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## Locating Gender Bias and Systemic Discrimination in Public Schooling Bureaucracy

*The contemporary model of bureaucracy guiding the daily functioning of public schooling in Canada is discussed in terms of its propensity for gender bias and systemic discriminatory practice. Systemic discrimination in bureaucracy is situated in a global culture of gender, founded on a universal acceptance of the duality of human sexuality, and rooted in dominant discourses of masculinity and femininity. Addressing inequities in the public schooling bureaucracy that are linked to the duality of masculinity and femininity and the resultant imbalance in the divisions of bureaucratic power and authority between men and women is fundamentally a gender issue. As such, facilitating stability-enhancing radical reform in the public schooling bureaucracy is an infinitely complex task—insofar as the foundations of the modern bureaucracy are closely tied to core sociopolitical constructs based on the so-called nature of sex, gender, and the natural distribution of knowledge-power. In the context of a critically pragmatic and practical suggestion for change, this article contextualizes Ramsay and Parker's (1992) "neo-bureaucracy" (p. 269) as a model of reform that offers the possibility for broadly defined acceptance in the teaching profession and the wider society, while bringing issues of equity and social justice to the forefront of the daily practice of teaching and learning in public schools.*

*L'article propose que le modèle bureaucratique courant sur lequel repose le fonctionnement quotidien des écoles publiques au Canada tend vers le sexisme et la pratique discriminatoire institutionnel. La discrimination institutionnelle au sein d'une bureaucratie prend sa source dans la culture mondiale des rapports sociaux entre les sexes, qui elle est fondée sur l'acceptation universelle de la dualité de la sexualité humaine et enracinée dans les discours dominants touchant la masculinité et la féminité. Dans la bureaucratie des écoles publiques, les disparités liées à cette dualité et le déséquilibre dans la répartition du pouvoir et de l'autorité bureaucratiques entre les hommes et les femmes qui en résulte est, à la base, une problématique hommes-femmes. Par conséquent, une réforme radicale qui renforce la stabilité de la bureaucratie des écoles publiques s'avère une tâche infiniment complexe puisque les fondements de la bureaucratie moderne sont liés de près aux concepts sociopolitiques de base sur la soi-disant nature du sexe, des rapports sociaux entre les sexes, et sur la répartition naturelle des connaissances et du pouvoir. Sous forme d'une suggestion pragmatique et éclairée, cet article contextualise la "néo-bureaucratie" de Ramsay et Parker (1992, p. 269) et la propose comme modèle de réforme prévoyant, au sein de la profession enseignante et de la société, l'acceptation envisagée dans une large perspective, et portant au premier plan de l'enseignement et l'apprentissage dans les écoles publiques des questions d'équité et de justice sociale.*

Bureaucracy has a longstanding history in public education. With the inception of widely available (mandatory) public schooling, essentially institutionalizing learning and educational development for children, came a systemic dependency on a universally applicable administrative structure for effective and

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efficient school management. From this point forward a single administrative standard, what has come to be known as Weberian bureaucracy, has guided the daily management of public schools around the world. Critical theorists have proposed that the so-called Weberian bureaucratic model of social and economic organization, which purports to be a nondiscriminatory, objective, impartial system of institutional management, is, however, inherently flawed insofar as it is a gender-biased system of management. As such, the Weberian model is fundamentally discriminatory in both its principles and in its practices (Duerst-Lahti & Johnson, 1990; Ferguson, 1984; Kanter, 1977a; Pringle 1990; Ramsay & Parker, 1992; Savage, 1992). Schools as educational bureaucracies may thus be construed as gendered and discriminatory by way of the very nature of their administrative structures.

Gender is a powerful and often unaccounted factor affecting schools, teachers, students, and whole communities. The marginalizing affects of sex-role stereotyping and gender bias in bureaucracies has been a central focus of much of the debate about building equity in the workplace during the last quarter of the 20th century. There is, however, only a limited foundation of critical research that addresses gender discrimination as a bureaucratic construct in the area of public schooling specifically, with significant contributions to the critical research in education appearing only recently.

