female and male principals discovered and reacted to these discourses. Both Foucault (1977, 1978) and Butler (1990) have written of possibilities of resistance and agency within discourse. The following discussion will outline and describe the process of denial, realization and acceptance/anger that occurred as principals navigated these discourses.

**Discussion of Findings**

In this section I will explore what I consider to be some of the most interesting and significant discoveries found within this study. The first is the fact that just about every principal to whom I spoke initially denied that gender has anything to do with leadership style, and while some participants came to some realization around the impact of gender on their leadership style,
others continued to deny that it is a factor worth consideration. The second is the extent to which some principals, in particular, the male participants, reinforced hegemonic notions around how men and women should lead their schools and the implications of this approach and attitude toward principalship. Finally, with this study, I sought to reveal moments when principals were able to express agency and resistance, however, I found that did not necessarily happen, and, as a result, it warrants some reflection.

The level to which principals were in denial that gender does in fact matter when considering leadership as principals was both surprising and expected. It was surprising to me largely because I had expected that, like myself, other principals would have experienced moments when their gender had become an issue, either with a teacher, a parent or a student. This was not the case, at least amongst the principals to whom I spoke. As a result, the question of gender and leadership was, for most, a relatively unfamiliar connection, and one that these principals had not previously considered. The denial became, for some principals, a reflection of the fact that they had not necessarily considered their gender an issue given their experiences. The fact that many of these principals had not had experiences similar to mine left me a little uneasy at times, as I wondered what directions our conversations would take. However, as can be observed through the discourse analysis, the ensuing dialogue was very rich, and actually revealed a number of gendered discourses around both male and female principal leadership.

While the denial was somewhat surprising, it was not altogether so. In some cases, I expected principals to deny that gender matters because, as leaders of schools, we are continually thinking about equitable approaches to leadership. I suggest that many principals take this stance because they feel that it would be wrong to suggest that their gender is a factor when it comes to
the way they lead their schools. To admit that gender matters is to suggest that principals are
judged against factors other than their merit and skills as leaders.

I suggest that if we as principals are not willing to look at gender as a factor to consider
when talking about leadership, we are, in a sense, preventing ourselves from recognizing bias in
our workplaces. I think that many principals would agree that gender should not matter, however
this study quite clearly illustrates that gendered discourses are real and alive and are impacting
our ability to lead. An unwillingness to recognize the existence of these discourses, or at least to
engage in a discussion of them, only reinforces the existing biases. While some principals
experienced moments in our conversations in which they came to a realization of the presence of
the bias, the extent to which this realization was internalized is difficult to measure. The question
becomes, what does one do with this new knowledge, this realization? I suggest that the choice
to act or not act, to think more deeply about the issue or to ignore it, lies with each and every
principal. Of even greater concern, however, are the moments in which we, as principals, re-
inscribe hegemony and foster the growth and maintenance of masculine domination.

The moments when principals either knowingly or unknowingly reinforced hegemony
were particularly concerning to me, particularly coming from the male participants. I was at
times quite surprised and shocked by some of the sexist comments made during our
conversations. Perhaps, as a researcher, I was somewhat naïve, but I did not expect to hear such
comments during my dialogue with these principals. What is interesting to note is that most of
the principals making these hegemonic comments were also in denial around the extent to which
gender matters in principal leadership. And yet, they quite openly perpetuated some of the many
gendered discourses that regulate both men and women, particularly with respect to the way they
lead their schools as principals. Taking into consideration Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic
violence in relation to these sexist ideals, we might consider these comments as evidence of the workings of this violence on principals as they think about their work in relation to their gender. Or, perhaps the fact that many of the comments were made by men is an example of how masculine domination is supported and maintained amongst these men. The discourse around the women taking over, as discussed in Chapter 5, clearly points toward a concern amongst men around the presence of women within what they consider to be their domain as principals. Indeed, men as well as women are clearly subject to this violence, however there comes a point when we really need to consider the impact our statements have in terms of the position we hold as principals, as leaders of schools. For example, if a principal places female students in a female teacher’s class because they like the same television shows or have the same interest in fashion, and we place “difficult” students with male teachers because we feel that male teachers are better able to hand them, how are we demonstrating responsibility and integrity? These kinds of assertions make it clear that there is a need amongst some principals to stop and consider the extent to which their biases, specifically around gender, might affect the manner in which they perform their duties. This must be considered for the sake of the students, staff, and communities in our care. We must not forget that children see and hear everything. They make sense of the world largely by what they see and hear amongst the adults in their lives. As principals, we have a duty to consider the message we are sending through our words, our actions, and our deeds.

