

Advancing Women In Leadership

Female Leaders in Educational Administration: Sabotage within our Own Ranks

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Introduction

Professional women in Australia have an interesting term for what happens to talented and outspoken females who rise quickly in their fields. They call it the "tall poppy syndrome" because a poppy that grows higher than the rest often gets its head lopped off (Polley, 1996). Such a phenomenon also occurs with women who achieve success in the field of educational administration, "the blue flammers" (Funk, 2000), who rise quickly through the ranks but are often not supported and even sabotaged by other women who work with them. Many females in educational leadership positions in the United States experience a spectrum of types of negative treatment from female teachers to female superintendents that can be defined as horizontal violence--a term used here to describe the harm that some women do to other women in the educational workplace. An illustration of a non-supportive female, a Texas superintendent, was described by Skrla and Benestante (1998) who were spurned and summarily ignored by the female superintendent when they tried to give her brochures regarding the Texas Council of Women School Executives (TCWSE) at the annual superintendents' conference.

The three women sitting in the women administrators' organization's booth in the convention hall . . . noticed the nametag on the woman approaching them read "superintendent" . . . "Are you a member of our organization?". . . one called out. The woman did not answer; instead, she greeted a male superintendent standing

nearby, who wrapped his arm around her and pronounced, "Here is one of MY women." The woman superintendent smiled and returned the hug. The women in the booth tried again, saying . . . "You should pick up some of our literature; we'd love to have you join us." The woman superintendent looked at the women in the booth, but she made no move to take any of the organization's literature, nor did she reply. After exchanging small talk with the male superintendent for a few more minutes, she moved off down the aisle of the exhibit hall. (p. 57)

Based on their experience, Skrla and Benestante (1998) wrote a chapter, "Being Terminally Female: Denial of Sexism is no Protection Against its Effects" in the 1998 TCWSE monograph, entitled *Females as School Executives: Realizing the Vision*.

Purpose of the Paper

The purpose of this paper is to explore the nature, origin, and effects of horizontal violence, including dismissive, negative, demeaning, or hostile behavior of some women toward others who have assumed leadership roles in education. Although this phenomenon exists outside of the field of education, this paper will focus only on horizontal violence as it applies to females in educational leadership and its effects upon their behavior and the schools and districts they lead. A secondary purpose for the paper is to explore the effects of this horizontal violence on girls and young women within the schools that have female principals.

Horizontal Violence

The origin of the term, horizontal violence, is credited to Paulo Freire (1970), a champion of the poor and disenfranchised in South America, who explored the effects of oppression on minorities in his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Within his work, he proposed the use of horizontal violence as a term to indicate the curious behavior of members of oppressed groups who lash out at their peers in response to oppression instead of attacking their oppressors. Using Freire's concept of horizontal violence, minorities and other oppressed groups (women who live in a male-dominated society) rage internally because of their lack of power but take out their anger and violence on their oppressed peers (other women). According to Freire, the causal factor for this behavior is the powerlessness and impotence of the oppressed that would be severely punished if they attacked the powerful individuals who actually control their lives.

Having seen the usefulness of this new concept in working with people with little or no power themselves, Freire (1970) warned people who were trying to free themselves from oppression of the hidden danger that they could become 'sub-oppressors' and identify strongly with the those holding the power because the "oppressed find in their oppressors their 'model of humanhood'" (p. 30-31). Within this context, he explained that people who are oppressed have the following characteristics that lead them to punish others like themselves: they (a) are reluctant or unwilling to resist the oppressors, (b) have low self-esteem, (c) are self-deprecating, and (d) fear autonomy and responsibilities because of the possibility of retaliation or sanctions from their oppressors. Under these conditions,

Freire pointed out that the rage of the oppressed people reaches such levels that they attack their kin in order to reduce the pain of feeling powerless and devalued. In this paper, the term "horizontal violence" (a type of psychological displacement) will be applied to instances of female school administrators who lash out at other females rather than vent their internal anger toward the men who in effect have been their oppressors.