This article is founded in the theoretical and practical responses to key questions involving issues of equity and social justice in public education. In considering the possibilities for change, I adopt the supposition that we must "refuse the fixity of patriarchal and capitalist imperatives whilst recognizing the power of organized labor to bring wider social benefits" (Ramsay & Parker, 1992, p. 269) through viable, stability-enhancing bureaucratic reform. In addition, this article is part of a larger research project investigating the interplay between school administrative systems and educational outcomes such as student retention, school-based violence, and student academic success (Jull, 2000). By contributing to the critical discourses addressing public schooling bureaucracy—guided in part by feminist theory and a radical structuralist analysis (Tomlinson, 1995)—I propose to expand on the currently only broadly defined interconnections between school administrative structures and the establishment of equity-enhancing learning environments in public schools.

#### *Bureaucracy as Biased*

In order to facilitate a discussion centered on the notion that a gendered, and as such discriminatory, bureaucracy guides public education, it may be helpful to begin with a brief description of bureaucracy itself.

Weber (1964) is commonly recognized as the father of the contemporary modern bureaucratic system (Gronn, 1994; Samier, 1996a, 1996b), to say nothing of his importance in economics, business administration, and public policy. Weber idealized bureaucracy as "the great leveler," the impartial system of management that reduced the human propensity for wasting time, perpetuating interpersonal bias, and engaging in discriminatory practices. The modern bureaucracy is positioned in both the popular and professional discourses addressing management practices as fundamentally hierarchical in structures of authority, impersonal in terms of business practices and sociopolitics, and above all else fair insofar as measures of fairness remain rooted in competitive

notions of efficiency. However, since the publication of Weber's management manifesto, critical theorists have made a habit of deconstructing this idealized model of bureaucratic efficiency in an effort to reveal the unseen everyday discriminatory practices that are situated as acceptable in a supposedly inclusive system of organizational management.

The modern bureaucracy is meant to provide stability, efficiency, and an equitably impersonal administrative infrastructure for large institutions and growing organizations—in addition to facilitating the removal of sociopolitical barriers that are seen as prohibitive to productivity (Weber, 1964). Furthermore, bureaucracy was originally heralded as the only means by which institutions could ensure equitable access in hierarchical structures for workers seeking promotion and overall fairness in the workplace. Equitable hiring and promotional practices are defended as bias-free by way of preset meritocratic measures of competence that are embedded directly in the bureaucratic structure itself (Halford, 1992). Meritous measures of worker competences are based on the principles of standardized evaluation, rooted in so-called objective assessment. That is, equity in the employee evaluation process is supposedly made possible via sets of predetermined, fixed, and explicit evaluative criteria. As an unbiased means of ensuring the hiring and promotion of the "best candidate for the job," meritocracy was and still is perceived to be the only mechanism by which institutions are readily able to facilitate equitable hiring and promotional strategies (Lemann, 1999). Furthermore, meritocracy is heralded as the only means by which large organizations can replace the old patriarchal and parochial structures of authority. Kallen (1995), among others (Cockburn, 1991; Lemann, 1999), has questioned the so-called objectivity of the bureaucratic meritocracy; indeed, the question remains, merit by whose standards?

The critical debate surrounding the actual objectivity of a so-called bias-free approach to personnel management is closely tied to postmodernist discourses, questioning the fixity and objectivity of truth, and an acceptance of the complex interplay between knowledge and power (Foucault, 1997) in both the formal structural configurations of work and in ordinary interpersonal (negotiated) engagements. Do bureaucracies favor certain individuals over others based on particular sociopolitical identities or contexts? To support a response to this question and others, I call for the disruption of popular conceptions regarding management ideologies espousing bureaucratic neutrality, considering the possibility that the idealized bureaucratic mode of management reflects and promotes gendered notions of efficiency, proficiency, and excellence (Duerst-Lahti & Johnson, 1990; Savage, 1992). In addition, I support the proposition that the current bureaucratic model that facilitates the administration of public education reinforces and perpetuates bias by favoring those whose sociopolitical context is consistent with the sociopolitical constructs of the bureaucracy itself. In the model bureaucracy, the favored sociopolitical context is grounded in dominant sociopolitical discourses, underpinned by hegemonic constructions of heterosexual masculinity (see Frank, 1987, for a discussion of hegemonic heterosexual masculinity), and reinforced through capitalism, patriarchy, and sex-role stereotyping. Indeed, discriminatory hiring and promotional practices may no longer be supported by blatant patriarchal

and bigoted networks, but more subtly by way of a falsely neutral system of meritocratic bureaucracy (Anderson, 1993).

