

Both sides of the desk: Conversations with women Vice-principals and high school young men.

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Introduction

The angle from within the high school office and among the voices of both students and administrators is compelling. It is here that gendered perceptions are shaped and reshaped. There is currently a considerable body of research that captures the polarity between communication patterns of men and women administrators. (see Shakeshaft & Perry, 1995) Unexamined and unexplained however are current perceptions of masculinities and femininities emerging from the exchanges between female administrators and male students.

Purpose/Objectives

This research centres on power arrangements and the careful orchestration of gendered relationships that support and allow women Vice-Principals as well as students, and specifically men, to make sense of “the social structures that are associated with control over or access to material resources, information, and knowledge” (Grogan, 1996, p. 30). By examining how and when gender identities are mediated between male students and female administrators, the research currently being conducted, has the potential to deepen understandings of being a woman Vice-Principal in addition to expanding research on high school masculinities.

Research methods

Drawing on qualitative research methods and specifically formal and informal interviews as well as observation techniques, this research centres on hearing the untold stories of high school young men and women vice-principals from behind the office door. It is the combination and complementary nature of these stories that provide a new perspective from which to hear and re-hear the dialogues between male students and administrators.

Expected outcomes

The various models of masculinities that parade before the Vice-Principal’s desk are awash with competing notions of what it means to be a man and how to express or display that. (see Connell, 1989; Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998; Epstein et al, 1998) Similarly the women behind these desks offer their own understandings of femininities and masculinities. The difficulty is in seeing and hearing the voices of each. This research attempts not only to create room for these stories to be told, but also to offer practical insight to the ways in which power is negotiated between both parties, Vice-Principals and high school young men. This research reveals the complexity of negotiating masculinities and femininities as they emerge within the context of a high school Vice-principal’s office. The research will highlight definitions of masculinity and femininity. In addition, this research will point to how and when men and women operate from within a gendered set of understandings in a high school setting.