In this author's search for articles relating to horizontal violence, the first source found related to this phenomenon came from research in the nursing profession (Blanton & Lybecker, 1998). This predominantly female field had identified Freire's conceptualization as a descriptor for the female-to-female horizontal violence occurring between nurses in the workplace in order to begin to reduce the incidences of female horizontal violence in hospitals and clinics. Freire's theory applies to female nurses because male physicians and other specialists hold almost all of the power and authority in the medical field, while nurses are poorly paid and are subordinate to doctors in all situations. Given their lack of power and input in the profession of medicine, nurses typify an oppressed group as defined by Freire (1970). According to Blanton and Lybecker, instances of horizontal violence included backstabbing and sabotage among nurses that were so frequent that they began to seek causal factors and solutions to their problems. Their research led them to find and then apply Freire's horizontal violence concept to a critical issue in their professional lives. Blanton and Lybecker's (1990) position statement on horizontal violence reveals the types of behaviors that this nursing association categorizes as horizontal violence.

Horizontal violence is harmful behavior, via attitudes, words and other behaviors that are directed to us by another colleague. Horizontal violence controls, humiliates, denigrates or injures the dignity of another. Horizontal violence indicates a lack of mutual respect and value for the worth of the individual and denies another's fundamental human rights. (p. 1)

This author first learned about the concept of horizontal violence from a female Methodist minister who spoke to a master's class for women in education leadership. During the class, she discussed female-to-female harassment of women, especially successful women, and related the concept of horizontal violence to this behavior. The speaker's seminary training had included the sociological concept of Freire's work with minorities who were oppressed. In her presentation, she shared ways in which she had seen similar behavior in female-to-female interactions that mirrored the horizontal violence concept. This newly ordained minister of a mixed-race congregation told the class how this concept applied to women who often treated each other with disdain and disrespect.

After this female minister finished her presentation, the women in this leadership class shared their own personal stories. The stories revealed, not only non-supportive behavior from their female peers, but also outright sabotage from female secretaries, colleagues, bosses, and even friends. They also discussed parallel metaphors for horizontal violence, including crabs in the bucket that try to pull back those trying to escape, iron maidens who wage war on their female

assistants, and queen bees who keep every one below their own status.

Horizontal Violence in Educational Administration

Most women in educational administration have had barriers, both internal and external, that have made their obtaining administrative positions more difficult than for men. Schmuck (1986) found that 70% of female school administrators reported that they experienced obstacles to their careers simply because they were women, and 74% of these women reported having negative role models--half of whom were women. 57% said they were not part of a network of professional support, and only 17% declared that they did not need or want such support. After completing her research, Schmuck described a thread of anti-feminism that ran through the stories of the women in her study and concluded that some of the women in her research appeared to deny their femaleness, caring solely about themselves and their own careers.

The field of education administration certainly provided some surprises regarding horizontal violence for women beginning their careers in administration. As an example, Gupton and Slick (1996) discovered an "unexpected wrinkle" in a female high school principal's new job regarding other women when she revealed that:

I expected some of the faculty women to like me, and maybe even enjoy having a woman in leadership. . . . What a shock it was to find no loyalty and little support. . . . many of the teachers were . . . not inclined to accept leadership from a woman. And the women teachers were less inclined. (p. 5)

Gupton and Slick (1996) also found that female administrators, new to their jobs, expected varying types of resistance to their leadership from men but appeared blindsided by the antagonistic behavior of the other women toward them. Benton (1980) reported a related phenomenon and named it the "Queen Bee" syndrome--one that adds insult to injury in the plight of female administrators who seek support systems from within their own ranks. According to Benton, a queen bee is a woman in a position of power and authority who works at keeping other women out of leadership in order to protect her queenly status. Supporting the relationship of the queen bee to the concept of horizontal violence, Ginn (1989) concluded that the queen bee phenomenon was about power and noted that there was not enough of this precious commodity to go around. She also indicated that the concept of shared power seemed difficult to grasp for those not usually included in the power loop, resulting in this counterproductive attitudes among many underrepresented female administrators. Ginn's conclusions parallel those posited by Freire concerning the lack of power as an underlying cause for horizontal violence.

