Guerrillas in the Mi(d)st:

A Study of Discreet Dissension Among Administrators in Academe


Department of Graduate and Undergraduate Studies in Education

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education

Faculty of Education, Brock University

St. Catharines, Ontario

© Sandra Plavinskis 2006
Abstract

This qualitative study examines the phenomenon of discreet dissension in the administration of academe through literature review and the focused reflections of retired, senior administrators of postsecondary institutions in Ontario. Discretionary decision making is a large component of senior administrative positions. At times, senior administrators use their discretion to engage in institutionally endorsed behaviour to fulfill institutionally sanctioned objectives. At other times, senior administrators use their discretion to engage in dissenting courses of action, contrary to the prescribed and codified policies, procedures, and norms of the institution in order to achieve institutionally endorsed objectives and/or to achieve objectives congruent with individual values. Discreet dissension emerges as an administrative activity for further investigation, enhancing the understanding of the art of administration.
Acknowledgements

Dr. Michael Manley-Casimir, gentleman and scholar, has been the inspiration and patient supervisor of this research. He is a seasoned educational administrator and respected scholar whose experience, candor, humane practice, and wit have been relentlessly exploited by this researcher. I have shamelessly taken far more treasures from him than I might ever hope to return. Graciously, somehow, he seems not to have noticed.

To the members of my committee, Dr. Bond and Dr. Neufeld, I thank you for sharing your wisdom and your expertise.

I also tip my hat to my beloved Antons Plavinskis and Bob Cripps who were lost in the course of this work.

I thank my mother for having taught me that discretion is, indeed, the better part of valor.

I extend a note of thanks to the friends among my colleagues who smiled patiently and nodded kindly as I described, frequently and in great detail, what it was like to be the only person in the history of the world who has ever had to transcribe audio data.

To my devoted husband, your dancing partner is back and ready to tango.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ...................................................................................................................... ii  
Acknowledgements ................................................................................................... iii  
List of Tables .............................................................................................................. vi  

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY .................................................... 1  
   Definition of Terms ................................................................................................. 2  
   Background of the Problem ..................................................................................... 9  
   Statement of the Problem ....................................................................................... 11  
   Purpose of the Study ............................................................................................... 12  
   Questions to be Answered ....................................................................................... 14  
   Rationale for the Study ........................................................................................... 14  
   Scope and Limitations of the Study ....................................................................... 16  
   Organization of the Thesis ...................................................................................... 22  

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ....................................................... 24  
   Traditional Administrative Theory ......................................................................... 26  
   Contemporary Administrative Theory ...................................................................... 27  
   Guerrilla Typologies ............................................................................................... 29  
   Rule Adherence and Discretion ............................................................................. 33  
   Dissenter Typologies .............................................................................................. 37  
   Dissension and Power ............................................................................................ 41  
   Discretion .............................................................................................................. 48  

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS AND PROCEDURES ............................................... 52  
   Participants ............................................................................................................ 54  
   Method ................................................................................................................... 56  
   Coding .................................................................................................................... 59  

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS ...................................................................................... 65  
   Capacity for Discretion in Senior Administrative Role .......................................... 65  
   Level of Engagement in Discreet Dissension ....................................................... 68  
   Role Satisfaction/Fondness for Institution ............................................................ 71  
   Value Alignment .................................................................................................... 73  
   Consideration of Risk ............................................................................................ 76  
   Consultation with Others in Decision Making; Isolation ....................................... 78  
   Formal Preparation for Senior Administrative Role ........................................... 80  
   Underlying Themes ............................................................................................... 82  

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICITATIONS ......................... 85  
   Implications for Future Research .......................................................................... 90  
   Conclusions ............................................................................................................ 92  

iv
REFERENCES ................................................................. 97
Appendix A: Interview Guide ........................................... 101
Appendix B: Brock University Ethics Approval .................... 103
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Coding Grid – Major Themes</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Coding Grid – Underlying Themes</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Senior academic administrators in service to their organizations are expected to uphold the norms, customs, conventions, mandates, policies, and standard operating procedures of their respective institutions. There are moments in every career of service in which the values of individual administrators are contrary to the values embodied in those same institutional customs, conventions, mandates, policies, and procedures. The traditional response, as demanded by the institution, is to align or perhaps even forsake the individuals’ values and enact the protocol of the organization. While the consequence of this behaviour appears to strengthen the organization, it also has the potential to strengthen the culture of the organization in which conformity, compromise, and mediocrity may become maladaptations to reform, growth, and change.

Yet, there are times when humane administrators assert their will and resolve to use their discretion to act in dissension, rather than deference to the expectations of the organization. In doing so, administrators act against their prescribed roles and institutional expectations, quietly and often secretly causing reforms which may have profound effect upon the membership and very idea of the organization. This administrative activity, this discreet dissension, is worthy of investigation.

This qualitative research study examines the phenomenon of discreet dissension in the administration of academe. Discreet dissension is explored by means of a review of literature and through the focused reflections of retired, senior administrators of postsecondary institutions in Ontario. These retirees shared their stories of their trials and tribulations as senior administrators within academic institutions. In providing their
accounts of their lived experiences and their uses of discretion, they have contributed to our understanding of the complexity and humanity of administrative service in academe.

**Definition of Terms**

The administrator is defined as the individual holding formal office within an organization having prescribed responsibilities over material, financial, and human resources to be directed according to institutional mandates. The Latin root *administrare* may be literally defined *to serve*.

At senior levels, academic administrators are the elite cadre that enable, shape, and direct the energies of hundreds, if not thousands, of people in institutions of higher learning. Many of the decisions they make have profound and often lasting influence on every echelon of their institutions, within and beyond the campuses. Theirs are offices of tremendous responsibility and accountability within public institutions, having hierarchical structures and complex bureaucratic forms in service to, "(1) man’s insatiable desire to know and (2) society’s need for advanced knowledge and skilled manpower" (Ross, 1976, p. 4). These are offices of significant power which are often limited in duration to years of service with or without options of renewal. Accountability is high, as ambitious and broad mandates accompany the offices; but supervision is low, enabling senior administrators the freedom to achieve mandates largely according to their own discretion, within tolerable legal, social, and organizational contexts within and beyond the institution.

Discretion refers to the open spaces between boundaries of policies, procedures, and conventions in which administrators have latitude in the interpretation and application of the rules that define their institutional roles. It is within this latitude that
choices and decisions are made. As Manley-Casimir (1990) describes, "Discretion and its exercise is what we need to understand if we are to come to terms with administrative behaviour; it is, in effect, the calculus of decision-making" (p. 4).

At times, administrators make decisions between prescribed avenues where they are evident. A choice is made between available options. Discretion also holds meaning in terms of discerning between variables. A discerning palate, for example, is the hallmark of the gourmet. Discretion becomes the judgment and intentioned determination of value or worth: a ranking of preferences. However, more often, discretion is required in order to determine innovations to action where prescribed avenues do not exist or are inadequate to address an issue or circumstance.

Discretion to make decisions is not entirely without controls. Rather, discretion is possible only because of the acknowledged existence of legal, political, social, moral, and other constraints. Discretion becomes a moment or opportunity in which an individual can make a subjective decision, grounded in the moral and situational context of the individual decision-maker.

That is not to say that all discretionary decisions are entirely unique or unpredictable and wholly dependent upon the personality, context, and capacity of the decision-maker. Baumgartner (1992) explains that there are variables which influence and add a degree of predictability to discretionary decision making. "More concretely, people differ in such matters as their age, sex, wealth, education, group memberships, personal networks, ethnicity, religion and respectability. All of these influence the exercise of discretion in predictable ways" (p. 129).
If such variables may be indicators of how discretion may be exercised, then it is noteworthy to mention a descriptive profile of Chief Academic Officers of American colleges and universities which was generated in 1984. While this is descriptive of senior academic administrators of American institutions, it may have import in the Canadian context.

According to Allen, a typical CAO was a Caucasian male in his late 40s or early 50s, articulate, well-read, and "usually rather good-looking". He held an academic-discipline doctorate, although sometimes in higher-education administration, and continued to do limited instruction, advisement and research. He rose to the CAO position through a career path of professor, department chair and dean. While he still occasionally attended his academic discipline's conventions and perhaps even presented a paper, for the most part his job made it increasingly difficult to continue his research, and his focus was shifting to administration. (Walton & McDade, 2001, p. 87)

Is this the descriptive profile of the Canadian senior academic administrator? A comparable descriptive profile was not located, if one exists. It is left to the gentle reader to look around the halls of their academy for anecdotal evidence. If such a profile is indicative of a cadre of academic administrators, then Baumgartner (1992) would likely suggest that theirs is a cadre that utilizes discretion in similar, if not homogeneous, ways.

This is an important consideration as any examination of uses of discretion must consider not only the office of the administrator, and not only the individual human being who attends that administrative office, but also the context in which they are making decisions.
Typically, the higher in the administrative hierarchy a position is posited, the greater the discretion in decision making formally permitted or tolerated. For example, a clerk in a lower level administrative position would have a defined job description including but not limited to the salutation to be used in answering the telephone. Senior administrative positions are provided much more discretion, particularly in terms of position descriptions which are typically ethereal in their prose of missions and goals, rather than itemized to-do lists.

Even this definition of discretion in relation to position within the organizational hierarchy is problematic, however, as there is a distinction which must be made between discretion prescribed by institutions and discretion claimed by individuals. Lipsky’s (1980) research on the activities of those he describes as “street-level bureaucrats” (p. 3) contributes the notion that even low-level employees working in highly regulated and supervised contexts exercise levels of discretion to fulfill their roles. Consider, for example, the receptionist who functions as gatekeeper to a manager, exercising discretion in determining who can and cannot have access to the manager. This kind of discretion may have powerful consequences for the members of the organization as access to management also equates to management access to information from the front lines. The kind of information that the receptionist would permit to reach the manager is precisely the information the manager would depend on to make reasonable discretionary decisions of his own. Lipsky determines that, at its best, discretion is used by frontline workers in order to encourage autonomy of client groups and influence over institutional policies, promote organizational change and improve service to, and participation of, client groups at the grassroots levels of organizations (p. 193).
Zimmerman (1970), in his study of intake receptionists in a public assistance office, examined the discretion or judgmental work engaged by these frontline workers. The receptionists were interested in preserving the temporal pacing and replication of work which, in this particular study, equated to maintaining the flow of clients through the intake process.