Much of the recent critical debate addressing discriminatory school administrative practices, in which institutionalized gender bias is positioned as an antecedent to systemic discriminatory practice, stems from analyses of gender inequity and systemic discrimination that are rooted in second-wave feminist theory (Acker, 1994; Ferguson, 1984; Kanter, 1977a; Pringle, 1990; Smith, 1987). However, public policy-makers and management theorists have tended to ignore (feminist) research that identified the existence of systemic and structural gender inequities. This is not surprising given Witz and Savage's (1992) assertion that the study of management theory has for the most part been funded and supported by men for the purposes of promoting research that favors the interests of male managers. The growing acceptance of feminist-critical research has brought about an arguably unwelcome disruption in the discourses of popular management theory and is proving to be fundamentally important to the process of sociopolitical redress in (post)modern bureaucracies in recent years, responding at long last to the blatant inequities in bureaucracies that have been perpetuated in part by the androcentric standards of the past.

Ramsay and Parker (1992) have suggested that bureaucracies, like patriarchy, have a propensity to permanence in that they are institutions of daily routine, guiding common, everyday socially acceptable interpersonal practices in both the private and public domains. It is unlikely, and perhaps even irrelevant if it were so, that Weber intended his original description of bureaucracy to marginalize certain individuals or discriminate against particular social contexts. It is more likely that Weber saw bureaucracy as merely the most efficient and cost-effective means of administering the daily needs of institutional capitalist production—and in so doing, ignored the social complexities of political economies. Of course, Weber's model of industrial efficiency was constructed around popular notions of work, family, authority, and power of the day. Contemporary conceptions regarding the "naturalness" of what were once understood as normal divisions of labor, power, and privilege, however, are dramatically different, although perhaps only in theory. Even with changing societal perceptions regarding the usefulness and/or appropriateness of sex-role stereotyping, standards in the model bureaucracy remain largely unchanged (Ramsay & Parker, 1992). Indeed, it is the everyday social practices, the unnoticed, the commonplace, and even the humdrum (Frank, 1991) that are the most difficult to critique in a discourse of discriminatory practice. Widely accepted structures of daily routine are not easily displaced from the greater sociopolitical (publicly acceptable) contexts of communities, either by critical dialogue or through radical reform.

#### *Situating Bureaucratic Bias: Gender, Hegemony, and Teaching*

The contemporary, centralized community school operates as a model of bureaucratic efficiency. School policies, rules, and regulations provide the template for staff and student (social and academic) interactions. Schools are hierarchical in their management and pedagogical structures (Reynolds, 1999), meritocratic in their staff hiring practices (Lyman & Speizer, 1980) and student academic promotional policies (Davis, 1995), and capitalistic insofar as

academic and social rewards for individual achievement are understood as opportunistic and rooted in a system of external rewards, namely, academic standing in the form of grades for students, and incremental monetary gains that recognize commitment to service for teachers.

Successful schools are identified as models of efficiency (Purkey & Smith, 1982). Successful schools are, furthermore, lauded for their fairness—measured in terms of the provision of equal access to educational and professional advancement and willingness to recognize individual achievement by those who “work” to achieve personal success. In opposition to this, student failure and/or teacher burnout in public education is most often viewed as a failure of individuals or of particular pedagogical arrangements, not of the school system itself (Skrtic, 1995). Also, low levels of school success are often attributed to specific student learning or behavioral deficits or as the unfortunate outcome of an unidentifiable malaise or general disinterest on the part of students in their own academic success. Individual teachers and specific school-based programs are also a locus of blame in a system that sheds the responsibility for failing students, high levels of teacher stress, and low student retention rates (Fine 1991; Skrtic, 1995). It is only recently that teachers and educational theorists have engaged in regular critical dialogue about the potential relationship between school organizational structures and student achievement (Acker, 1994; Crosby, 1999; Witz & Savage, 1992).