Finally, my attempt to discover moments when principals found agency and resisted the dominant gendered discourses was not as fruitful as was initially expected. As I expressed in the

7 A reference is being made to the conversation I had with John, when he indicated that he would place a particular group of girls in a classroom with a female teacher because they might watch the same shows or have the same interest in fashion.
8 A reference is being made to the conversation I had with George, when he talked about how he felt about the expectations we have of men to handle difficult and sometimes violent situations.
previous chapter, this study is a reflection of my own agency with respect to the relationship between gender and leadership. However, my enthusiasm for the issue was not necessarily shared by the principals to whom I spoke, with the exception of Maggie. Maggie was quite bothered by the issue and made many substantive comments that have been used throughout this thesis. She was also one of the few who opened a window for herself toward any kind of real resistance and agency. Maggie felt very comfortable sharing her thoughts with me openly and did so without much reservation, even going so far as to admit that she wondered about how her role would be different, or how she would be perceived by others differently, if she were a man. I do not suggest that the remaining principals do not have the capacity to engage in what Butler (1990) referred to as “reflexive mediation.” On the contrary, I have been clear that I believe that principalship is a place where dominant discourses can be challenged, revealed, resisted, and reformulated. Some principals who began their interview by denying that gender is a factor when it comes to leadership began to acknowledge the presence of gendered discourses within the role. The extent to which these new realizations were internalized is not clear, and I believe that to come to a point where one discovers a sense of agency, one has to continue to talk about the issue and consider its effects. The fact that realizations were made provides some hope that the dialogue can continue.

I realize that principals are people, too. They are subject to the same dominant discourses that exist in our society and that permeate our interactions, both at work and in our personal lives. I also recognize that principals work within institutions born out of structures that regulate the population, ensuring order, hegemonic masculinity, and other forms of oppression. However, by beginning this dialogue surrounding gender and principal leadership, these discourses, this domination, has been somewhat disrupted. It has enabled principals to pause, think, and open the
door toward new ways of conceptualizing the role. I believe that principals are change agents, and I hope that, with encouragement, biases can be further challenged, making way for new discourses that take us further away from limited, hegemonic notions.

**Implications for Theory**

The review of related literature revealed that there have not been many attempts amongst researchers of educational leadership to use a post-structuralist approach. In relation, Niesche (2011) commented that, while Foucault, for example, is used extensively in educational research, his work has not been widely used in the field of educational leadership (p. 3). Foucault’s work provides a powerful means of offering insight into principals’ work as a site of power relations and subjectivities (Niesche, 2011, p. 3). Foucault’s (1977, 1978) work has also helped reveal that principals are subject to gendered discourses that regulate the manner in which they perform their duties. Within these discourses, new discourses emerge and are produced and maintained. Similarly, Butlerian (1990) ideas provide a framework for thinking differently about the way constraints and discourses can be altered. Niesche and Gowlet (2015) wrote that “It is through the plurality of discourse and our operation at any one moment in time through an array of discourse that alteration of constraint is possible” (p. 381). They take the position that Butler’s notion of agency allows for the creation of a different logic around thinking about educational leadership (Niesche & Gowlet, 2015, p. 378). Making use of Butler (1990), there is a possibility for agency as principals reflect upon the discourses acting upon them. Interestingly, I did not observe many of the principals making use of this agency, but rather the study itself has become, for me, a reflection of my own resistance to the discourses acting upon me as an elementary principal. Bourdieu’s (2001) work, particularly through his notion of symbolic violence, has helped to reveal the pathway through which both male and female principals are subject to
masculine domination. By employing his theories, I was able to lay out a pathway travelled by principals as they navigated these discourses throughout our conversations. The principals denied that gender has anything to do with their leadership, only to provide examples in the end of how gendered discourses had acted upon them as they carried out their duties. It is important to recognize that through discourse, these principals went through a process of denial, leading them toward realization and affirmation of the presence and influence of gendered discourses. Some also expressed their frustration/anger around its existence, providing a glimpse of some resistance and agency.