In Edson's research study (1988), a female aspirant described her view of the painful blow that occurred when an established female administrator failed to encourage female aspirants by stating, "My experience with female administrators

has not been positive. . . . From what I see, it's every woman for herself. The men help each other a lot more than the women do" (Edson, 1988, p. 76). She also noted, paradoxically, that many women in education find themselves drawing up battle lines instead of forming alliances. In addition, Edson pointed out that a decided concern among many of her respondents was the failure of female educators to support other female administrative applicants. The results of Edson's study revealed that, in spite of many women who were supportive of other women within her study, female aspirants were still concerned with the jealousy, competition, and lack of support shown them by other female educators. Because of these "worst detractors," a serious distrust of women in the field was reported. As one female educator noted:

I'm concerned about the harm that successful women do to other women in this district. The men are supportive; the women are jealous and sabotaging. Now that a few women have made it to higher levels, they seem to relish the opportunity to 'do in' other women. At least the men who were in power before were more innocent about it. (Edson, 1988, p. 249)

In a related vein, Shakeshaft (1995) stated that the complexities in female-to-female interactions in educational administration have not yet been made clear. She also reported that when she travels around the country and speaks with female administrative groups a common theme that has emerged from her audiences is the belief that women are their own worst enemies.

Despite considerable evidence to the contrary, the view that it is other women who keep women from advancing remains strong. Therefore, we need to examine why we cling to a "blame the woman" explanation, while ignoring or discarding what we know about female-to-female support systems and helping strategies. (Shakeshaft in Dunlap and Schmuck, 1995, xiii)

Categories of Supportive and Non-supportive Women

Shakeshaft's concern, acknowledging that some females were antagonistic toward their peers, could be explained by Matthews' (1995) research study regarding views of equity that female administrators hold regarding other female administrators. In this study, Matthews categorized four distinct points of view of female administrators regarding their peers. From the responses to interviews with female superintendents, assistant superintendents, high school principals, and assistant principals in her sample, she developed four categorizations that reflected differing views these respondents had of other women in administration.

The categories that emerged from the responses of Matthews' subjects were: (a) "activists" whose concerns are gender equity and the active support of women into educational administration; (b) "advocates" who support other women, belong to

female advocacy organizations, and believe that women bring unique strengths to school administration; (c) "isolates" who detach themselves from equity issues and do not believe that sex discrimination existed, was not worth worrying about, or was not even a problem; (d) and "individualists" who believe that the individual, female or male, took precedence over the group and did not believe in supporting or promoting women or taking action to correct the sexual imbalance in school leadership.

Using Matthews' categories, one can see that the first two categories, activists and advocates, have positive and supportive points of view with respect to other women in educational administration, while isolates and individualists hold views that result in diminishing the value of other female administrators, feeling detached from them, and believing that they were unworthy of their help. Matthews' conclusion would support the horizontal violence concept but also could explain the paradox of why certain women in educational leadership are supportive of their female colleagues while others are non-supportive.

In relation to horizontal violence, two categories of non-supportive women, isolates and individualists, deserve a closer look. According to Matthews (1995), isolates identified in her study were detached from issues of sex equity, were treated as tokens in their workplaces, took pride in being the "only woman," and cherished the opportunity to speak from "the woman's point of view." As two isolates in Matthews' (1995) study stated:

I am not one to really push the women's thing and I guess it's because I have always felt I could do whatever I wanted, it didn't make any difference, and I just assumed that everyone else could, too. I just haven't had the time and the energy to fight for other women or for their opportunities either... [The second respondent stated] I'm not a real strong women's lib person. I guess I feel like if you've got the credential and you've got the experience and can project that, you can get a job. And if you're not confident, then you shouldn't get it. (p. 259)

In contrast to the individuals that Matthews classified as isolates, the individualists appeared to be more concerned with the attributes of individuals, male and female, and not with the cause of sex equity in school administration. The responses of individualists, however, revealed a theme running through many of their comments--the fear of alienating men although they have, in reality, alienated themselves from other women. The voice of an individualist below clearly reveals this point of view:

I have a lot of good feelings about the way I came into where I am. It makes me feel good in many ways that someone else kept saying, "You have the capabilities, you have the features that we want, you have the things that we need". (p. 259)

Another individualist tells an even more revealing story about her views of other women:

I was into my master's program for a year, the second year it became the 'in' thing

for
women to get into administration. All of a sudden . . . there were all these women.
And I
know the guys used to protect me and said, "You were here first. They're just
jumping onto
the bandwagon." There were so many of them that just didn't belong. They haven't
got the
patience for it; they haven't got the personality; they haven't got the guts. Some of
the gals
were in there just because they were women. (p. 259-260)

Then she stated the attributes that she believed made her right for the job:

I am kind of a unique woman in that I have never let the 'different sex' stop me. I
have
always teased: I could out-drink, out-smoke, and out-swear any of the guys I
needed or had
to. And I find it a compliment that they consider me one of the guys. (p. 260)

Matthews' (1995) typologies of females in educational administration provides a
credible explanation for horizontal violence between female school leaders by
revealing the characteristics of isolates and individualists and identifying their
motives for anti-female behavior. According to this author, isolates obtained their
positions with a high degree of district support (the highest of the four groups) and
denied having experienced any type of gender discrimination. They are
characterized by their 'token' status and are oblivious to any discrimination in their
work area. These women appear to have no vocabulary or conceptual framework
within which to categorize instances of discrimination as such. Men, however, have
recruited these individualists into school administration, and their mentees have a
fear of alienating the men (their former and present mentors) who allow them to
share some of their power. When viewing other women coming into school
leadership positions, they see them as threats (especially those who want to "rock
the boat" when they enter the established male system). Their perceptions are
based solely on the male point of view, and these individuals see men as the source
of authority.

Individualists who have been mentored into the system by males often remain
wards of their mentors and remain permanent protégés with no individual power
without their men. Because they were favored by males and continue to have their
support (but at a high cost), these women cannot understand why other women
say that they have experienced some type of discrimination when trying to enter
the field of educational administration.

According to Matthews (1995), profiles of isolates and individualists also showed
that these female administrators alienate themselves from other women, internalize
the male voice as the external voice of authority, and deny the frustrations and
experiences of other women who enter the field of school administration. Isolates
enjoy being the token females and getting the special attention they enjoy in this

role, while individualists resent the women who advocate for gender equity and are highly opposed to separate advocacy organizations for female administrators. In doing so, however, they devalue their own identities and discount their own unique experiences as women. As Matthews (1995) noted, individualists see the world through a male prism, and she believes that these women who see their own experiences through male eyes, distance themselves from other women. Her insightful conclusions prove that women do speak in different voices. She also provided explanations for their behavior, noting that career patterns and sources of support may be two of the reasons why some women in administration view gender equity issues quite differently.

In contrast to the isolates and individualists, female activists and advocates serve as agents for change and are strong supporters of other women because of the unique strengths that they bring to schools and districts (Matthews, 1995). Supporting Matthews' (1995) categorization of women who are individualists, Schmuck and Schubert (1995) explained that some female principals must decide whether or not to join a women's administrative group, but view this move as possible political suicide, while noting that others take a more sanguine view and enjoy the support and advice they receive after they become members of such associations. They are afraid, however, to splinter off from men (who hold the power). As these authors noted, "Politically, and personally, women administrators are torn between being segregated into a culture of women and being integrated into a culture of men" (p. 282).

Bell (1995) supported the causes of this cultural dilemma, stating that women in school administration are in the unusual position of having one foot in each camp--being members of a majority (women in education) as well as members of the few (women school leaders). She also revealed that the positions that females hold in educational leadership places them on the fringes of groups of teachers and administrators, implying that they do not belong to either or to both. Based on her research, Bell concluded that experiences of females in school administration "encompass both authority and influence as leaders, and isolation as women in a male-dominated occupation" (p. 289). In a similar vein, Kanter (1993) wrote that the effectiveness of women leaders is a response to opportunities and to favorable positions in the power structure and that men and women are able to exercise their authority more effectively when they have power. From these related research studies, it appears that the hidden agenda underlying horizontal violence between female administrators is power. Horizontal violence appears to exist when female leaders realize that they have little or no power, except that given to them by men, and they try to appear powerful by "lording it over" other females.

Funk (2000) summarized the feelings of female administrators, isolates and individualists, who want to remain the "Queen Bees" or have adopted the mannerisms, values, and issues of the male administrators, thereby perpetuating horizontal violence.

- I am in the spotlight as the only female administrator! I do not want to share.
- These jobs are so scarce that I will do whatever I have to do to undermine other

female applicants.

- I am fearful that if I act feminine in my administrative role that they will not accept me!
- I do not think that she earned her promotion.
- She seems so competent! I feel unworthy and incompetent!
- I made it without extra help! Why in the world would I help her?
- I do not want to have anything to do with the professional association for female administrators. As a female superintendent, joining this association would be the "kiss of death" with my male colleagues.