The teaching profession has been perceived as both masculine and feminine since the inception of public schooling in Canada over 100 years ago (Blount, 1999). Teaching, once a predominantly male occupation, almost entirely comprised women as a result of the rapid expansion of public education during the early part of the 20th century. In the burgeoning educational bureaucracy, the men were promoted to administrative positions, overseeing the provision of now widely available public schooling. Women, then as now, were paid less than their male counterparts and were considered dispensable in terms of their professional value (Berkeley, 1984). To this day women continue to function primarily as teachers, while men continue to occupy jobs in upper management, including school administration and government ministerial positions (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 1999).

The need for deconstructing the current bureaucratic practices and the gendered social order in public education can be rationalized in terms of the importance of promoting equity and social justice in schools. Inequity in schooling can have profound social and academic consequences for under-represented persons and/or groups in the school community (Books, 1999). Even so, systemic discrimination, stemming from sex-role stereotyping and gender bias in the Weberian model of bureaucracy, still receives little critical attention. The absence of appropriate school administrative reforms, however, may be explained in part by Crompton and Le Feuvre's (1992) assessment of the social science's longstanding history of conducting research in the public sphere, namely the workplace, which is historically located in the masculine domain, ignoring the relevance of what was (and arguably still is) perceived as the feminine, or private domain, the traditionally feminized familial context of the home. Given that caring for children in schools by women (teachers) could perhaps be considered a natural extension of caring for children in the home,

the absence of a tradition of critical debate regarding gendered constructions of teaching and schooling may be due in part to teaching's historical ties to, and location in, what has traditionally been identified as the feminine domain or private sphere. Critical theory and the feminist analysis call into question the assumed natural order of the public and private domains, giving rise to the reassessment of how we define and understand work in and outside of the home (Cockburn, 1991; Webster, 1996).

Kanter's (1977b) research model for conducting a structural analysis of the social order in organizations was identified by Zimneck (1992) as one of the more useful mechanisms for locating gender bias in a given bureaucracy. Kanter (1977b) defends her analyses of gender bias in part by clearly identifying workplace stereotyping and gender imbalances in bureaucratic hierarchies. She does this simply by counting and categorizing the sex of the occupants in corporate structures. From these data Kanter then derives a sex ratio, identified as: "uniform," "skewed," "tilted," or "balanced" (p. 966): that is, uniform, skewed, tilted, or balanced by way of the (dis)proportionate occupancy of either men or women in any given position in a bureaucratic hierarchy. Skewed and tilted are merely subtle degrees of measurement between a generally marked imbalance in sex distribution in which most of the participants in any given position or organization are of one sex or the other. This is contrasted by what Kanter refers to as a balanced distribution, located mid-way in the continuum, whereby there is roughly a 50:50 split in female to male participation. Citing statistics from the province of Nova Scotia, there is currently a skewed number of women in elementary teaching, outnumbering men 4:1, a tilted number of women in teaching in general, outnumbering men 2:1, and a skewed number of men in positions of authority and power, outnumbering women 3:1 (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 1999). Indeed, initiating a dialogue about unbalanced staffing ratios and their subsequent implications for authority and power sharing is perhaps the first step in the long and challenging process of establishing and (re)enforcing gender equity in public schooling.

Although Kanter's (1977b) model for identifying sex-role stereotyping may seem absurdly obvious, it is a practical and theoretically accessible starting point from which to begin researching gender inequity in bureaucracies. Not that researching gender equity in relation to bureaucracy is simply a task of counting and categorizing. On the contrary, common conceptions about the suitability or predisposition of one sex over another for a given occupation or responsibility are deeply rooted in popular notions about gender roles and widely accepted and vehemently reinforced opinions on sex-gender suitability in the workplace, which makes critical dialogue difficult because it is rife with sociopolitical-cultural complexities. Simply put, nobody likes to be told that his or her everyday social practices and workplace routines are gendered such that they marginalize others (or themselves for that matter).