The process by which the principals denied and subsequently recognized gendered discourses suggests that leadership can be seen as something fluid and open to change. Niesche and Gowlet (2015) commented on this fluidity, stating that, “Seeing leadership as a multiple form of different subjectivities allows for an interpretation of leadership practice as a phenomenon that is contested and fluid, open to change, moving between different positionings, and disrupting the search for that essential human feature” (p. 382). Leadership is described here as something that can be contested, changed, and disrupted by viewing it from multiple subjectivities. In this study, I have shown how gender is often initially discounted as relevant with respect to principal leadership, but then, later, gendered discourses are indeed found to be at work. Taking a post-structuralist approach to this study has enabled the exploration of how gender is at work within principalship. There are, of course, many different discourses at work within principalship, however gendered discourses were something that most of the principals had never considered. Niesche and Gowlet (2015) commented on the benefits of taking a post-structuralist stance, stating that,

In order to initiate change and expand possibility, we need to appreciate the way different leadership discourses are mobilised in particular societies, cultures and historical
moments. This will create more genuine possibility for alternative ways of being a leader and importantly, move the ELMA field beyond fixed, limiting discourses of leadership that are exemplified through various adjectival models and standards discourses. Viewing leadership as ongoing reconstituted subjectivities allows for a rejection of imposed categories and identifies spaces of freedom for leaders’ actions rather than a closing down and erasing of difference. Post structuralist theorising leads to a productive (re)thinking of leadership practice as it occurs, which is vastly different to the hegemonic method of analysis in leadership at present that is based on pre-existing categories and norms. (p. 383)

Here, it is made clear that a post-structuralist theorizing makes it possible to examine differing discourses of leadership that go beyond pre-existing categories and norms. This theorizing leads to alternative ways of practicing leadership, rejecting traditional norms and embracing new leadership discourses. By examining gendered discourses within principalship, new ways of leading have emerged. Granted, many of these discourses only further regulate and act upon the principal in such a way that limits his/her ability to lead freely; however, they offer a new and critical way to investigate discourses at play within principalship. This discourse analysis has enabled me to look at principalship through a different lens, resulting in some rethinking of leadership practices. If anything, this research has enabled principals to begin to see that, indeed, gendered discourses do matter with respect to the way they lead their schools. The possibilities for resistance and agency have been revealed and hopefully can result in some new thinking about how one’s gender impacts principal leadership.

This research represents a movement away from research that focuses on hegemonic notions of how to lead schools. It brings into question and troubles the notion that men and women lead differently through critical discourse analysis. The presence of hegemonic masculinity within principalship has been revealed, as well as how it regulates both female and male principals. Through the process of revealing these gendered discourses, participants in the study were provided with opportunities to resist these discourses, whether they chose to or not.
This study opens up new ways of looking at and reflecting upon leadership practice in our schools. It challenges us to formulate new gendered discourses of principal leadership. In their post-structuralist study on the professional development of female secondary principals, Murakami and Tornsen (2017) found links between gender and professional identities. They reported that, “The most important implications of this study relate to the perpetuation of biases. Gendered discourses were evident in the development of professional identities. When female principals resort to demonstrating ‘male-like’ qualities, or when they must challenge authoritative styles to develop their own professional identity, they reveal a continuous struggle towards equity” (Murakami & Tornsen, 2017, pp. 820–21). Here, Murakami and Tornsen (2017) highlight the struggles female principals face when taking on what is often perceived as a position meant for men. They also point to the need for more research in this area, in particular the lack of support offered to women as they navigate leadership positions in education (p. 821).