Such an orientation requires judgmental work on the part of the receptionists in the use of procedures to effect such results, since contingent circumstances may sometimes render the literal use of such rules inappropriate, that is, the actions that could ordinarily be reconciled with the literal use would lead to "trouble"—potential or actual. (p. 234)

This sensibility manifested in the receptionists' occasional suspension of the task structure at hand, deviation from a prescribed temporal sequence of process, dealing with issues on a case by case basis, determining out of the ordinary (and in some cases covert) actions for special cases, and, otherwise, "employing judgments based upon their understanding of the features of the actual situation of use and the practicalities of action in the setting" (Zimmerman, 1970, p. 230), in the interests of reasonable, practical rule use which would accomplish their work.

Discretion, then, is not merely a role limited to senior administrators, though they are the focus of this research.

It is necessary to examine the discreet within the word discretion. To be discreet holds the meaning that one is unobtrusive, cautious, and prudent, particularly in the keeping of secrets. In common parlance, one exercises discretion in keeping confidences and knowledge of behaviours which are contrary to social norms, as in discreet love
affairs. The decision to be discreet is motivated by the intent to protect the actor and/or those with knowledge of the behaviour. Discretion may also be impelled by humility and modesty. For instance, one may be discreet in discussing salaries or accomplishments.

Discrete, on the other hand refers to the singular, the isolated, the distinct and unconnected as a discrete variable of study. Indeed the administrator works in the realm of the discrete as each case, each situation, presents itself uniquely to each unique administrator.

Dissension is the intentioned disregard or subjugation of the literal meaning and/or spirit of a policy, procedure, precedent, convention, or custom. Dissension may be subtle or dramatic in its execution and consequence. It is, in effect, a nay-saying to preexisting conventions, rules or policies. More than a negation, dissension may simultaneously be an affirmation of higher order institutional or personal morality. Zimmerman (1970) describes this as an element of competent rule use, involving,

...judgmental work providing for the reasonableness of viewing particular actions as essentially satisfying the provisions of the rule, even though the action may contrast with invocable precedent, with members' idealized versions of what kinds of acts are called for by the rule, or with the sociologists' ideas concerning the behavioural acts prescribed or proscribed by the rule. (p. 238)

As discretion may be an act of self-actualization, so too can dissension be an act of self-actualization. Dissension can be the assertion of the self over the systemic, providing evidence of the dominion and primacy of the self over the idea of the institution.
Discreet dissension, therefore, refers to the considered, clandestine, and effective digression from the literal script or institutional dialogue between administrators and their institutionally prescribed roles. Discreet dissension occurs when administrators use the authority and resources afforded them by their organization in ways other than those expressly or implicitly expected by the organization. The exercise of dissension must often be discreet as it exists in tandem with a level of risk to actors and subjects. When dissension is clandestine, the risk of precedent-setting is alleviated, permitting the administrator further discretion in dealing with situations on a case by case basis.

For example, when a receptionist creates an extraordinary (beyond literal rule adherent) arrangement, care is made to do so covertly and conceal the arrangement, whatever it may be.

The provisions made are to them “unofficial”, that is, not sufficient as a warrant or justification for their actions outside of the reception process itself. However, in terms of the practical concerns of receptionists with getting their job done and preserving the sense of their accomplishment as a job well done, they by their decision to employ “unofficial” considerations in dealing with the exigent circumstances provide for the possibility of a recognizedly routine processing of cases. (Zimmerman, 1970, p. 236)

This behaviour is certainly not limited to receptionists. The capacity for discreet dissent exists in every profession and will be examined within the context of senior academic administration in this study. Discreet dissension is an administrative skill which has received limited attention in traditional administrative research and instructive literature.
Reflective administrators are those who apply a critical gaze to the performance of their duties as a consequence and extension of their self-concept as professionals and as human beings. The humane administrator is one who recognizes the self-concept of self and others in action. Within the idea of the humane is the notion of bringing the least possible degree of pain to others in encounters with them. Reflective, humane administrators are attuned to their own identities and those of others beyond their existence as mere agents of the institution. Ideally, these administrators have developed a maturity in their moral development and understanding through their lived experiences and processes of reflection.

**Background of the Problem**

The problem begins in recognizing the individual within the office of administrator. As scientific inquiry demands an object for cross-section, dissection, and vivisection, the organization qua organization is permitted to grow in its complexity and density until it becomes a thing in itself. The scientific lens has created the objects of organizations, systems, and offices for study, removed by intention and design from the humanity entwined through them. This legacy reverberates in language of administrative scholarship.

That same objectification can be applied to administrative posts. We can conceptualize the Job, the Office, the Function of the Administrator, the Manager, the Leader, the Bureaucrat, the Chair, and the Vice President. More importantly, we must begin to describe and conceptualize the Human Being self-actualizing through administrative practice. There is a need to seek out the narratives of the individuals: those who administrate, regulate, organize, lead, motivate, and stabilize through their
identities in life, not just through the roles they adopt by professional designation. Those for whom the work is an embodiment and expression of values, not just a job; those are the most valuable participants for inquiry as they may lead us to a new understanding of humane administration through the expression, however clandestine, of their values. In understanding some measure of the individuals through their reports of uses of discretion in particular contexts, we may understand what it means to serve humanely.

These ideas are of particular interest to me as a researcher and also as a junior-level administrator. As I look to enhancing my own practice, I wonder whether I am possessed of an administrative character. I held no particular aspirations to become an administrator. I was an educator first, yet, academic administration has become a passion. I have yet to determine whether my entry into academic administration is an incidental/accidental happenstance or an eventuality. I must reconcile the notion that some of the most meaningful, rewarding, and satisfying work I have accomplished has been the result of using my discretion, beyond my formal job description. I have been witness to and participated in discretionary decision making which has, in particular circumstances, led to discreet dissension from the literal application of rules in the interests of serving values of justice and fairness which existing policies and procedures could not accomplish. Anecdotally, I know I am not alone. It is necessary to determine whether other administrators considered the same issues, engaged their discretion in similar ways, and asked the same kinds of questions when they found themselves in administrative positions. There is a need to explore who these people are and how they came to be academic administrators. Were they accidental or reluctant administrators or had they designed and intended paths to such service? How did they use their discretion
in the course of their work and, if that discretion led to some form of dissension, how did
they act in particular contexts? These questions formed the background of this inquiry.

Statement of the Problem

The literature in administrative studies demonstrates that the effective
administrator is one who promotes conformity through the promotion of rules as the path
to achieving an organization’s goals. However, conformity and standardization are often
maladaptations which prevent the growth and development of that same organization,
contra to its explicit goals. There is a need to examine discreet dissension as an impetus
to propelling the growth and development of institutional and human endeavor. It
requires scholarly development within the literature of academic administration and
recognition of its potency and potential in practical day-to-day administrative practice.
Without academic and practical enquiry, we would neither recognize discreet dissension
when we next encounter it, nor would our understanding of it be complete. Further,
aspiring administrators would not necessarily recognize it as a tool, strategy, or valid
means of accomplishing institutional or personal goals.

Traditional administrative theory does not address this phenomenon, which is
problematic for the scholarship of academic administration. Discreet dissension remains
largely unresearched and attempts to offer instruction to novice or aspiring administrators
in its humane use are limited. Yet, discreet dissension is an expression of power and
would add to the understanding of the moral complexity of being an administrator within
academe.

Practically, discreet dissension demands attention as the complexities of real life
administration in any institution may require its activation as a tool used by the humane
administrator in the course of his/her work with others in academe. Each member of academe has, to a greater or lesser extent, by proclamation or individual assertion, the discretion to impose his/her will through the performance of his/her duties. Yet, that discretion is rarely examined. It is often pushed into the discreet shadows of implicit understanding of those who exercise discreet dissension rather than being pushed into the domain of discussion, investigation, or debate.

If the organization contains and encapsulates the values of a collection of human beings, what happens when the values of the administrator are contrary to those of the organization? Discreet dissension may be a response of reflective administrators articulating their values. These are the guerrillas in the mi(d)st of academe from whom we can learn the lessons of practical, humane administration through an examination of their applications of discreet dissension. Further, there is a need to consider whether an ethical benefit is derived from discreet dissension in terms of protecting the weaker members of the institution and preserving higher order meta-organizational values of justice, honour, integrity, and equity. In its academic contribution and its practical utility, an examination of discreet dissension will add another layer to the understanding of the administrative character and its potency.

**Purpose of the Study**

This study examines the phenomenon of discreet dissent as a functional skill of administrators. There appears to be a bias in the literature toward reports of dissent in administration as an offence to an institution, its agents, or its clients. The administrator, prized for his or her ability to make decisions in the interest of the organization, is also a
human being, walking the thin edge of sometimes competing institutional and personal notions of justice, fairness, democracy, and equity. Discreet dissent among reflective administrators as a phenomenon of study is largely unrecognized in the lexicon of administrative skills, save as isolated case studies of abnormality and often malignant behaviour.

There is another perspective to be considered. There are few among us who cannot point to moments in which rules have been bent or broken to accommodate a unique situation. We may have bent a rule for another, or been the beneficiary of a rule bent by another. At times, discretion is used to achieve objectives which necessitate behaviour beyond or in spite of existing rules. For example, in rushing a neighbour to a hospital for emergency treatment, you might decide to park illegally, and, upon exit, the municipal by-law officer might decide to tear up a violation ticket given your explanation of the extenuating circumstances which caused your deviation from posted parking advisories. The by-law officer would likely never report the incident to superiors and you may never trouble your neighbour with the tale of your close call with a parking ticket. This is a small and rather innocuous example of discreet dissension which provided a service to a weaker person (an injured neighbour) and satisfied a personal ethic of care for you and for the by-law officer. The examples of discreet dissent in the administration of academe can often be significantly more complex. However, these stories within academe are rarely told or heard.