Dissociation from Female Identity

Dissociation and denial of certain female administrators regarding their own personal histories of sex discrimination led to another source of horizontal violence. Crosby (1984) spoke to the anti-feminist attitudes among some women who have perplexed researchers in the field of women in educational administration. These women stated that they have never experienced gender bias nor discrimination, thereby supporting the fact that they are in denial regarding instances of their own experiences with discrimination and thereby dissociate themselves from other women. Giving support to Crosby's work, Schmuck (1995) also described her research that revealed that some women in educational leadership deny any discrimination against themselves, see themselves as exceptions to the rule, argue that they are not like other women, and state vehemently that they have never been victims of sex or gender discrimination.

As they dissociate themselves from their female identity, they remain self-oriented and tend not to identify with other women but rather with those who are the gatekeepers of the profession. They often do not provide support for girls or women and ignore issues of gender equity. Rather than offering a different voice, they perpetuate the status quo. (Schmuck, 1996, p. ix)

The dissociation between non-supportive females, isolates and individualists, creates significant negative consequences for experienced female school administrators as well as those entering the profession because of the negative impact that non-supportive women can have on their advancement or entry into educational administration. These women administrators, however, pay a high price for the benefits they receive from males--the loss of their "voice" and the inability to be themselves. In relation to this dilemma, Matthews (1995) posed the question, "What is the price of being co-opted by men?" (p. 261). Smith (1975) responded:

We have difficulty in asserting authority for ourselves. We have difficulty in grasping authority for women's voices and for what women have to say. We are thus deprived of the

essential basis for developing among ourselves the discourse out of which symbolic structures, concepts, images, and knowledge might develop which would be adequate to our experience and to deviating forms of organization and action relevant to our situation and interests. In participating in the world of ideas as object rather than as subject we have come to take for granted that our thinking is to be authorized by an external source of authority. (p. 365)

The "price" paid by women is also described by Matthews (1995):

The very thing that these women are striving to achieve—"working and making the right impression and not being any different from anybody else"--point to the very thing that is lost: Their unique experiences as women and the values and beliefs that accompany that experience. (p. 262)

Horizontal Violence and Gender Inequity

Non-supportive female administrators often do not provide support for girls or women and ignore issues of gender equity. Rather than offering a different voice, they perpetuate the status quo. (Schmuck, 1996, p. ix)

Given the female-to-female horizontal violence that continues to exist for women in educational administration, Schmuck identified a hidden or at least unspoken area of female-to-female horizontal violence--the lack of support from female administrators, particularly principals, in making sorely needed changes in the academic, social, and cultural barriers that exist for female students in the nation's schools. Questions that arise include regarding gender equity are: (a) Do the effects of horizontal violence affect the attention that female principals give to equity policies and practices in schools? (b) Are schools with female principals still failing in fairness to girls and young women in their schools? (c) Are aspiring female administrators learning about gender inequities in their preparation programs and making the necessary changes to level the playing field for girls and open their lives to opportunities yet unavailable to many girls in schools today? (d) Are boys still being called upon more often, given more critical feedback, given cues to questions, and provided with more praise in the nation's schools (and universities)? (e) What are the necessary changes that need to be made in curriculum, delivery systems, counseling practices, leadership role availability, etc. that would make a paradigm shift in the lives and self-worth of girls and young women in schools and universities?

In response to such questions, Schmuck and Schubert (1995) designed a research study to test Adkison's (1981) prediction that women who have personally

experienced institutional discrimination would be more sensitive to bias, serve as strong advocates for change, and shape local practice toward greater sex equity for employees and students. The overall purpose of this study was to determine whether or not the women who had become school administrators since 1981 have now become equity advocates and active proponents of shaping local school board policies and practices toward greater gender equity for students. The researchers chose nineteen female principals from three states who agreed to participate in their study to determine their attitudes toward gender equity in their schools. The results of this research indicated that female administrators had made few if any changes in their schools regarding gender equity following the 1980s. In their sample, Schmuck and Schubert (1995) found that none of the female principals, when asked to describe an important policy or practice for which they were responsible, gave an example of gender equity, and only four of the principals addressed any continuing and concerted school-wide efforts to address either student gender or racial inequities. The majority of these principals also reported that they had experienced no discrimination as a female while seeking the principalship. Although these female principals reported some differential treatment they experienced in schools, they failed to label this behavior as discrimination. Two of the nineteen women gave examples of sex discrimination, but neither of them gave a strong response nor provided evidence of promoting gender equity in their schools.

