



**Norma T. Mertz, ed.** *Breaking into the All-Male Club: Female Professors of Educational Administration*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2009. x + 203 pp. \$19.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-4384-2496-5.



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In *Breaking into the All-Male Club*, Norma T. Mertz has collected a group of life narratives by professors who were the first women to occupy faculty positions in departments of educational administration in the United States. Names gracing these pages include influential figures in educational administration, such as Barbara L. Jackson, Martha McCarthy, Nelda Cambron-McCabe, Diana G. Pounder, and Nona A. Prestine. This book gives the reader insight into the early years of their careers as the first women hired by their departments and the similar struggles that they faced.

Overall, *Breaking into the All-Male Club* is an important collection that contributes a great deal to feminist history and the history of education. The idea for the book grew out of the University Council for Educational Administration Task Force on Gender, when Mertz observed that the “voices of women who were pioneers in the field were missing, in spite of the fact that many of the

women who had broken into the club were present and active in the discussions” (p. vii).

While the history of teaching shows that it was originally a male profession, teaching slowly became feminized in the 1800s because of the increased demand for teachers as common schools grew across the United States.[1] By 1900, men had largely deserted teaching for more lucrative occupations. Therefore, with its low salaries, teaching became a predominantly female occupation. However, educational administrators, such as superintendents, remained male. Quoting Jackie M. Blount’s *Destined to Rule the Schools* (1998), Mertz states that, “School officials (i.e., lay boards) lauded the notion of paid male administrators who could monitor female teachers and keep them from getting out of line.”[2] Accordingly, the faculty in departments of educational administration at colleges and universities were also overwhelmingly male. Women began to be hired as faculty members in these departments of higher education only in the 1980s. As Mertz’s collection shows, some of these “female firsts” were the

first women hired by their departments between the 1980s and 1990s (p. vii).

This book is an attempt to chart the stories of these women. In her preface, Mertz narrates that several women asked to participate in the book project either never answered her request or were reluctant to tell their stories; indicating that the stories contained in this collection may represent only part of the picture of the history of women in the profession. Yet, in her collation of these narratives, Mertz emphasizes that every attempt was made to preserve the writer's tone or perspective. All editorial comments given to the contributors focused on the book's purpose, length of the manuscript, and issues of clarity and did not try to elicit particular ideological positions.

As a whole, these narratives offer portraits of brave, yet uncertain, personalities who found different ways into the profession. Some women found a warm welcome upon entering higher education, while others experienced a comparatively colder reception. Some, like Betty Malen, benefited from a great deal of support that helped her assimilate more easily into the professoriate. Malen says that she had had sixteen years of experience in K-12 education before she obtained her Ph.D. at the University of Minnesota and had fully intended to return to that once she had completed her doctorate. Her plans changed, however, upon the encouragement of her mentors, Van Mueller and Tim Mazzoni, who persuaded her to take up a position at the University of Utah. Malen notes that Mueller and Mazzoni "did not simply offer sage advice and tangible assistance" (p. 108). Rather, they both forged strong connections with Roald Campbell at the University of Utah to ease her transition, discussing with Campbell possible assignments and related arrangements that would work well both for her as a scholar and for the department as a whole. These efforts, Malen notes, "went well beyond conversations about

how to make 'the fit' as good as it could be" (p. 108).

In direct contrast to Malen's narrative, Diana G. Pounder's story is laced with a series of trying problems that she encountered at her first job, at an unnamed Research I institution in a southern state. Pounder recounts that at this institution, power was concentrated in the hands of three male senior faculty members, known in the program as "The Triumvirate." The opinions of junior faculty with respect to program decisions were politely listened to, but ultimately disregarded, to the point where "the more junior faculty joked that even department secretaries had more influence than assistant professors did" (p. 85). At the same time, Pounder found herself sexually harassed by a member of "The Triumvirate," experiencing frequent overt and crude sexual advances that she was unable to ward off. When she rebuffed these overtures, Pounder notes that the faculty member repeatedly tried to discredit her character and her professional record, calling her a "whore" in hallway conversations, and actively sabotaging her tenure and promotion case (p. 87). Pounder also observes that at the time she was undergoing these problems, in the mid to late 1980s, institutional structures had not been set up to allow her to address them. It did not occur to her to report her colleague's behavior to the dean, provost, or any other administrator. She worried that she might jeopardize her position by reporting this harassment, as "The Triumvirate" was going to have the most direct influence on her tenure decision.

Along with these divergences, there are also remarkable similarities among the narratives. A common motif among the stories is that these women did not explicitly plan for a career in higher education but found themselves encouraged into the position by persuasive mentors. Nona A. Prestine goes so far as to call herself "the accidental professor," after Anne Tyler's novel *The Accidental Tourist* (1986). Martha McCarthy

pronounces that she wishes that she could say that she “had a grand plan to become a university professor, but that is not the case,” and suggests that women ended up in their roles often because they did *not* have a systematic plan to achieve a career goal (p. 28). Several women, such as Nelda Cambron-McCabe, report that there was resistance to their being hired, especially if they were young and did not have any or much experience as administrators. They were cautioned that students might be unwilling to accord them proper respect as women had traditionally not filled these positions, and because of their inexperience. In other words, these narratives indicate that these women “accidentally” found their way into the profession because women were not expected to become professors of educational administration.