I have discovered few studies, Canadian or otherwise, which investigate progressive, intentioned discreet dissent among educational administrators. A study such as this will enrich the definition of dissent as removed from its base, destructive, self-
centred, gains-motivated tradition. Discreet dissent has emerged as an act of defiance and survival: a creative, productive skill, the capacity and expression of which is the mark of a humane and effective administrator. This study has yielded information and analysis of interest to administrative scholars and administrators who reflect on their own behaviour as human beings and agents of institutions. In its practical utility, discreet dissent may serve the purpose of protecting the weak (those without influence or power in the organization) from the machinations of the institution qua institution, and may lead the humane reform of organizations.

Questions to be Answered

In this study of retired administrators, there were three major questions to be answered.

Had administrators engaged in discreet dissension in doing work that impacted others and their respective institutions?

What made discreet dissension the only or preferred course of action for the administrator? In other words, were there no avenues of institutionally permissible behaviour which would have garnered the same result?

The final question asked how administrators had been prepared for or learned their skills in testing the limits of rules and conventions in acting in discreet dissent.

Rationale for the Study

In seeking answers to these questions, an administrative skill has emerged which reinforces the influence of an individual's will and intent upon the performance of his/her administrative duties and the enhancement of the organization. It is of value to investigate instances of discreet dissension within any organization, demonstrating the
necessity to developers of policies and procedures to craft their documents with the knowledge of guerrilla behaviour at the fore. For example, the designer of a chair aims to create a stable object with four legs, but designs in absolute recognition of the fact that, in its use, the chair will likely be tilted back on two legs, distributing weight and stress in predictable ways. In the same way that architectural designs have incorporated the principle of soft vandalism into their designs (knowing that human beings express themselves in particular ways), perhaps administrators will design the responsibilities of administrative offices incorporating a tolerance for guerrilla behaviour.

Authorities of the organization charged with the responsibility of hiring individuals do not expressly recruit or invite a guerrilla into their midst. In the myriad of human resources tests and tools designed to select the most appropriate candidate, there is no litmus test to determine the propensity or likelihood of a candidate to assume the identity of a an administrative guerrilla in the exercise of their discretion. Those who enter senior positions through ascension/promotion or competition are eligible for those posts largely based on their experience and reputation as known quantities. Senior administrators contribute a lifetime of experience to the post on offer and can, at least operationally, outwardly, affirm the traditional traits sought by the organization in the name of its own preservation and future development. In this exploratory study, the participants, senior administrators, battle tested and experienced, come to an identity of guerrilla through developmental process across their lifespan through reflection on their practice and lived experience.

If discreet dissension is a means to achieving effects indicative of higher order human values, then it becomes important to examine the ways in which it is addressed in
the training and preparation of administrators and those in their charge. It is necessary to discover whether discreet dissension is so dependent upon the individual, their values, experiences, and contexts that it cannot be taught as prescriptively as other administrative skills of resource management and budget administration. Is that capacity for discreet dissension derived from a life lived, rather than an hour of instruction or a chapter of text? If this is the case, then the study of administration is nearer the study of an art form rather than a scientific phenomenon. Perhaps there is something unique about administration in the academe in comparison to other industries.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

Due to the hazard of compromising the professional reputation of the administrators who may identify themselves as having engaged in acts of discreet dissension, only those administrators who have retired from service were invited to be participants in the study.

Interviews were conducted with one pilot participant and two retired senior administrators of postsecondary institutions who were all residents of Ontario. The number and representation of participants interviewed were limited by the pool of retired senior administrators, geography, and resources available for face-to-face interviews.

Participants were selected as a course of convenience rather than random sampling. The small number of participants means that the results do not permit generalization or any measure of replication to a broader population. That is not to suggest that the research may not have a contribution to make to the scholarship of educational administration. Conclusions derived from the data are useful for exploring
ideas and also for identifying themes for investigation in subsequent research. Getzels (1970), reflecting on research in organizational change, observed that the,

...observation that strikes one forcibly is the belief expressed over and over again in the literature that there is a need for more empirical data. There is no doubt that there is such a need. But the further implication seems to be that if only we gathered more data we would automatically have the solutions to all unsettled issues of organizational change. At the risk of overstating the case and offending many of my colleagues in research, I am going to assert once more that what is needed is not more raw data – at least not more raw data alone – but more ideas. (p. 71)

If this inquiry is of import to the field of administrative scholarship, a research path for subsequent study may or may not emerge. Getzels (1970) described the reality of the masses of data collected and their paradoxical relationship to practical influence. The paradox offers the caution of humility to researchers.

But here is the paradox. If one seeks a specific effect of a specific datum on a specific school practice – if one seeks a specific educational change as a function of a specific piece of empirical research – one is hard pressed to find it. What data, for example, led to the repudiation of flash cards and drill in American schools, or to the metamorphosis of the classroom from a rectangular space with the seats firmly bolted to the floor and facing forward to the octagonal and sometimes circular space with seats all over the place... Indeed, Bloom reported that of the 70,000 studies only 70, i.e., about one in 1,000, were of any
significance. And even then it is doubtful that there was a direct relationship
between the research and practice. (Getzels, 1970, p. 72)

The generation of ideas, whether derived from a participant value of \( n_1 \) or \( n_{3000} \), has the potential to become the crux of new paradigms and research paths.

As the data collection involved the reflective narratives of administrators, there was a bias of the actors on reflection including the distortion of the temporal distance from the events of discreet dissension. Due to the senior level of administrators interviewed and the level of secrecy with which some of the behaviour was executed, it was not possible to solicit the reflections of third parties (benefactors or victims) of behaviours that were examples of discreet dissension. Accounts of discreet dissension were subjective and one-sided. Still, the narrative data reflected the authentic voices of the retirees, providing first-hand, lived accounts of a largely unexamined, undocumented, and unresearched skill set.

There were no women among the research participants. This is not surprising as there would be few women who would have retired from senior academic service within the last 15 or 20 years. This research study is not claiming that participants are representative of broader populations, but it is important to consider that women’s stories may be quite different than those of their male counterparts. Feminist theory reminds that,

Administration and policy-making in education have been, and still are, the province of men, although women make up a large portion of educational workers. Educational theory and administrative practice have been dominated by men, who have acted as ‘gatekeepers’ in setting standards, producing social
knowledge and decreeing what is significant, relevant and important in light of their own experience. (Blackmore, 1993, p. 27)

One of the limitations of this research was the dependency on exclusively literature review and analysis of narratives gleaned through interviews. A mixed-methods approach utilizing quantitative questionnaires may have enhanced the information collected, and provided another means of self-reporting for the participants.

To the bias of the researcher, it must be revealed that I am, myself, a novice administrator within a university context, entering my sixth year of service. My previous experiences included teaching and administrative roles in a community college. I have accrued some level of familiarity with the nature of what it means to be an administrator within two different forms of postsecondary institutions, though at a much more junior level than those interviewed for this research.

Having been the benefactor of several mentors who have been generous with their wisdom and forthright in their reflections and advice, I was hoping for the same level of candor and cooperation from the study participants. I am grateful to the pilot and participants as I believe that I was the benefactor of their forthright and sincere reflections. This is the subjective determination of this researcher and, thus, open to scrutiny as a limitation. I cannot scientifically determine the precise level of candor or sincerity of responses.

One of the limitations I imposed on myself in securing participants was the condition that they would be previously unknown to me, as I was unknown to them. As I had the good fortune of working with some senior administrators through the course of my career, I had some concerns that my interpretations of their narratives would have
been somehow compromised by my own personal awareness of the context of their stories. In working with participants who were strangers to me, as I was a stranger to them, I encountered the challenge of drawing an appropriate depth of responses. These participants indicated that they had an interest in the focus of my research, but were naturally and entirely appropriately somewhat cautious in the information they provided. To honour their sincerity and provide some assurance of confidence, pilot and participants were offered editorial privileges in reviewing the transcripts of their interviews. Their identities remain confidential to this researcher and advisor. Should I have the opportunity to pursue my research agenda in years to come, I may have the opportunity to develop a level of trust over the long term with retirees in the course of other research which could enhance the level of disclosure participants are comfortable in using. For the purposes of this research project, I was ultimately privileged and very satisfied with the depth and breadth of information that participants decided to share.

In acknowledging the bias of my own experience, the development of my epistemology emerged from a childhood spent as an only child in the care of a gregarious, aesthetically sensitive, multi-generational household of Northern European immigrants. In this household, practical knowledge was valued for its utility, but secondary in the hierarchy of knowledge to the beauty of song, dance, and poetry. The pinnacle of this hierarchy was wisdom defined as the lived combination of practical and aesthetic knowledge. Therefore, my worldview is one which accepts the truisms offered in fables, proverbs, and home-remedies as articulations of the lived and tried wisdom of elders. However, my existence in the context of being an adult in contemporary Canadian culture has also impacted upon my epistemology and worldview, in so far as I
have a healthy respect for the aims of formal education and the accumulated depth of a scientifically oriented knowledge base. However, I remain inherently skeptical of scientific knowledge, and must acknowledge this bias at every turn. I look to human beings in order to glean the truisms of life well lived, rather than a scientific systems orientation for the explanation of the human condition. In short, I love to hear a good story and always cheer for bumpkin when he, inevitably, encounters the devil on the dirt road.

It is not surprising that my research interest has to do with gleaning wisdom from those with a career of administrative service behind them, through their first-person narratives. What I have learned, as a junior administrator, I credit largely to the mentors and experiences I have had. I have learned and continue to learn more from those mentors and colleagues who have had the patience to have a conversation with me than from any text or course, though I do acknowledge that those texts and courses have provided me with the vocabulary and theoretical baseline with which to understand what my mentors and colleagues are trying to tell me.