The issue of gender and leadership needs to be explored further if we are to challenge hegemony within principalship. Murakamy and Tornsen’s (2017) study is an example of this need, and an expression of the inequalities that exist, particularly with respect to female principals.

Another implication for theory with respect to gender and principal leadership can be found within Gee’s concept of figured worlds. Gee understands figured worlds as a means of making sense of and meaning in the world. We create these figured worlds out of situated meanings, the context in which language is used to describe and define the world around us. In this thesis, I have revealed the creation of figured worlds that clearly define differences in the way men and women lead; figured worlds that define female principals as mothering, and, alternatively, male leaders as part of a boys’ club; and finally, figured worlds where men are perceived to be the preferred principal and women are perceived as not belonging within the role.
What is most interesting about figured worlds is that they do not belong to any one person, but
are a part of a collective consciousness. Gee (2011) wrote,

> Figured worlds, too, are usually not completely stored in any one person’s head. Rather, they are distributed across the different sorts of “expertise” and viewpoints found in the group much like a plot to a story (or pieces of a puzzle) that different people have different bits of and which they can potentially share in order to mutually develop the “big picture.” (p. 105)

Here, Gee refers to figured worlds as distributed across different people with different ideas and experiences, all with a goal to developing what he refers to as “the big picture.” This idea of figured worlds is significant in this study because it has always been present throughout the description of the different gendered discourses. This study involved interviewing principals individually, and yet many connections were made between the comments and ideas expressed by these principals. As the conversations were analysed and presented here within the thesis, a story or big idea unfolded (denial, resistance, recognition). The fact that so many links could be drawn between what the principals said suggests that principals create their own collective figured worlds. If we consider a collective understanding or concept of principalship, we can begin to see how these links between principals can be made. Indeed, each principal had their own perspective and experiences to share; however, the common elements revealed within their responses suggest the existence of a common understanding around what it means to lead as a female or male principal. It is interesting to consider the fact that these common elements and discourses arose out of a conversation about gender and leadership. Although the questions posed to each principal were the same, each conversation also took on its own direction and the questions became more of a guide than a common feature of each interview. Even with each conversation being different, there still arose a pattern of denial, resistance and recognition/acceptance – the “big picture.” The existence of this figured world is interesting and
somewhat surprising, but it is also concerning. How do we address the existence and proliferation of the limited and hegemonic discourses of male and female principal leadership revealed in this study? If we accept that there exists a collective understanding or figured world defining how female and male principals lead, we also need to ask how this figured world was created. What are the implications of this figured world on how men and women lead their schools? We have seen that figured worlds, like situated meanings, have the potential to change. The question becomes: what new figured worlds can be created that recognize and perhaps challenge hegemony? Many questions arise that could be explored with further study and consideration.

This research also opens to the door toward an exploration of leadership beyond the elementary school. It causes one to consider how much one is able to make generalized statements about gender and leadership in the private sector, as well as in the political sphere. Surely the findings discussed in this thesis are not particular to elementary school principals in the Greater Toronto Area. It would be interesting to apply some of the theories outlined in this thesis to other realms in which leadership is a factor.

**Implications for Further Research**

The discussion around the theoretical implications of this study makes clear that this research represents a relatively new way of looking at gender and leadership. Coleman (2003) wrote of how most leadership research and its relationship to gender either focuses on equal opportunities for women, or on similarities and differences between the way men and women lead (p. 29). In this thesis, I have attempted to take the notion that men and women lead differently and critically analyse how this notion comes into play through gendered discourses of leadership. What I have found is that, indeed, there is a common conception that men and
women lead differently, however the discourses that emerge reveal much more than this superficial notion of leadership in schools. Blackmore (1999) wrote that, “Gendered subjectivity is constituted out of a range of discursive practices in specific organizational sites informed by particular sets of gender power relations” (pp. 59–60). The findings show how gendered discourses of leadership were revealed within each of my interviews with principals. These discourses were constructed and negotiated throughout our conversations, but the fact that they emerged during our conversation indicates that these discourses are present already and influence the way both women and men lead their schools. Blackmore (1999) pointed out that these leadership behaviours and understandings are learned over time: “There are women who are controlling, and women who are facilitating, and women who are both. Women do not suddenly assume masculinist behaviours as leaders, leadership is learnt over a long period of time, and behaviours do not change unless conditions force that change” (p. 60). In this thesis, I have sought to expose these discourses and subject them to a critical interpretation. In doing so, I have highlighted both female and male gendered discourses of principal leadership, revealing a long-traveled path of masculine domination.

