

than with actual results.

### Women at the Top

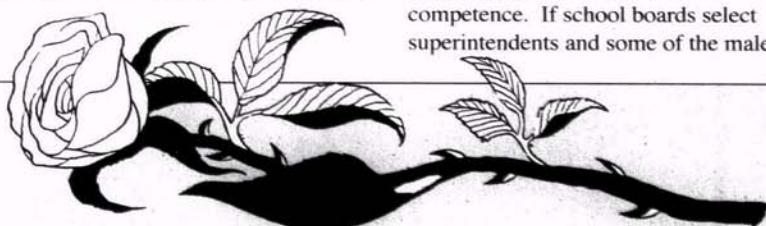
According to a survey by Gotwalt and Towns (1986), women who do become leaders in education tend to exhibit similar characteristics. They are usually from rural areas and small towns that have allowed them to build power bases and overcome stereotypes, and they are often first born or only children. Women administrators are more often married than not, and the majority have children. Women at all levels of administration are older than men in similar positions, are

more likely to be members of minority groups, and usually have more classroom experience.

These women at the top demonstrate that they know the unwritten rules about accepted behaviors and experiences that are rewarded in the system. Through organization and networking, women are beginning to ask the right questions and learn what they need to know about career advancement paths and leadership. They have identified successful leaders, studied where they have been,

and observed what they have done to get ahead. Then they set out with determination to ensure that they are given the opportunities to have the same types of experiences.

Surprisingly, they also try to gain access to membership in networks of influential men, because, in fact, a significant number of men have opened doors for women just as other men have closed them. Relationships are critical to advancement, and being recognized as a "member of the club" is as important as hard work and competence. If school boards select superintendents and some of the male



## In the Pink?

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**W**hen I was completing my university's undergraduate education curriculum, I witnessed something that would remain etched in my consciousness like a scar.

Judy, my supervising teacher, who was completing her administrator's certificate, was "taking over the fort" while the principal, soon to retire, interviewed prospective candidates for his position. Judy and I were at the photocopy machine when a poised woman in a pale gray suit arrived for an interview. Half an hour later, the woman emerged from the principal's office, smiling and confident that she had done well. Judy asked the principal his opinion of the candidate. She was very qualified, he replied, but she was wearing pink earrings. His wife wore pink earrings, and he didn't take any woman seriously if she wore them.

As we left the office, Judy confided that "pink earrings" was just another excuse for not hiring a woman for a man's job, that men didn't want women "up there" with them. That was 15 years ago . . . back when women were beginning to make inroads into the all-male enclave of educational administration.

I'd like to believe that times have changed — that men and women now work side by side in administrative positions; that men and women now mentor colleagues through programs of study or job searches; that men and women now network with one another without feeling that their same-sex bonding needs are being eroded; that men and women in positions of power now can recognize and value intuitive/nurturing capabilities and/or analytical/assertive qualities whenever and in whomever they see them, regardless of the sex of that person.

But I fear that the pink earrings

syndrome is still with us. Although women in educational administration are no longer an anomaly, their paths are often obscured by the same old obstacles: they are denied access to leadership positions by a well-established male network. They are not mentored. They are screened out of activities that encourage growth and teach competitive teamwork. They are underestimated, relegated to less important work, patronized. They are not taken seriously.

Leadership has many definitions, but it is most easily defined by what it is not. True leadership is not an individual decision to exclude many, but a commitment to include all in the effort to fulfill human potential. □

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