Many of these narratives also reveal comparable encounters with sexism. Some women report being asked if, as the sole woman faculty member in the department, they would be bringing food to meetings; many describe their surprise upon being introduced by their first names, as their junior male counterparts were presented as “Dr.” or “Professor.” More seriously, these first women also found that they were excluded from the “old boys’ club” in their departments because they were women. They were often left out of crucial networking opportunities because their colleagues feared that having lunch with them, or traveling with them, would arouse their wives’ suspicion. As a result, women found themselves alienated from their male colleagues and isolated within the department.

In addition, women who were associated with the department, but who were not faculty, often did not make it easy for these professors. Paula Myrick Short notes that one faculty wife energetically tried to get her to join the “spouse club,” for which she did not have the time and energy (p. 172). The faculty wife was incensed when Short turned down her overtures. In addition, Deborah

A. Verstegen relates that department secretaries, all female, often relegated the typing for female professors to the bottom of the pile and that one senior female professor told her confidentially that she now typed her own letters and other work. Verstegen also recalls how a department secretary once blurted out that if she, like Verstegen, had been born with a golden spoon in her mouth, she too would have been in Verstegen’s position.

Overwhelmingly, however, the women who had the most peaceful careers report that to “pick your battles” was the most effective strategy for success (p. 32). McCarthy recalls that she let remarks like the comment about bringing food to meetings pass but made it a point to question why she was asked to teach off campus more often than her male colleagues. As a result of her complaint, the department changed the teaching schedule. This indicates that while the system was changing to incorporate women, it found it difficult to tolerate those who would not, in Mertz’s words, “let things pass” (p. 72). Many narrators also assert that being on good terms both with secretaries and deans are also essential to one’s success, as is networking within the institution and the academy at large.

Ultimately, in the way that it problematizes gender as a unit of analysis in understanding educational history, this book is a simultaneous intervention into two fields: the history of educational administration and feminist history. By focusing on higher education, *Breaking into the All-Male Club* adds the dimension of college- and university-level politics to the history of educational administration. Books on gender and educational administration generally focus on K-12 practitioners, in particular, superintendents, such as C. Cryss’s Brunner’s *Principles of Power: Women Superintendents and the Riddle of the Heart* (2000), Mary Gardiner et al.’s *Coloring Outside the Lines: Mentoring Women into School Leadership* (2000), Lisa Smulyan’s *Balancing Acts: Women Principals*

at Work (2000), and Blount's already cited *Destined to Rule the Schools*.

*Breaking into the All-Male Club* also sheds light on the lived experiences of women in educational administration. Scholarly interest in this topic began to increase in the 1980s and 1990s but tended to concentrate on recommendations that women be hired either as educational administrators or faculty in departments of higher education. Examples of such contributions are: Adrian Tinsey et al.'s *Women in Higher Education Administration*, a special issue of the journal *New Directions in Higher Education* from 1983, Patricia Farrant's and Ron McClellan's *Strategies and Attitudes: Women in Educational Administration* (1986), Patricia Farrant's *Strategies and Attitudes: Women in Educational Administration* (1985), Carol Shakeshaft's *Women in Educational Administration* (1987), and Margaret Catherine Berry's *Women in Educational Administration: A Book of Readings* (1979). However, because of its focus on life narratives, *Breaking into the All-Male Club* is especially valuable for feminist historians who wish to study the growth of the discipline of educational administration from the perspective of feminist history.

One dimension that the collection lacks is the perspective of minority faculty and their entry into the "all-male club." There is only one minority faculty narrative in the collection--Barbara L. Jackson's story, the first entry in the book. Mertz shows, however, that she is aware of this and comments in her introduction that this exclusion, while regretful, is the result of few women of color actually being the "female firsts" in departments of educational administration. She recalls a remark by one of her contributors: "Women were threatening enough. To introduce gender and race at the same time may have been too big a leap for all-white, all-male departments" (pp. viii-ix). Another aspect that would have been useful to include would have been more global perspectives. The collection included the life narrative of one

international faculty member, Mary Gardiner, who originally grew up in Australia but moved to the United States for her career. It would have, however, been valuable for the collection to have an even larger international reach and include the experiences of women faculty members from a variety of other countries. This could, however, be an interesting follow-up to the present volume, given the development of research on gender and educational administration in international contexts.[3]

In essence, *Breaking Into the All Male Club* is a valuable contribution to the history of women in the teaching profession. It has provided a medium for the experiences of these women pioneers to be recorded. The similarity of their experiences, which document the constraints of being part of a minority group dominated by unspoken insider norms and behaviors, offers useful material to researchers who are interested in studying the history of gender in the discipline of education.

#### Notes

[1]. Jackie M. Blount, *Destined to Rule the Schools: Women and the Superintendency, 1873-1995* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

[2]. Quoted in Blount, *Destined to Rule the Schools*, 26.

[3]. See, for example, Izhar Oplatka's work on women in educational administration in developing countries, and that of British scholars working on similar subjects, such as Joyce Goodman and Sylvia Harrop. Izhar Oplatka, "Women in Educational Administration within Developing Countries: Towards a New International Research Agenda," *Journal of Educational Administration* 44, no. 6 (2006): 604-624; Joyce Goodman and Sylvia Harrop, *Women, Education Policy-Making and Administration in England: Authoritative Women since 1800* (London, Routledge: 2000).

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