While the study did reveal some moments when principals resisted these discourses, these moments were few and far between. It would be interesting to return to these principals again after having the initial conversation to see if their thinking around these gendered discourses has changed. To what extent did these principals think more on the topic of gender and leadership after our conversation? Did they find themselves resisting these discourses or embracing them? It might also be interesting to have further discussions with principals in small groupings of both men and women. Talking with groups of principals might be interesting in terms of noting which discourses get legitimized and by whom, and which are dismissed.
It would also allow the researcher to observe the ways male and female principals interact with one another in the group setting. It might also allow for not only the revelation of still more figured worlds that promote hegemony, but also the creation of new figured worlds that could perhaps challenge the hegemonic notions shared in this thesis. This study has become, for me, a reflection of my own agency and resistance around this issue. Having the opportunity to analyze the responses of different principals has provided me with a perspective that is quite different from those of the principals to whom I spoke. If these principals were brought together to discuss gendered discourse in leadership, I wonder where we might take the conversation. It is clear that these biases need to be addressed, and I have found that one of the most effective ways to do just that is through dialogue, in order to create new discourses and hence new figured worlds.

Another way forward as a result of this research is to have another look at the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF) and consider the implications of gender and leadership and its possible impact on this document. As mentioned at the beginning of this thesis, the OLF acts as a guide for leadership and is used by principals and school boards in the selection process and in the evaluation of school and system leaders. It is a critical document as it lays out a structure for understanding and defining principal leadership. It is also devoid of any mention of gender as a factor that has an effect on principal leadership. This is understandable, of course, as the OLF cannot be perceived as favouring any particular gender as being the best fit for principal leadership. The data presented in this thesis and the resulting gendered discourses of principal leadership suggest that indeed gender does matter and should be considered, recognized, and/or problematized as we consider the direction of leadership in Ontario’s schools. I am not suggesting that the OLF include gender as a determining factor to be considered when understanding effective leadership. I am suggesting that the OLF consider the impact these
discourses have on principal leadership and address it as an issue of gender equity. In its current form, the OLF does not address the importance of checking one’s bias, for example, as a means of promoting an equitable and inclusive approach to principal leadership. There are moments when equity is mentioned; however, I believe that it may be useful to make it a more central part of its understanding and presentation of the role of principal. Such a project would, of course, be much more complex than what I have presented here. However, I believe there is a space within this document in which this research can be used to address gender inequalities within principalship.

There is also the question of how to address this issue with Ontario’s principals more broadly. As I was working through the analysis of the data and conducting interviews, many principals and participants in the study indicated an interest in learning more about my findings. I spoke with them about providing an opportunity to share the findings in a presentation. I think it is important, however, to consider the possibility of offering an opportunity for principals to engage in some professional learning around this issue. In considering for a moment the kind of impact a principal’s hegemonic notions of gender might have on the students, staff, and communities they serve, one might find cause to pause and reflect on this possible impact. If principals are indeed required to model bias-free approaches to learning, and equitable and inclusive approaches to learning and opportunity for students and staff, then some of the discourses discussed in this thesis become concerning. If, for example, a male principal values a female principal’s leadership only to the extent to which she leads as a man would lead and without going so far as to be considered pushy and bitchy, what messages might be being sent to the young girls in the school? I think that it would be a valuable exercise for principals to have the opportunity to reflect on their biases, in particular those related to gender, and to consider the
kinds of messages they may be sending to others via their role as principals. It would be interesting to develop a course or professional development presentation directed at principals as a means of exploring this issue further. Such an opportunity would also allow for the exploration of the potential impact a principal’s gender bias might have on his/her school community.