In terms of the human condition, I must declare that I am an optimist. My tendency is to look for the good in humanity and I typically find it. Encounters with cruelty and the darker side of humanity have been few in the course of my life, and always take me by surprise. I believe there to be gods and monsters among us, but I believe that most of us are generally good hearted and doing our level best in this world. I consciously remained open to the benevolent and malevolent natures as they may have emerged in this research, though I discovered the participants to be conscientious, good
people who were committed and proud of the work they had done as senior administrators.

I must further acknowledge the potential for bias in that I believed the responses to questions to have been genuine and did not second-guess the truth of the participants' remarks.

**Organization of the Thesis**

The first chapter of this thesis has provided the introduction to this research investigating the activity of discreet dissension in the context of educational administration. Definitions were provided for key concepts of administration, discretion, dissension, discreet dissension, and the reflective, humane administrator. The background of the problem, statement of the problem, and purpose of the study were explained. The three major questions to be answered by the investigation were provided. The rationale, scope, and limitations of the study were declared.

The second chapter reviews the literature of import to research about discreet dissension. The contributions of Greenfield (1986) to academic administrative inquiry are juxtaposed against the contributions of traditional administrative theory and contemporary administrative theory. An exposition of guerrilla typologies leads into a review of literature addressing rule adherence and discretion. Dissenter typologies are then explored and culminate in a review of dissension and power as represented in the literature. Finally, a review of the literature on discretion concludes this chapter.

The third chapter on research method and procedures explains the orientation and approach for this research. Participants are described and the method of data collection and the coding process is clarified.
The fourth chapter presents the findings of the research according to emergent themes as recognized by the researcher in the data collected. Major themes of capacity for discretion, level of engagement in discreet dissension, role satisfaction and fondness for the institution, alignment and departure of the values administrators with those of the institution, considerations of risk in dissension, degrees of consultation or isolation of administrators in decision making, and degrees of formal preparation for senior administrative roles are identified.

Chapter Five explores the themes of the previous chapter in descriptive analysis. Implications for further research are described. Finally, conclusions are drawn by considering the research findings in view of the original problem statements and questions to be answered as they are posited in the first chapter of this work.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In one of the most significant developments in the study of academic administration, Greenfield (1986) turned the focus of scholarship away from the scientific positivist pursuit of understanding organization as a thing in itself, having an ontological reality, to the consideration of the organization as the collection of individuals, having will and intention, who were heretofore thought to be somehow subjugated or even negated by the construct of the organization qua organization. Greenfield argued persuasively for administrative scholars to seek an alternative path of inquiry. “The alternative path would seek to understand administrative realities within a broader conception of science – a conception recognizing that values bespeak the human condition and serve as springs to action both in everyday life and in administration” (p. 57).

In order to understand the organization as a membrane containing, defining, and perhaps restraining humanity and its activity, it becomes necessary to examine the individual administrators who are a part of the composite, each with their ambitions and motivations, their talents and foibles. As Greenfield (1978) articulates, “human beings and their social forms are like the quartz crystal: unique within larger patterns. What shall we look at then: the crystal or its pattern?” (p.18). I have elected to examine the individuals in this research, acknowledging that this and subsequent research may or may not eventually reveal broader patterns.

Greenfield (1986) cautioned against providing the organization with stability of identity and animation to which it was not entitled. If a determinism is afforded to the concept of organization, it can become a refuge from responsibility, a blind to individual
endeavor and a place in which meanings and sense making are not creative and perpetual activities for members, but nearer to dogma. This was a revolutionary notion, as it offered contest to Durkheim’s nineteenth century assertion of the scientific perspective of society and organization as having an ontological reality apart from its component parts.

For Durkheim, society is greater than the sum of its parts, for it has a unique reality. Society surpasses every individual in richness and complexity. Ideals such as a freedom and equality have an existence beyond particular individuals. These ideals and sentiments originate in society, and they inform and influence individual actions and beliefs. Durkheim is concerned with order in the midst of disorder. He sees the basis of order in society, not the individual. (Tucker, 2002, p. 124)

This orientation was one of scientific positivism in which social organizations were presented as entities seeking order and equilibrium. These organizations could be objectively understood through the processes of reason and scientific method. This is a sharp contrast to considerations of the contemporary administrative theory and subjectively oriented, values-based inquiry that Greenfield (1993) endorsed.

In my world, the line between fact and value is at best blurred and what we see as facts is in large measure determined by ideas in our heads. Although I recognize some kind of dialectic between what we construe as fact and what we recognize as idea, it is not obvious to me that we can validate truth by means that are independent of the person seeking truth. (p. 94).

Greenfield’s (1993) method is a benchmark of contemporary administrative theory and the orientation of this research project.
Traditional Administrative Theory

The role of administrators in the university environment is, at first glance, one of service to the broad bureaucracy which enables formal, accredited learning, teaching, and research to occur. Administrators assume the expressed authority of their office to enforce, and in some cases create, the policies and procedures of the organization in service to its explicit and implicit mission, goals, and objectives. “The core activities are attainment of organizational goals, maintaining integration of the organization system and adapting to forces in the organization’s external environment (Argyris, 1964, p. 315).” (Sergiovanni, Burlingame, Coombs, & Thurston, 1999, p. 60).

Among the attributes of effective administrators are the abilities to promote and follow rules and enforce policies. The skilled administrator is the voice of reason in uncertain times, the beacon of constancy and consistency, the keeper of the ways and traditions of the organization, and the protector of the aspirations of the ladies and gentlemen of the organization. This is possible because the echelon of the office of senior administrators is perceived to be above the fray. Senior administrators are thought to be by proximity, hierarchy, necessity, and the wisdom accrued through life experience, transcendent beyond the vested micro-interests of the majority and, thus, understood to be ideal arbiters, enforcers, and historians of the organizational culture.

Through their leadership, administrators become champions of the institution that provides their sustenance. What is good for the institution is good for the administrators, and vice versa. There is a putative symbiosis of relation in traditional administrative study between the administrators in service of their organization and the organization in the sustenance of its administrators. However, to claim that the role of the administrator
is limited to the promotion of institutional mandates through a series of regulatory activities does not provide the full flavour of the function.

Traditional administrative theory was and is enamored of scientific methods of inquiry seeking objective rather than subjective truisms. The administrator was reduced to an alpha variable within any number of scientific management formulas. Learning the formulas was the goal of any fledgling administrator and with that learning supposedly came the confidence and skill to function as an effective administrator. For instance, in situation A, actor B performed C with outcome D, meaning that the rational, logical (read scientific) choice of action would be E. If every encounter were reduced to known variables, and enough repetition were applied in practice, a skillful administrator would be hatched, fully capable of making any decisions in any context. Surely, this is not the calculus of decision-making that the contemporary scholar, Manley-Casimir (1990) described. Yet, it is the prevalent paradigm of the grandfathers of traditional theory, including Marx (nee 1818), Weber (nee 1864) and Durkheim (nee 1858), and their twentieth century champions, concerned with the application of scientific methods in explaining the phenomenon of the world.

Contemporary Administrative Theory

As Greenfield (1986) suggested, far from being an amorphous thing in itself, having an ontological reality and being, the organization is a repository of the collective identities, values, efforts, and interactions of the humanity comprising it. Certainly, the administrators’ responsibilities include the enforcement of rules. However, it may be argued that more energies are directed to the promotion and guidance of individual human endeavor. In this constructive approach to professional identity, administrators
promote the intentions of learners, faculty, other administrators, and themselves to the end of enhancing the collective identity or concept of the institution in which these identities encounter one another. Administrators are, thus, in service to individuals they encounter as human beings and as contributors to the collective lived experiences of the institutional community.

In this vein, servant leadership becomes one contemporary model for the way that academic administrators might behave and self-actualize, as described by Greenleaf, as cited in Beckner (2004).

The difference [in the servant leader] manifests itself in the care taken by the servant - first to make sure that that other people’s highest priority needs are being served. The best test and most difficult to administer is: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? (p.142)

How can the notion of servant leadership survive the enormous bureaucracy and tradition of academe? Greenleaf, cited in Beckner (2004), acknowledges that the call to servant leadership in academe is a tall order, particularly due to the nature of education and its historical and philosophical orientation. He describes two particular challenges:

1. The assumption that some individuals know what others ought to learn, and are justified in imposing their judgment - backed up by sanctions.

2. The fact that our whole system of education rests on coercion: first the legal requirement for attending school until age 16-18, then the built-in compulsion to continue academic education by the credentialing that begins with the secondary school diploma and continues through the Ph.D. degree – and beyond. (p. 142)
Yet, contemporary theory assures that servant leadership can survive these challenges and become a benchmark for humane academic administration. If a senior academic administrator embodies this identity of servant leader in the promotion and support of human endeavors, is it necessary for administrators to deliberately, yet secretly, dissent, to act as guerrillas in the midst of the organization? The answer may well be yes, as the diversity of humanity and endeavor within any context is unique and leads to a pastiche of interests to serve rather than some singularly focused mass of social intention to be addressed as traditional administrative theories suggest.

**Guerrilla Typologies**

I arrived at this notion of the administrative guerrilla upon reflecting on how to describe these administrators who discern when and how to fight these *little wars* in academe. The diminutive of the Spanish word for war seemed apropos. The notion of guerrilla in professional contexts other than the literal military exists, but there is a gap in the literature of academic administration to acknowledge or investigate the administrative guerrilla in academe.

Humane administrators do not chart the course of their activities in concert with or in deference to the institution at the expense of individuals’ wills and intentions. Rather, skilful administrators can propel the capacities of individuals at times in concert with, and at other times, in spite of, the bureaucracy which contains and defines them. This goal of service to the aims of human beings rather than the perpetuation of systems leads to the development of typologies of discreet dissenters and metaphors of administrators as guerrillas of the people, rather than merely soldiers of the institution.
The following examination of guerrilla typologies will refine the notion of guerrilla behaviours and provide focus to the idea of the administrative guerrilla in the midst of academe.