Considering that there may be multiple ways of experiencing and reinforcing gender further complicates the process of exposing discriminatory practices in the everyday social and administrative structures of the model bureaucracy. Suppose the reinforcement of gender bias, rooted in hegemonic masculinity and femininity, stems from one of three possible contextual arran-

gements: (a) as individual cases of interpersonal gender discrimination (Halford, 1992); (b) as a systemically gendered bureaucracy (Ferguson, 1984) reinforced through structural arrangements that perpetrate discriminatory practices, requiring only the complicity of the occupants to effect gender bias (Smith, 1987); and (c) as a combination of interpersonal and systemically reinforced gender bias. With the potential for this degree of complexity resulting from the interplay between interpersonal and structural associations predicating systemic gender bias, one might expect that each bureaucracy is gendered differently. Differences may be linked to the historical structure of the bureaucracy itself, the social practices of the current occupants of the organization, or as some unpredictably temporally significant arrangement of the two. Of one thing at least we can be sure, that the gender imbalances in the staffing composition and the resultant (dis)equilibrium of power in the teaching profession (Acker, 1994; Nova Scotia Department of Education, 1999) factor significantly in the construction and reinforcement of dominant perspectives regarding sex-role and gender stereotyping in the workplace. As suggested by Acker (1994), the imbalanced gender distribution in the teaching profession, and the continuation of the role of women as the teachers (and as the volunteers in schools where personnel and resources are limited), may strongly contribute to the reinforcement of patriarchal structures and a social order that is consistent with the status quo views and expectations of women as un(der)paid caregivers and caretakers of children. Similarly, with men continuing to occupy the positions of power in the school administrative hierarchies, with all the incumbent exclusive economic and social rewards, the imbalances in the public schooling hierarchies are likely to continue (Kanter, 1977a)—insofar as (male) educators are more likely to focus their attention on supporting traditional schooling agendas in order to advance their own careers and secure their place in the hierarchy.

One of the more commonly identified outcomes of a gendered bureaucracy is the disproportionate number of men occupying positions of power. As I argue in this article, the limited number of women promoted to high-ranking positions of power is largely a result of a discriminatory hiring and promotional climate resulting from gender bias in a meritocratic bureaucracy that favors (the sociopolitical contexts of) men evidenced, I suggest, by the skewed number of men in administrative roles. However, Savage (1992) offers another and arguably more useful way of interpreting patterns of promotion in organizations taking into account the recent increase in the number of women promoted to higher-ranking positions in bureaucratic structures. In his investigations into the complexities of systemic discrimination and gender equity in bureaucracy, Savage differentiates between professional advancements (of women) in the hierarchy of power and the hierarchy of expertise. Savage suggests that although women have made inroads in the power structures of bureaucracy, they are more likely to gain promotions in the hierarchy of expertise rather than the hierarchy of power and authority. Given the implication of Savage's claim, it seems that future research addressing systemic gender barriers will require a more finely tuned analysis of bureaucratic imbalances: taking into account distinctions between hierarchies of power and expertise and their respective connections to authority with bureaucratic structures.

*Outcomes of a Gendered Public Schooling Bureaucracy*

Given the supposition that school bureaucracies function as gendered administrative and sociopolitical regimes, one would expect at least to see measurable outcomes to the effect that one sex receives preferential treatment over the other; that one sex over the other has greater access to resources; that individual chances for promotion are limited by sex-role stereotyping and gender bias; or that students of one sex or the other are more readily able to access the "inner corridors" in their schools, enhancing their capacity to attain educational success. Perhaps, though, the longstanding imbalance in the distribution of men and women in power-holding positions in public education is proof enough to support an argument for the existence of favoritism (i.e., discrimination) in the public schooling bureaucracy.

I suggest that the deleterious, marginalizing consequences of a gendered (masculinized) bureaucracy are not necessarily sex-specific, limited only to the experiences of women. Males too can be disempowered insofar as hegemonic masculinity is oppressive to a diversity of femininities and masculinities, and by what Ferguson (1984) refers to as the feminization of service positions in the workplace, including everyone from lower-ranking administrators to the clients themselves. Ferguson suggests that bureaucracies position those who are not in the upper echelons of the bureaucratic hierarchy, but yet are engaged in a professional relationship with the bureaucracy, to an ostensibly feminine locale. Ferguson discusses the bureaucratic propensity for favoring workers who possess characteristics that are traditionally identified as feminine—in that, ideally, low-ranking personnel embody traditional notions of femininity, including a willingness or at least a complicity to subordination and the acceptance of authority. Clearly, according to Ferguson's analysis, both men and women can be positioned as powerless in this bureaucracy.