As Schmuck and Schubert (1995) described their surprising research results, they concluded that "changing the gender representation of principals will not, alone, change equity practices in schools" (p. 285). These researchers also determined that female principals appear to adopt the prevailing norms of the male administrative school culture, ignore issues of equity, and are unable to translate their own personal experiences into administrative action to ensure that gender equity exists for their students or their employees. Noting that these principals appear to disassociate from their own individual experiences and feel that their personal experiences are simply idiosyncratic, Schmuck and Schubert (1995) concluded that these women "fail to comprehend the more fundamental concept of how gender serves as a segregating factor in the culture of educational institutions" (p. 285). The following conclusion made by this research team should give all female principals reasons to take heed when considering the negative ramifications of their research.

Although we applaud continuing efforts to reach gender equity in administration and believe women have successfully demonstrated their administrative competence, we cannot presume because a woman is in charge, challenges to inequity will be made. We must continue to educate female and male educators about inequality through the universities and professional associations. Women's professional associations, especially, have taken too narrow a view; they should provide a more comprehensive and critical view of how our schools perpetuate inequality. (Schmuck & Schubert, 1995, p. 285)

Summary and Recommendations

The curse of horizontal violence remains a hidden issue for females in educational leadership, as it is with other minorities who are members of oppressed groups and lack sufficient power because of their lack of genuine status in their organizations. If it is difficult for some women to believe that women in school leadership are members of an oppressed group, the existence of the phenomenon of female-to-female horizontal violence should give some credence to the differing types of status that women hold in educational settings. Using the concept of horizontal violence provides an explanation of research results regarding the harm that some women do to others, thereby indicating that many female educational leaders dissociate to some degree in order to survive in often tenuous positions within school districts where men are still the providers of the power. In addition, some female administrators who are successful feel that the problem of gender discrimination in the field of education has already been solved and does not merit any more attention.

Women in educational administration, however, will not be rid of this destructive behavior until equity for females is achieved in most areas of their lives. Until this time, female school leaders must be aware of the phenomenon of horizontal violence and not let it deceive or coerce them to practice this "dark art," causing damage to the girls and young women in the schools. The first step to change is the awareness of the concept of horizontal violence between females in educational settings that stalls the progress needed to allow women and girls to be the best they can be. Bringing this behavior out in the open, teaching about it in the professional programs for female and male administrators, spreading the word to female administrators who could provide needed support to their female peers, and making changes in schools that will promote and eventually achieve gender equity for all of our students.

Feminine principles are entering the public realm because we can no longer afford to restrict them to the private domestic sphere, nor allow a public culture obsessed with Warrior values to control human destiny. (Helgesen, 1990, p. 255.)

Recommendations

Steps that might prove to be catalysts in this change effort include the following.

- More research is needed regarding the phenomenon of horizontal violence and its negative impact on female administrators and female school students.
- Women and girls should become aware of the existence of horizontal violence and work together to understand this phenomenon, the psychological reasons behind female-to-female discrimination, and the powerful messages that such behavior has on others. Allowing horizontal violence to continue will slow the progress of women and result in inequitable treatment that will not allow them to become equal members in our society.
- Women in administration should strive to enrich their schools and workplaces with qualities of female leadership that enrich schooling: Collaboration, Caring, Courage, Intuition, and Vision (Regan, 1995) instead of using the methods of male administrators.
- Females in administration should become aware of and acknowledge sexism and

gender discrimination and strive to eliminate it. They should also work together to change the existing cultures in education by drawing on their female strengths (Skrla & Benestante, 1998).

- Preparation programs for educational administrators should include knowledge, skills, and appreciation for equity issues within our public and private schools.
- In-service and aspiring female principals should educate themselves in specifics regarding the most critical inequities in their schools and develop strategies that will provide girls and young women (and boys and young men) with gender equality through the total school curriculum.
- In-service female administrators at all levels should show the courage and strength necessary to take the risks to "make a difference" by challenging the status quo, ensuring that schools become places of acceptance and intellectual stimulation for girls and young women.

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