The political guerrillas are near enough in their proximity to the organization to apply a critical gaze to the governing institution and determine it to have developed a reality and dimension beyond and contrary to the individual aims and hopes of the humanity it was conceived to organize and serve. In the case of an oppressive regime, guerrillas use the cover of darkness, created by the distance of their identity from that of the institution, to thwart its goals. An otherness is applied to the notion of the bureaucracy. An alienation develops from organization as a collection of human endeavors toward organization as a tool of self-preservation and a storehouse of power, amassed and propagated in individual offices.

As a result, the romantic notion of guerrillas is one of those fighting the good fight in the shadows, turning the machinations of the institution against itself in service to the individuals and their nobler aims of justice, equity, and liberation. Mythologies of Zorro and the Scarlet Pimpernel are typical of this romantic hero. The guerrillas become the champions of those who are no longer participating or recognized members of the idea of the organization, but stand in peril of the institution which has illegitimately been granted an identity equal to or superseding the identities of those who compose it. When an organization is endowed with a will or motive of its own, it may become an incarnation of the intention of those who have turned their backs to the broader humanity in the name of the institution. An organization, so animated, can become a refuge from
humane responsibility and shroud for those who would use it as a shield and a tool to impose their will through its amorphous identity.

Perhaps less dramatically, and certainly without physical violence, administrative guerrillas turn a critical gaze to the institutions of which they are a part. These reflective administrators recognize their humanity above their roles as agents of the institution. Once this proximate distance between administrators and their institutions is realized (and so it must be, else fanaticism and blind servitude result), mature administrators may recognize their ability to engage in discreet dissension which may be, at the same time, constructive and cathartic for the individual, yet destructive to the notion of bureaucracy which has claimed a privilege of position and identity. Key to the understanding of the administrative guerrilla is the notion that the harm to the concept of institution is never fatal. The administrators who commit acts of discreet dissension are not as destructive, nor as noticeable in their deeds as the terrorists, the fanatics, the zealots, and the martyrs. Rather, the guerrillas quietly, precariously, create moments of dissonance that can bring about better, more just notions of, and operations within, the institution, and do so in such ways as to ensure their survival to fight another day.

The administrative guerrillas are professional dualists, publicly capable in their offices, and privately effective in their clandestine work. The administrative guerrillas must be acutely and operationally ethical humanists. They are acutely solitary and isolated in their activities. The administrative guerrillas do not carry placards in order to collect and congeal a critical mass that would destroy the idea of the organization. Rather, administrative guerrillas must pick and choose their battles and their benefactors from the complex arrangements of the spheres of influence in which they conduct their
work. Though devoted to the welfare of the ladies and gentlemen of the organization, the guerrillas must act alone, in isolation and in secret, lest the glare of a shining moment of victory attract the attention of those whose will is not as noble. In acting alone, the guerrillas are masters of their consequence and acutely attuned to their own values. Mature, self-sufficient, and possessed of good skills of judgment, the guerrillas adopt the risk of their behaviour without accolade.

This notion of deciding alone and acting alone is key to the notion of the guerrilla, for if guerrillas were to band together, they could become a caste within the organization and capable of falling to the temptation of accrued and exponentially amassed power. This phenomenon is one identified by Heinz Leymann in the early 1980s called mobbing. Leymann’s contribution was to document beyond any doubt the same reality [bullying] among adults, even in the cool, rational, professional, bureaucratic, policy-governed setting of the workplace. The tactics differ. Workplace mobbing is normally carried out politely, without any violence, and with ample written documentation. Yet even without the blood, the bloodlust is essentially the same: contagion and mimicking of unfriendly, hostile acts toward the target; ...

(Westhues, 2003, p. 6)

To the question of what mobbing actually looks like in the workplace, Leyman’s work uncovered what had not been previously brought to light for examination, though may have existed from the beginning of humanity’s attempt to achieve production by coming together in groups.

The finding that made Leyman famous is that the far worse threat to workers’ health and safety is from their own co-workers and managers: the threat of
collective, frequent, enduring, hostile communication, of being isolated, silenced, ridiculed, gossiped about, threatened and harassed, of being assigned meaningless tasks, or no work at all, and thereby being pushed steadily into a defenseless position from which there is no escape except by giving up one’s job. (Westhues, 2005, p.42)

This is not the behaviour of discreet administrative guerrillas, as it is vulgar and indelicate toward the nobler aims of the humane. While mobbing may bring change, it does so at the cost of suffering rather than elevation, cunning rather than integrity, and malice rather than benevolence.

**Rule Adherence and Discretion**

Rules have a privilege of position in administrative and organizational theory. They are the everlasting and eternal superstructure of the organization. Policy is the glue that binds and directs the energies of the members of the organization. Rules function at once to inspire creativity in administrators and at the same time set and define acceptable limits and tolerances for the individual expression of administrators through their offices. Administrators worth their salt to the organization are those who can contribute to the creation, refinement, and enforcement of rules and policies. Administrators act as jurists and logicians; interpreting, revising, and creating an ever increasing library of mission statements, policies, departmental goals, and fiduciary systems. It is the skills of administrators in these abstractions which are valued in terms of leading the subordinates of the organization in working through their problems in the concrete. Careers of effective administrative service are those which exhibit the capacity to uphold the abstractions which the organization values.
Among the skills of effective administrators is the ability to recognize and function within the discretionary spaces between the explicit and implicit mission, policies, and procedures of the institution. Discretion is more than the ability to function in a lack of rules, but provides the latitude in which the measured and intentioned bending and breaking of rules may occur. For the purposes of this study, it is necessary to examine the categories of rule adherence prescribed for the administrators.

Administrators, as agents in service of the organization, are expected to abide by the law of the land including respect and compliance with criminal, civil, and human rights laws. These laws are broken at the peril of the institution and the individual administrators. This is the case within the scope of traditional administrative theories and within the more contemporary approaches to administrative study. It can be argued, however, that the administrators spend relatively little of their time in situations which require the enforcement and compliance of the law. Discreet dissension is not equated with law breaking for the purposes of this research.

Most of the administrators' time is spent in the realm of policies, procedures, conventions, and customs of which they are a part, based on their membership within the broader organization. Equally as important as codified rules, unspoken rules of conduct are the currency of the culture and climate of the institution. This is the muck of the realm; the soup in which humanity lives its day to day. Often uncodified, though as tangible as bars on a window, the administrators live their professional and personal intentions in and around, over and under, within and through those bars.

The focus, for the discreet administrator, is not on polishing and reinforcing the policies, but discovering the transparencies and open spaces of discretion that the policies
reveal. Administrators, matured in their personal value development and lived experience, can look to rules as an Escher print; seeing dimension, light/dark, opportunity/challenge, dark/transparency in every gaze.

Administrators are afforded discretion in the performance of their work. Traditional institutional theory would suggest that the expectation of the organization qua organization would require administrators to use their discretion to strengthen the policies, precedents, and conventions in service of the aims of the institution. The administrators are expected to think outside the box, to be creative in their approaches to the end of solidifying, and ideally, codifying more and more of common practice into terms of reference, policies, and tenets. Yet, this perspective implies that the professional identity of administrators negates their individual human identities. Rather than reinforcing and polishing the collection of institutional directives, perhaps skilled administrators spend at least a portion of their efforts in making policies more fluid than rigid, affording colleagues and subordinates some measure of discretion in the performance of their own work.

Skillfully, humane administrators test the tensile strength of the policies and practices found at the end of their noses. They look to bend, yet, perhaps never shatter those policies. This testing, this bending, this shaping is the process by which the administrators articulate their will and demonstrate their power, if only in the shadows, if only to their own witness. Where the classical administrator shouts institutional dogma to the rooftops, the humane guerrilla whispers of dignity and humanity to those near enough to hear.
In order to demonstrate the presence (and ultimately the value) of discreet dissension in administration, it is necessary to shed light on the character of the administrator. Testing the boundaries and working in the shadowy spaces of discretion is a perilous task. Facing the threat of revelation at any moment by the harsh light of transparency and accountability, the administrators risk the criticism and scorn of others of their institutional community, for whom the disregard of a rule may be an affront to their dignity or capacity as rule creators or enforcers. Simultaneously, a discreetly dissenting human administrator may wish to conceal evidence of his/her discretionary decision making, even from those who might appreciate or benefit from it. If discretion were seen to be effective in making even positive changes, the demands for equal treatment and the setting of precedents emerges, further increasing scrutiny on the administrative office and limiting discretion in yet another direction. In short, it takes little time for a revealed, effective, practical process to become a rule in a bureaucracy that values policy development.

Indeed, following common practices, sticking to the rules, and following precedent is the touchstone of most long and lauded administrative careers. What happens when administrators are prepared to take risks against their professionally prescribed identities? Is there room enough for administrators to rebel against their own administration? The answer may very well be, yes.

In his analysis, Zimmerman (1970) determined that competent rule use involved more than the literal use of rules, but could justify variation from literal rules as part of the, "...possibly competent "uses" of the rule by personnel employing judgments based
upon their understanding of the features of the actual situation of use and the practicalities of action in the setting” (p. 230).

The notion of a collection of individuals marching under the same flag, to the beat of the same drum to conquer the same enemy, is as romantic as the notion of organization as thing in itself. Within the corps, there are those whose personal notions of justice, fairness, and right are at odds with those of their colleagues or the majority of their company. Perhaps there exists a genealogy of types of dissenters, organized according to the intricacy of their moral development, motivation and capacity to accomplish their work.