The outcomes of a gendered public schooling bureaucracy filter down into classrooms, affecting students and teachers in deleterious ways. Bureaucratic authority is plainly apparent in schools and is replicated by teachers and students in the context of individual classrooms. As long ago as 1932 researchers understood that educators implement strategies of domination based on the power imbalances in schools, implemented and enforced through the school administration, to coerce students to modify their behavior (Boyd, 1991). As indicated above, I have a connecting interest with respect to understanding the possible relationship between public schooling bureaucracies and student performance, measured as educational outcomes. When a school administrator, most often male, enters a classroom or walks the halls between classes, disruptive student behavior decreases. Unwanted student behaviors, as defined by schools, are temporarily suppressed in the presence of the school's highest-ranking authority figure, the school principal. The authority of the school principal represents the power of the public schooling bureaucracy. Students understand either through direct experience or vicariously that the school administrators have the power-authority to remove them from any school environment at any time. Such power is rationalized in terms of masculine notions of "power over" others (Epp, 1997, p. 25) and is essentially understood and accepted by students, parents of students, teachers, and the administrators themselves as fundamental to the management of schools.



Teachers, most often women, have their leadership role randomly and continually usurped by the external masculine power of the school administration: an administration, furthermore, that is capable of either supporting or undermining them. Most often it is one man in the school, the school administrator, who is in possession of the full force of the bureaucratic proclivity for an intense adherence to administrative order. The hierarchical notion of power and authority in schools that is established and maintained by the school bureaucracy disempowers classroom teachers. Teachers are positioned as subordinate in a system of externally imposed administrative dominance. Placing more women in the role of school administrator offers the possibility of facilitating local variation in the perceptions of students and teachers with respect to the potential for gender equity in school-based structures of power-authority. However, changing the sex of the school principal from male to female, I suspect, will have only limited impact with respect to administrative responses that are rooted in the more broadly situated gendered (masculine) public schooling bureaucratic authority. Indeed, herein lies another area in need of further research in order to better understand the implications of appointing women administrators in an otherwise gendered administrative structure.

In a recent case study investigating the differing rates of success of school reform initiatives by male and female teachers, Hubbard and Datnow (2000) offer further evidence that gender does indeed matter. In fact, they found that there was blatant systemic discrimination in schools, manifested as intercollegial gender bias, verging on misogyny, and reinforced by the school administration. When school reforms were perceived as feminine insofar as a proposal was initiated or strongly supported by female teachers, Hubbard and Datnow found the initiative was less likely to be supported by the male teachers and ultimately less likely to be endorsed by administrators throughout the extended school bureaucracy. The significance of the role of the bureaucracy itself as complicit—and indeed as an accomplice in supporting the male teachers who opposed the proposed reforms—was not explicitly addressed by Hubbard and Datnow. However, the implication that the school administration was resistant to the reform measures on purely sexist-gendered grounds is evidenced by a patterned history of reported failures of reform initiatives proposed by the female teaching staff over a number of years. Hubbard and Datnow state: “because ... [certain] whole school reform efforts have been primarily identified with women, they have been subject to attack” (p. 125). Extending their thesis, proposed school reforms that are perceived as feminine or gendered in ways that do not coincide with predominant views and/or are inconsistent with the norms of the predominant social context of the school’s power-authority structures will probably face unwarranted criticism by those who support and are supported by the school administration and the existing bureaucratic standard. In reading Hubbard and Datnow’s reflections on the outcomes of school reform initiatives that are perceived as gendered (read feminine), I was surprised that they did not include a discussion of misogyny in their final analysis. Indeed, there is a need for further critical dialogue about a teaching profession that by way of its systems and structures supports “attacks” and a generally “threatening” professional climate directed toward female educators and their so-called feminine reform initiatives. Misogyny

seemed to present itself as central to the position taken by the male staff, who in one case self-identified as "the good old boys," in the context of their efforts to "derail" reform measures supported by the women in their school (p. 125).