Two areas this study has not explored are ethnicity and sexuality. It is difficult to truly analyze the workings of gendered discourse without also looking at ethnicity and sexuality; however, these considerations went beyond the scope of this project. Indeed, gender intersects with ethnicity and sexuality within just about every gendered discourse discussed in this study. Some of the principals mentioned their ethnicity and sexual orientation as contributing factors to their understanding of their gendered selves. It would be interesting to look at how one’s sexuality and/or ethnicity impacts discourse around leadership in general. The intersection of gender, ethnicity, and sexuality would add yet another rich layer to understanding how the principal is further regulated.

This study has employed a post-structural approach that has provided opportunities to critically examine the manner in which gendered discourses regulate principalship. It has revealed a pathway traveled by the principal participants, through denial, revelation, and, in some cases, resistance. The next step would be to formulate new gendered discourses of leadership that address the fact that masculine domination acts upon both female and male principals. This positions the principal as a possible change agent and opens the door to new ways of thinking about and examining the intersection of gender and leadership. The door is open. We need only to enter and see what happens.
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Appendix A: Recruitment Notices

Are you interested in participating in a Study on Principal Leadership and Gender?

I am conducting interviews/discussions for my doctoral thesis in Social Justice Education at OISE, University of Toronto. I am looking for principals of elementary schools in the GTA to participate in a 30 – 40 min discussion about principal leadership in schools and gender.

*If you are interested, and/or have questions about the study, please email Ken MacKinnon at ken.mackinnon@mail.utoronto.ca. If someone you know is interested, please ask them to contact me directly.*
Are you interested in participating in a Study on Principal Leadership and Gender?

I am conducting interviews/discussions for my doctoral thesis in Social Justice Education at OISE, University of Toronto. I am looking for principals of elementary schools in the GTA to participate in a 30–40 min discussion about principal leadership and gender.

Participants will be interviewed at a comfortable location of their choice. By accepting to participate in this study, participants agree to take part in an interview that will be recorded with an audio-recording device.

If you are interested, and/or have questions about the study, please email Ken MacKinnon at ken.mackinnon@mail.utoronto.ca. If someone you know is interested, please ask them to contact me by email.

Please note that the interviews are approved by The University of Toronto Ethics Review Board. The thesis is supervised by Dr. Diane Farmer. Participants may email the supervisor at diane.farmer@utoronto.ca or inquire at the University of
Appendix B: Informed Consent Letter

Date: September, 2015

Study Name: “Thank goodness you are a man!": troubling gender and principal leadership in elementary schools

Researcher: Kenneth MacKinnon, ken.mackinnon@mail.utoronto.ca

Purpose of the Research: This project intends to explore the discourses around masculinities and femininities and the manner in which they set up yet another discourse around what it means to lead as a man and as a woman. As these notions dominate the discourse around the issue, they become widely accepted as true. As a result, principals become subjected to this discourse and find themselves having to ‘live up’ to these ways of leading. By talking with principals working in elementary schools in the GTA, I hope to discover what these principals think about these gendered discourses around leadership. What kind of impact does gender identity have on the principal and the manner in which they lead their schools? How do expectations around the different ways men and women are ‘supposed’ to lead affect the manner in which principals conceptualize their leadership? Are men and women ‘naturally’ different leaders?

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research: You will be asked to engage in a discussion with the researcher about the ways in which your gender has played a part in your role as an elementary principal. There are nine guiding questions that will be discussed. The interview/discussion will be recorded so that it can be recalled at a later date for research purposes. The discussion should not take more than 30 to 40 minutes to complete.

Risks and Discomforts: While the study is anonymous and pseudonyms will be used, there is a slight risk, although unlikely, that you will be recognized.

Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You: This project provides an opportunity for principals to reflect upon the manner in which their gender influences or does not influence how they lead. It provides an opportunity for reflection and new learning for both the participants and the researcher.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer will not influence the treatment you receive from the researcher or the professional relationship you share with the researcher either now, or in the future.

Withdrawal from the Study: You can stop participating in the study at any time if you so decide. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researcher, the University of Toronto, or any other group or person associated with this project. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed.

Confidentiality: All information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and unless you specifically indicate your consent, your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. The interview/discussion will be recorded using a digital device and handwritten notes will also be taken. No identifying information will be included in the data. Your data will be safely stored in a locked facility and only the researcher will have access to this information. The data will only be stored as long as it takes the researcher to analyse the data and defend the doctoral thesis. Your data will be kept for 2 years after the thesis is complete, at which point it will be destroyed. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

Questions About the Research? If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact Ken MacKinnon by e-mail (ken.mackinnon@mail.utoronto.ca). This research has been reviewed and approved by The University of Toronto’s Ethics Review Board. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact my supervisor, Dr. Diane Farmer by email (diane.farmer@utoronto.ca) or the University of Toronto Ethics Review Board at ethics.review@utoronto.ca.

I___________________, consent to participate in “Thank goodness you are a man!": troubling gender and principal leadership in elementary schools conducted by Kenneth MacKinnon. I have understood the nature of this
project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

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<th>Signature</th>
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Appendix C: Ethics Approval

PROTOCOL REFERENCE # 32255

November 20, 2015

Dr. Diane Farmer
DEPT OF HUMAN, SOC SC & SOC JUSTICE
EDUCATION
OISe/UT

Mr. Kenneth MacKinnon
DEPT OF HUMAN, SOC SC & SOC JUSTICE
EDUCATION
OISe/UT

Dear Dr. Farmer and Mr. Kenneth MacKinnon,

Re: Your research protocol entitled, “‘Thank goodness you are a man!’: Troubling gender and principal leadership in elementary schools”

ETHICS APPROVAL

Original Approval Date: November 20, 2015
Expiry Date: November 19, 2016
Continuing Review Level: 1

We are writing to advise you that the Social Sciences, Humanities, and Education Research Ethics Board (REB) has granted approval to the above-named research protocol under the REB's delegated review process. Your protocol has been approved for a period of one year and ongoing research under this protocol must be renewed prior to the expiry date.

Any changes to the approved protocol or consent materials must be reviewed and approved through the amendment process prior to its implementation. Any adverse or unanticipated events in the research should be reported to the Office of Research Ethics as soon as possible.

Please ensure that you submit an Annual Renewal Form or a Study Completion Report 15 to 30 days prior to the expiry date of your current ethics approval. Note that annual renewals for studies cannot be accepted more than 30 days prior to the date of expiry.

If your research is funded by a third party, please contact the assigned Research Funding Officer in Research Services to ensure that your funds are released.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research.

Yours sincerely,

Matthew Brower, Ph.D.
REB Co-Chair

Jeffrey Steele, Ph.D.
REB Co-Chair

Dean Sharpe
REB Manager

Research Oversight and Compliance Office - Human Research Ethics Program
McMurrich Building, 12 Queen's Park Crescent West, 2nd Floor, Toronto, ON M5S 1S8 Canada
Tel: +1 416 946-3273 ● Fax: +1 416 946-5783 ● ethics.review@utoronto.ca ● http://www.research.utoronto.ca/or-researchers-administrators/ethics/
Appendix D: Narrative Chart

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<th>Principal</th>
<th>The Micromanaging “Bitch” Factor</th>
<th>I understand because I am a mom/dad</th>
<th>Men have a easier</th>
<th>The empathetic / emotional</th>
<th>You’re tough, you can handle it</th>
<th>You’re such guy</th>
<th>Race and Ethnicity</th>
<th>Don’t worry, no problem, leader</th>
<th>If it’s all about personality and skills</th>
<th>You call yourself a leader, prove it</th>
<th>“Mean” girl/cattiness</th>
<th>Surprise! Men can be kind too</th>
<th>I’d rather work for a man</th>
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