**Dissenter Typologies**

As the anarchists and nihilists have yet to discover, the negation and destruction of the organization rarely serves the broader aims, however noble, of those who suffer under the presumption of its superiority. As any human resources professional will attest, those out to smite the institution are quickly dismissed, literally, and figuratively by their colleagues, who, quite rightly, see themselves as threatened in each blow the institution suffers.

The next identity which requires consideration is that of the administrative vandal.

Vandal: One who destroys beautiful objects to make way for what he terms “improvements”, or to indulge his own caprice. When Gen’seric with his Vandals captured Rome in A.D. 455, he mutilated public monuments regardless of their worth or beauty. The word ‘vandalism’ was invented by the Abbé Gregiore, *a propos* of the destruction of works of art by revolutionary fanatics – *Nineteenth Century* (Aug. 1893, pg. 272). (Brewer, (no date), p. 1268)
Administrative vandalism can be interpreted as the malevolent action of individuals against the forms, representations, and systems of the organization of which they are a part. Vandals destroy that which the culture values and has endeavored to protect through legal and social contracts. For the vandals or saboteurs, the process is secretive and fraught with individual risk, while the end is public and its discovery associated with the release of risk from the actor. The danger is in the act, not the outcome. The resulting destruction is on display to the delight of the vandals who need others to see what their power has wrought, as did the Luddites of ages past. However, administrative vandals need not use physical violence in their act of expressing their power. For example, the administrator may intentionally destroy the spirit of a policy in the method of its application. Such acts may be intentioned to point to the inadequacy of a particular tradition, in the hopes that wreaking destruction would impel change and improvement for vandals otherwise impotent to make changes.

Perhaps the identity of the whistleblowers is the next in the moral procession. As raucous as Gabriel, the whistleblowers are typically nobly and humanely motivated, unlike the anarchists who are abstractly and theoretically motivated or the vandals who are largely only individually or vainly motivated. Yet, the whistleblowers are not the guerrillas. They seek the light, not the shadows. The whistle blowers seek change and salvation from institutional perils, more often than not, to their own demise. “In theory, anyone who speaks out in the name of the public good within the organization is a whistleblower. In practice, the whistleblower is defined by the retaliation he or she receives” (Alford, 2001, p.18). The rule-breaking career of the whistleblowers is, thus, often limited to just one big bang as a stick of dynamite in the presence of witnesses
collected to testify to the aftershock and raise a toast to the nobly vaporized. The whistleblowers are reflective and humane as they have developed a value system which includes the understanding

... that we have certain *prima facie* duties that we must always adhere to *unless* serious circumstances or reasons tell us to do otherwise. As suggested by Ross (1930) this approach suggests that “consequences [do not] make an action right or wrong, but...it is necessary to consider consequences when we are making our moral choices: (65). (Beckner, 2004, p. 32)

For example, loyalty to an employer may become a *prima facie* duty as it can be superseded by an emerging duty of care for the safety of others. However, what differentiates the whistleblower from the senior academic administrative guerrilla is the fact that the whistleblower does not have the power of the guerrilla to evoke change in isolation. The only recourse to circumstances which offend their moral sensibilities is for whistleblowers to report their witness of wrongdoing to those who have the capacity to evoke change in a given context. The act of reporting can take different forms.

It may be internal, occurring when a member of an organization reports suspected wrongdoing within the organization, either through the customary chain of command or outside the chain of command. It may be external when the whistleblower reports his or her observations to someone outside the organization.

(Beckner, 2004, p. 34)

Where the necessity and value of whistleblowing is acknowledged, the response in the administrative literature is to codify the practice and enshrine protections for the
whistleblowers, who had presumably exhausted any other means of achieving values of justice or fairness within their institutions.

What of the guerrillas, the whisperers, whose aims and intentions are noble yet find themselves limited in their publicly prescribed professional capacities? Frustrated by the limits of their articulated office, administrators may be compelled to exercise their human potential in the achievement of justice and fairness in secret. Yet, at the same time, those administrators are risking, as Socrates did, their own professional execution. This danger forces administrative rule bending into the shadows: the darkest corners afforded by the discretion of their office. The guerrillas become the masters of the sotto voce.

Yet, even the shadows of administrative office have become conventional. Consider the observations of the career university administrator, Warren Bennis (1973), as he reflects in his memoirs

A gentlemen’s agreement protects the privacy of university administrators. Like most other bureaucrats they tend to be secretive about their work even when being secretive serves no obvious purpose, even when it is counterproductive. After working uncomfortably within the limits of this restrictive code for a number of years, I am convinced that it cries out for violation. (p. 1)

The instinct of self-preservation, honed and tested in years of survival in the domain of academic administration, demands such secretiveness of administrators. Perhaps it is only on exit in retirement from service that administrators can tell the stories of their lived experiences.
Dissension and Power

What of the intention of bending rules? Is there always a nobler motive? Pride, avarice, mischievousness, selfishness, and destructive impulses inspire disregard for rules, as do values of sacrifice and benevolence in the spirit of doing good works for self and others. Administrators are able to realize goals by discreetly engaging in dissenting activities. There is power in the exercise of discreet dissension to expedite and execute processes that may serve institutional and/or individual notions of justice, fairness, and reasonableness in interactions with others. If this is the case, discreet dissension may be a part of an unspoken, unexamined though highly desired skill set, as vital to administrators as skills of consensus building, compliance, tolerance, negotiation, and synthesis.

Administrators are affected and afflicted with the same foibles and human condition as their colleagues within the organization. The symbiosis between administrator and institution is fragile and more diaphanous than the heavy ceremonial tapestries of office reveal. Who is this person who sits at the right hand of the mythic institution, armed with policies, procedures, rules, and conventions for the purpose of governing the mass of human effort contained as organization? Who is this administrator charged with the responsibilities of protecting the realm from its own citizenry? This is another upright of the species homo sapien, and precisely the embodiment of values revealed by Greenfield (1986). This turn of focus to the human condition is not unique to Greenfield. In the introduction to Human, all too human, a similar turn is described in Nietzsche’s (1878/1966) thinking as cited in Hollindale (Trans.) (1996).
He now had come to the hard realization that the only possible way to that higher humanity required an uncompromising examination of everything human and all-too-human that at once stands in our way and is our point of departure, and a sober stocktaking of what there is to work with in undertaking what he was later to call the enhancement of human life. (p. ix)

There is a gap in the literature which would examine discreet dissension and rule breaking as a valuable administrative skill. Contemporary administrative literature offers insight and urging to think outside the box, be an innovator, early adopter, pioneer, leader with vision, and creative problem solver. However, being an effective and humane academic administrator through considered discreet dissension is rarely addressed.

Kadish and Kadish (1973) made a contribution with their work, Discretion to disobey: A study of lawful departures from legal rules. They offered the nearest explanation of uses of dissent in senior positions, though theirs was an explanation grounded in the context of legal positions.

In effect, the role agent is permitted to incorporate into his decision what would ordinarily be excluded reasons, or to put the matter differently, to convert excluded reasons for an action into role reasons. He is at liberty to act on his own judgment in certain circumstances, and he can expect his decision to be supported by others in related roles. This is the finesse that introduces flexibility into role behavior and reduces the instances in which people simply step out of their roles in order to do what must be done. (p. 29)

This is an intriguing analysis. It acknowledges that the person they call the role agent is expected to bring personal rationale and values into the decision making, not just
institutional values. Further, those personal considerations become bound in the office, which has the effect of shortening the perceived gap between the individual and his/her role. The support of those in related roles is an expectation rather than described as a faint hope. The most heartening reference is to the notion that, if an action demands dissension, it can be accomplished within the formal office, without requiring the burden of personal risk as presumably the activity is carried out under the protections of the office, so long, of course, as the dissension is lawful.

What is addressed most often are instances of discreet dissension as a destructive force and a strategy of gamesmanship in academe, which could easily be added to Astin's (1976) list of rationalization, passing the buck, obfuscation, co-optation, recitation, displacement, and projection. Astin (1976) determined that, "Academics have become so expert at these games and so accustomed to playing them that the games pose a serious obstacle to any attempt to improve institutions for students" (p. 75).

Some administrative theories reveal their critical theory roots as they weigh in with the hypothesis born of the x and y tension; in which dissension is a necessary motive force.

Too much tension may lead to debilitating frustration. But too little tension may lead equally to debilitating boredom. The effect of both on performance may be the same. Too much dissatisfaction may inhibit effort. But too much satisfaction may also inhibit effort. If, as it is said, individual necessity is the mother of invention, it may perhaps be that a certain amount of organizational dissatisfaction or disequilibrium is the midwife of innovation. (Getzels, 1970, p.78)
In this sense, dissent is a necessary, tolerated and, to some extent, expected activity within the organization. It is integral to the continuing development of the members and their institution.

Destructive, anarchic, and nihilist theorists offer examination of destruction and dissent as human expression. There exists a body of literature on terrorism, law-breaking, sabotage and victimization though its consideration is beyond the scope of this research.

The contemporary emphasis (in this increasingly litigious culture) on codification of policies and procedures as indicative of effective administration may have at least a stalling and, at worst, a malevolent impact on the members of the institution. At first glance, the checks and balances of policies, procedures, precedents, and in the case of conflict, resolution strategies including tribunals, administrative hearings and the like, are safeguards of transparency and consistency as the members of the institution seek justice from their senior administrators. However, as Westhues (2005) cautions:

Nevertheless, adversarial proceedings tend toward the primitive pole of the continuum between barbarity and civilization. The main reason is that they tend to reduce conflict to a binary variable: guilty or not guilty, win or lose, goodness on one side and wickedness on the other. The complexity of life is lost. (p. 10)

Simply put, emphasis on the administrative process in terms of preparation for external scrutiny in the form of transcripts and documented policies and the like may actually be doing a disservice to the end of humane administration in deference to other order values of transparency and public accountability.
At what point does the line of a paper trail become honed to the sharp edge of weapon? Authors Dixon (1976) and Westhues (2005) have examined cases at McGill University and the University of Toronto in which academics working within these institutions were subjected to administrative persecution, meticulously detailed and documented by the senior administration of the respective universities. If an administrative process satisfies scrutiny, then the lens must be shifted to those individuals who are the motive force in animating the process in the first place as a shield for their own culpability in bullying, harassment, mobbing, and any number of ignoble activities. From too many cases we learn that administrative acumen in postsecondary institutions can equate to power. How the power is wielded becomes an individual determination. Perhaps the humane administrator who is prepared to assume the role of the guerrilla and act in discreet dissension may do so because there does not exist a more transparent option to reach just ends.