Distributing power and privilege along gendered lines in public education can result in skewed forms of institutional and social change in schools (Hubbard & Datnow, 2000). Female teachers as the underrepresented group in the administrative ranks of public education face barriers to school reform, proposals for curricular development, and opportunities for social change when their ideas and values are evaluated by a predominantly male administration. When social reform is perceived as gendered by the administration, that is, by the composition of its professional support (i.e., female teachers), Hubbard and Datnow suggest that male-dominated (masculinized) administrations are less likely to adopt the proposed (feminized) reforms. In education, as in other bureaucracies, "some social locations [i.e., male vs. female, administration vs. teacher] enjoy a more privileged status" (p. 128). In the case of public education, men continue to hold the higher paying positions of power and privilege, and as a result continue to determine the direction of administrative, academic, and social change in public schools.

#### *The Possibility for Change*

Stable and healthy schools are fundamental to the construction of stable and healthy communities and by extension the overall economic and social well-being of nations. As such, it is no surprise that advocates of the public school system are resistant to radical and potentially destabilizing change (Rusch & Perry, 1999). Change involving restructuring the very administrative model that holds the current system of public schooling together has the potential to be at least unsettling to the existing social order, and disruptive to widely accepted and firmly entrenched social constructs of the status quo. Unsettling the social order in public education may result in numerous detrimental outcomes, not the least of which involves placing student performance, measured in terms of educational outcomes, at risk. There is little if any research directly investigating the implications of initiating radical structural changes in public education. Critical theorists and researchers investigating the structural and administrative arrangements of various public schooling models have the difficult task of making obvious the current discriminatory practices in existing school bureaucracies while offering a (nondisruptive) conceptual base from which to build more equitable schools.

Although I make a case supporting the supposition that the current public schooling bureaucracy is fundamentally gendered in its processes and practices, I do not go so far as to suggest that all systems of institutional management are discriminatory. To take the position that all management structures, be they old or new, favor one gender over another in systemic and systematic ways excludes any possibility of bringing about beneficial equity-enhancing reform in a bureaucratic arrangement. I am suggesting, however, that the past and current bureaucratic models that facilitate the daily functioning and ongoing operation of public education are in fact demonstrably gendered, reflecting a singular androcentric construction of administrative efficiency in the Anglo-Eurocentric sociopolitical and managerial context, also known as Weberian bureaucracy.

Before discussing the possibility of facilitating equity-enhancing change in the current (gendered) bureaucratic system of managing public schooling, I preface my comments with the following. First, I emphasize that perhaps it is not bureaucracy itself that is gendered, but rather it is more specifically the Weberian model of bureaucracy, founded on principles of industrial efficiency and large-scale institutional management that is systemically gender-biased. Second, given an appreciation of the context in which the current system for managing schools was originally constructed, we should be able to deconstruct the “errors” of the past while ensuring the retention of the essential systems for effective school management, facilitating the continued functioning of the present school system while initiating bureaucratic reforms. Last, it is the dominant (current) model of school administration that impedes the establishment of gender equity in public schools, not untried, newly proposed management structures. Of course, it is naïve to believe that we need only replace the current system with some new or untested alternative in order to secure equity and social justice in our schools. Initiating responsible change requires the inclusion of the current administrative infrastructures if only in part, while bureaucratic reforms are permitted to take hold, revealing their potentially beneficial and detrimental outcomes over time.

Suggesting that bureaucracy itself is not implicitly gendered, but rather that it has been (mis)construed as a gendered system, created and sustained by the politics of patriarchal parochial capitalist efficiency, opens up the possibility of bringing about stability-enhancing change without disrupting the human infrastructure in the public schools system. Britton (2000) suggests that Weber’s model bureaucracy does indeed offer the possibility for the promotion of equity and social justice in the workplace given certain administrative conditions.