The representation in the literature is, however, more often a darker and more sinister accounting of the power of administrative discretion to punish and purge dissenting behaviours within academe.

When the dissenting activist is isolated from a department it is a common tactic to make life so miserable that the individual is literally driven by desperation to leave the department. Such procedures disguise the fundamental political conflict which is the real issue. Furthermore, it is often the isolated and frustrating position in which the activist finds himself which leads him to retreat into a defiant and angry posture – a result which is then used to justify purging the
individual on the “personal” grounds that the activist was a “bad” colleague. (Dixon, 1976, p. 118)

Postmodern literature offers descriptions of the pastiche of personal and role identity, and hints at the other/under world of power relations and transactions. Baudrillard (2001) contributes insight to the administrative guerrilla in the mi(d)st, with, Everything – or at least, most essential things – already takes place outside the official circuits. And there is something heartening about this. There is something spirituel in this double game, in this perversion which resists any normalization, in these occult structures which flout established authority, in this black market of the social. And, in any case, what hope would there be of a society that had purged itself of all clandestinity? (p. 105)

Biography and autobiography illuminate the character and will exercised by powerful senior administrators in the twilight of their careers, although one does have the sense that most are purposively written as monuments to service and great men of great office rather than candid accounts of living in an administrative personality. Descriptions nearing the concept of dissent for those at the pinnacle of the hierarchy is revealed as innovation, courage of conviction, and the like.

Looking to political administration, Paikin (2003) provides glimpses of the humanity of senior politicians. In the era of negotiations surrounding the proposed and ultimately doomed Meech Lake Accord, Frank McKenna confronted Robert Bourassa’s ambiguous support of Canada.

Bourassa’s answer was so poignant, it cut McKenna to the quick. “I was very close to Pierre Laport,” McKenna recalls Bourassa telling him, referring to the
Quebec labour minister who was assassinated by the Front de Libération du Québec terrorist group. “I personally had to take a very hard stand in the hostage negotiations. The intransigence of the leadership in Quebec – really on the side of Canada – resulted in Laporte losing his life. When I went in to tell his widow that her husband – one of my best friends – had died, it was one of the hardest moments of my life. And so, Frank, unless you’ve walked in my shoes, you should not judge my commitment to Canada.” (Paiken, 2003, p 234)

This provides a glimpse of the man, the decisions, and the price of dissent in senior administration. Though this account is part of a political life, accounts such as this must be brought to the fore as they emerge in the academic administrative life.

From the memoirs of Dawn Steel (1993), the first female President of Columbia Pictures, come the stories of her travails in senior administration which provide insight to character, orientation, and context of being an administrator from a feminist perspective.

When I was younger, men were my role models. From my father and my brother to the brilliant and powerful men who were my mentors in Hollywood, it was always men I turned to. And it was men from whom I thought I’d derive my power. But I have to say that in the history of the world no man who was sane or sober ever gave his power away to a woman. Today, thank God, there are female role models. And the admission of the desire for power and control over one’s life is no longer forbidden. (p. xii)

The stories are there to be told in the administration of academe, and are beginning to find voice through administrative practitioners who seem to be starting to share them with those who would ask the questions. However, as Westhues (2005) and Dixon
(1976) discovered, more often the evidence of humanity is left in the memories of the actors as all that remains are the accounts, purposefully and professionally written, in the official documents of meeting minutes, transcripts of tribunal proceedings, and official correspondence rather than in first person accounts.

The singular example of a published and highly personal account of the administrative experience was the informative, if slightly mischievous, volume, *To rise above principle: The memoirs of an unreconstructed dean* (Josef Martin, pseudonym, 1988). It is a book which provides practical, in some cases raw, in other cases humorous, accounts of the lived experience in academic administration and advice to those who aspire to administrative office. The irony is, of course, that the book was published under a pseudonym which, in itself, may be an expression of discreet dissension.

**Discretion**

Literature on discretion reminds us that it is a part of everyday life, utilized by persons of every description, in positions of every category and industry. By virtue of its pervasiveness in every aspect of life, it is often overlooked for inquiry. Discretion is a means of survival and innovation and for those who Lipsky (1980) describes as street-level bureaucrats and for those who are senior administrators, and everyone in between.

To understand discretion, the literature of hermeneutics must be considered as meaning-making is a precondition to making decisions. For example, when an administrator focuses attention on a piece of policy, the document is, at first glance, timeless (often not indicating a date of creation but awaiting a date of ratification), authorless (written in the voice of the committee or the organization, with no indication of originating writer), and having no history of creation (with no addendum indicating
lineage of necessity or narrative of its origin). The policy appears as a thing-in-itself; it very simply is, and its potential for meaning is yet to be actualized. The academic administrator must endeavor to ask questions and recognize the grit on their lens of interpretive focus through reflection on their own history, culture, and relationship to the organization and situation at hand. It is then necessary to inquire into the history, culture and origins of the document itself. Only then can the text and the reader communicate with one another. However, this should not be reduced to some entirely non-scientific, magical process between the administrator and the meanings they work toward. Habermas (1971) tells us that,

As soon as certain fundamental value judgments are posited as axioms, a deductive chain of statements can be analyzed cogently for each; at the same time, such principles themselves are not accessible to rational comprehension: their acceptance is based solely on a decision, a commitment. Such decisions can then be interpreted either in an existential-personal sense (Sartre) or in a public, political sense (Carl Schmitt) or institutionally from anthropological presuppositions (Gehlen), but the thesis remains the same: that decisions relevant to the praxis of life, whether they consist in the acceptance of values, in the selection of biographical \textit{[lebensgeschichtlich]} design, or in the choice of an enemy, are not accessible to rational consideration and cannot form a rationally substantiated consensus. But if practical questions, eliminated from knowledge that has been reduced to empirical science, are dismissed in this way entirely from the controlling powers of rational investigation, if decisions on questions touching on the praxis of life must be pronounced as beyond every and any authority
committed to rationality, then we cannot be astonished by the ultimate desperate attempt to secure socially binding precommitments on practical questions institutionally by a return to a closed world of mythical images and powers (Walter Brocker). (Habermas, trans. by Viertel, J., 1973, pp. 266-267)

In the hermeneutic sense, is there any more mythical image than Greenfield’s (1993) man who comes back through the door in the wall?

Leadership and change publications of an instructional nature suggest that administrators (and their capacity for discretionary decision making) are at the fore of most institutional change, either as an impetus to change or as transition agents, implementing changes initiated at senior levels. Most of these publications are founded on case studies, reported by authors as third-party to the incidences, illustrating the experiences in order to guide fledgling administrators through the performance of their duties. Among these instructive texts is Preparing administrators: New directions (Culbertson & Hencley (eds.), 1962), written in the era of traditional administrative theory development. It offered the following, perhaps well intentioned, advice for novice academic administrators.

The greatest difficulty occurs in the process of relating academic knowledge to the decision making of practice. The optimum conditions for doing so occur when our subject matter lends itself to treatment such as the following: under conditions a, b, and c, x can be expected to result in y; or more commonly, in order to bring about y, do x. However the practitioner must decide when conditions a, b, and c obtain, and whether or not he wants y. We may, in turn,
help him to understand and to identify conditions a, b, and c, and to recognize the
grounds of his valuation of y, but in practice he has to make the decision. (p. 93)
Clearly, in the traditional literature the human being and the potential of dissension are
overlooked as is any moral consideration of complexity, power relations, and notion of
the humane in discretion.

Even if there would be some sort of reconciliation or reconstitution of traditional
theory, hermeneutics, and contemporary theories, one must acknowledge that individuals
occupying administrative offices may remain personally posited in one orientation or
another. When the administrative cadre is composed of an ethical humanist, critical
theorist, traditional X Y administrator, and historical hermeneutist, how does sense
making, let alone discretionary decision making, occur? This is precisely the pragmatic
Decisions are made. Dissensions occur. The inquiry resumes.
In order to engage in research from the humanist perspective championed by Greenfield (1986), it was determined that a qualitative study using narrative inquiry would be most appropriate. It is a form of inquiry, "in which individuals tell their personal, firsthand accounts to the researchers" (Creswell, 2002, p. 521).

In narrative research, inquirers describe the lives of individuals, collect and tell stories about people's lives, and write narratives of individual experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). As a distinct form of qualitative research, a narrative typically focuses on studying a single person, gathering data through the collection of stories, reporting individual experiences, and discussing the meaning of those experiences for the individual. (Creswell, 2002, p. 521)

Data collection would take the form of face-to-face interviews. Questions were developed in a focused interview guide and responses were transcribed and issued to participants with full editorial privileges of revision and addition. Qualitative data analysis through coding yielded rich information for this study.

As this is research with human participants, the ethics of doing such work required careful consideration and approval from the Brock University Research Ethics Board. The participants were not to be considered vulnerable individuals as seniors, though a duty of care was respected. Retired seniors considered to be vulnerable individuals due to declining health or capacity were excluded as participants.

Participants were fully apprised of the intent and methodology of the research project. Their written consent was solicited after their rights and responsibilities were reviewed in tandem with the rights and responsibilities of the researcher. Signed consent
forms have been held on file by the researcher, with each participant retaining a copy for his records. Further, participants will receive a copy of this thesis after defense.