Contrary to the underlying sentiment in this article and in the critical research connecting bureaucracy to forms of discriminatory practice, Britton (2000) suggests that equity in the workplace may be made possible via more bureaucracy, not less. The idea that reform-minded educators should actively promote the expansion of bureaucracy in public schooling may at first seem contradictory to the theoretical underpinnings of this article. However, extending and redefining the bureaucratic powers in existing institutions may in fact be the only viable means of replacing the current system. Removing the current public schooling bureaucratic system in its entirety and replacing it with a new management structure is arguably irresponsible insofar as such a proposition could not sufficiently account for the academic and social security of all those individuals who are currently invested in the system. Although radical systemic change is fundamental in the promotion of issues of social justice and equity in public schooling, alternatives to the current model for managing public schooling must adequately account for the needs of the present generation of students and teachers. To construct stability-enhancing radical change, reformers must account for a century-old administrative infrastructure and be sensitive to the infinitely complex sociopolitical (human) aspects of learning, personal growth, and schooling in the proposals for change.

In their discussion of educational reform, Ramsay and Parker (1992) refer to a bureaucratic alternative, a so-called neo-bureaucracy, that closely resembles the kind of stability-enhancing radical change supported in this article.

[Neo-bureaucracy] would be continually attempting to refuse the fixity of patriarchal and capitalist imperatives whilst recognizing the power of organized labor to bring wider social benefits. They [institutions] would recognize the functional imperatives of bureaucracy whilst refusing the definitions of [the same]. Thus there would be limited task specialization and acknowledged areas of expertise but would not imply that only experts or professionals have power over particular areas of the organization's activity. Individual ownership of successes would be replaced by an accent on teamwork and group achievement. Special roles would be replaced by negotiated allocations of personnel to cope with particular problems or opportunities. (pp. 269-270)

Other similarly positioned theoretical alternatives to the current model of bureaucracy include Skrtic's (1995) discussion of adhocracy, and Karlsen's (1999) views on decentralization for bringing about equity-enhancing change in the public schools system. Furthermore, Ramsay and Parker's (1992) notion of a more equitable bureaucratic model is consistent with Ferguson's (1984) foundational feminist critique of bureaucracy and the supposition that for bureaucracies to better reflect the needs of all persons, administrations need to promote the principles of power-sharing, decision-making through consensus, and staff participation.

However reasonable, equitable, or radical the proposed change, stability in the current education system would still be largely contingent on the support for the proposed changes in the very schools and communities affected. Some variation of Ramsay and Parker's (1992) neo-bureaucracy may represent the essential mix of the old with the new such that teachers and other key education stakeholders are willing to embrace the reforms, ensuring successful implementation and trial.

The process of successfully implementing a radical reconfiguration in the bureaucracy of power-sharing—belaying the promotion of equity and social justice through consensus-building—is neither linear nor finite. Rather, change that is sensitive to the unfolding ramifications of reform requires adaptability in the reform process itself. Furthermore, the promotion of successful bureaucratic change in public education will arise out of continual and inclusive critical dialogue, involving teachers, administrators, and all public education stakeholders. In addition, the reform process will require an ongoing commitment to the cyclic process of policy analysis, development, and implementation. Successful policy reform “is not just something that is done to people: it is essentially contested in its formation and implementation” (Bal & Bowe, 1991). Bal and Bowe's prescription for successful policy reform is consistent with the notion that effective school reform is contingent on a concerted “reflexive interaction between the attitudes and actions of educators and policy makers and the institutional practices within the school” (Hubbard & Datnow, 2000, p. 118).

Although this recipe for change may appear to lack radicalism in and of itself, it is a campaign of stability in a radical structural analysis. This article supports a proposal for change that is rooted in the identification of gendered

notions of inequity in the public schooling bureaucracy. The promotion of equity and social justice via a radically new approach to school management that is founded on a critical analysis of bureaucratic systemic imperatives, furthermore, offers an opportunity for the establishment of schools that are respectful of individuality, creativity, and multiple ways of knowing and learning. The hierarchical power-based system of management that is currently responsible for administering public education in schools throughout Canada is a model of bureaucratic efficiency that ignores the complexities of gender bias and does not sufficiently account for the individuality and diversity of teachers' and students' needs, particularly those persons who remain under-represented in the ranks of the dominant power-holding and decision-making offices of the public schooling bureaucracy.

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