As psychological developmental theory articulates, professional identity is an integral component of self-esteem and self-concept. If one ascribes to Erickson’s stage of life span development model, retirement age can posit one in the psychological crisis of ego integrity v. despair and disgust. If an individual resolves this crisis on the side of ego integrity,

It is indicated by an acceptance of one’s life for what it has been and a freedom from the burden of excessive regret that it had not been different. It also involves an acceptance that one’s life is one’s own responsibility…..Successful resolution of this final psychosocial crisis leads to the emergent virtue of wisdom. (Sugarman, 1996, p. 92)

However, if the crisis is resolved to the opposing end of despair,

Lack or loss of accrued ego integration leads to despair. This is often revealed in a fear of death and expresses the feeling that life is too short to alter anything. One cannot start a new life or plan to do things differently next time. Despair may be hidden behind a show of disgust – a contemptuous displeasure with particular institutions and people. (Sugarman, 1996, p. 92)

Not knowing who I would encounter, as participants were completely unknown to me, particular diligence was applied regarding questions of role potency and success. Questions asked during the interview were designed to incite reflection on the legacy and impact administrators have had in the course of their careers.
It was possible, through reflections on a lifetime of service, that a participant’s attitudes regarding their efficacy during their career may be negative or morose. Retirement is not always a celebration of a life’s work, but may be the declaration of the end of a person’s utility, or in the worst case, the realization of opportunities and potencies lost for those unprepared for retirement. In the event that such a response was evidenced, it was necessary to have counseling resources at the ready, though those resources were not called upon in the course of the research. It was clear in short order that the participants were enjoying the phase of ego integrity and embodied lived wisdom, not despair.

**Participants**

A sample of convenience was compiled. A list of potential participants was determined according to characteristics of a state of retirement from senior administrative position within a community college of applied arts and technology or university in Ontario.

Retired administrators are those who have achieved the designation of retiree and left their respective institutions entirely, rather than those is a state of semi-retirement, acting as agents or consultants to those institutions, maintaining an active, if somewhat limited role, in their administration. That is not to suggest that they no longer had any ties to their former institutions. In fact, the participants indicated that they visited their former campuses on occasion and maintained a circle of friends among former colleagues. Rather, the retired administrator would no longer have any compensatory relationship to the institution, short of retirement benefits to which they were entitled, nor
have any active power in its continuing development. Similarly, the institution and its agents would hold no dominion over the retired administrator.

A further condition imposed on the pool of potential candidates was that they were previously unknown to me as the researcher. Having worked in college and university settings for much of my career, I had enjoyed relationships with mentors, some of whom are now retired. In order to maintain the integrity of the confidences shared over the years, it was my decision to approach only those with whom I had no previous affiliation. Retrospectively, I am not certain this particular precondition was necessary, and the omission of this criteria would certainly have made the development of a participant pool easier to accomplish. However, I remain concerned that too much inference and historical knowledge may have clouded my data analysis if I had worked with those previously known to me.

It was anticipated (and proved to be the case) that all participants would be male as their entry into administrative service 15 or more years ago would have relied on a particular pool of candidates, the vast majority of which would have been male, and likely sharing formal training in other professions as administrative scholarship is a relatively new academic discipline.

The actual identification of individuals as potential participants was challenging. In compiling the list, I had approached a Human Resources department at an institution which, quite rightly, had concerns regarding the privacy of their retirees. To protect their privacy, initial communications with potential participants would have to occur through the Human Resources office until such time as potential participants provided consent to the researcher to communicate directly. In another instance, I approached the President
of an institution, the Vice President of another, and then turned to senior staff as historians of human resources rosters. As names emerged, I worked with Human Resources departments in order to make the initial contact with retirees.

The response to the initial letters of invitation was good, yet as a novice researcher, I was overconfident in the first mailing. Not all contacted replied to the invitation. One potential participant secured a date for an interview but withdrew due to developing health concerns. Another potential participant declined involvement as he did not want to revisit his administrative career. Securing participants was a challenge.

Those who elected to participate were found to be robust in their retirement, enjoying good health and active lives after leaving their positions. The participants were good-natured, even-tempered, and willing to share their stories at length. I noted that the opportunity to do so was met with some enthusiasm by the retirees. The period of their service as senior academic administrators was a source of pride and satisfaction. In the contact outside of the transcribed interviews, they revealed themselves to be helpful, gregarious, and wise to the ways of the world.

**Method**

First person narratives were collected from one pilot participant and two retired, postsecondary, academic administrators. An interview was conducted, according to an interview guide (Appendix A), with each participant. At the same time, the interviewer took notes by hand in order to supplement the audio recorded on tape and digital recording equipment. Transcripts were produced with identifying variables removed and distributed to the participants along with an invitation to edit and provide addenda where needed. A second interview was conducted where clarification or expansion of responses
was required. Interviews were conducted at a variety of venues convenient to the participant. Each of the interviews lasted in excess of 1 hour.

The methodology for these interviews was based on the procedures described in *The focused interview: A manual of problems and procedures: A report of the Bureau of Applied Social Research, Columbia University* (1956). The selection of the focused interview method was appropriate for this study. "The primary objective of the focused interview is to elicit as complete a report as possible of what was involved in the experience of a particular situation." (Merton, Fiske & Kendall, 1956, p. 21). The focused interview requires the interviewer to have preexisting knowledge of the situation in order to facilitate the interview. As a fledgling administrator, I was confident that I had at least a rudimentary understanding of the arena of academic administration in which circumstances of discreet dissension may occur. The characteristics of the focused interview include:

1. Instead of having to make extensive explorations to identify relevant experiences, the interviewer can begin at once to explore the significant aspects of the particular experience.

2. Because the interviewer is familiar with the objective nature of the situation, he can provide cues which enable the interviewee to recall more vividly. (Merton et al., 1956, p. 21-22)

Interviews gleaned personal context utilizing three procedures; identification, controlled projection, and paralleling of experience. The questions initially solicited identification from the participant with the identity of the senior administrator in light of discreet dissent. Next, questions narrowed the focus of responses to the personal context
of the participant. Finally, the last of the queries direct participants to describe their own experiences.

The interview guide used by the interviewer aimed to elicit “retrospective introspection” (Merton et al., 1956, p. 23). That is to say, questions were framed in such a way as to garner the reflections at the time of the experiences with discreet dissent, rather than hindsight reflections.

A list of questions functioned as a guide (Appendix A) rather than a rigorous template. Questions developed and emerged throughout the interview sessions, and relied on the responses of the participants to form the next in the series through an assortment of cues asking participants to look back and recall what stood out in their experience. A series of non-directive and transitional questions were used to “yield as many anticipated and unanticipated responses as possible within a limited time” (Merton et al., 1956, p. 64).

A pretest of the questions was administered to a pilot participant in order to determine the efficacy of the tool to provoke reflections and solicit responses. The tool provided effective in garnering sufficient depth and breadth in responses to be used without major revision in interviews with participants. Transcripts were produced for the pilot participant and offered for review. Revisions in returned transcripts were minimal, and this researcher proceeded to interview other participants.

The data captured on audio tape, digital files, and paper copies have been secured with a measure of confidentiality and security, as those with whom the retired administrators may have interacted may still be actively employed by their respective institutions. Similarly, those institutions certainly still exist. Tapes, digital audio files,
and transcripts will be duly destroyed after a period of 3 years, as indicated in the Brock University Research Ethics Board Application for Ethical Review of Research Involving Human Participants.

Transcripts were generated by the interviewer using word processing software. The names of third parties and the postsecondary institutions, dates, and other identifiers were not transcribed into the research for presentation, but appeared to the participants as blacked-out spaces with insertion tags indicating the type of information removed from the audio. For example, the blacked-out segment would be followed by square parentheses indicating that a proper name or the name of the institution had previously been in the position of the block. Emotive elements were then inserted in green font. Emotive elements were largely gleaned from the handwritten observation notes of the interviewer. For instance, the interviewer may have noticed a frown or a chuckle from the participant which could be useful in interpreting the text of a particular response. Further, each participant was provided with a pseudonym.

The transcripts were then returned to respondents with full editorial privileges. Participants were provided the option of removing, clarifying, or inserting addendum as they desired. They were then asked to return the transcripts with their notes to the researcher for use in the study. Though they had complete discretion in terms of editorial privileges, there were very few revisions in the transcripts returned to the researcher.

**Coding**

A coding system was applied to transcripts. To aid the process, participant contributions were created in black, while interviewer questions were changed to a blue colour. This served to isolate the participant responses and make them more apparent in
the pages of transcripts. It is important to note that there already existed a level of intimacy with the transcripts as the researcher was actually the transcriber of the audio interviews. Thus, the textual encounter with the information was not, by any means, the first contact with the interviews. The exercise of coding had been going on in the mind of the researcher for some time prior to the encounter with the transcripts.

First, transcripts were scanned individually, then collectively as a virtual Great Plain of paper. The researcher was looking first at a surface level in order to see any visual patterns. There were some questions which triggered longer responses than others, while some required repetition or a revisiting during the interview in order to glean an answer. Answers to like questions across transcripts were collected together using a cut and paste technique. In that way, the researcher began the deeper analysis, comparing and contrasting answers to questions as they were provided by recipients.

Themes began to emerge from respondents which were highlighted, colour coded, and, otherwise, marked for relevance. The emergence of themes was akin to some lengthy digestive process churning over time as themes emerged from other themes. Some themes were apparent in their immediacy and nearly shouted their presence while others emerged more timidly. For example, one of the themes was the high level of discretion available to senior academic administrators. This was evidenced directly in the transcripts with the following exchange.

**Interviewer:**
......Actually I just wanted to get to the extent of the discretion you had.

**Dr. Blue:**
The extent of discretion was enormous... (Transcript, March 17, 2006)

Such direct and straightforward responses were noted easily.
Another reading was necessary, this time with particular attention to emotive notes in order to determine what elements participants were emphasizing as they were considering their administrative roles. Where an emphasis in notes may have been open to interpretation of emotive intent, a replaying of audio became necessary. For example, in reading a chuckle, inserted by the researcher in square parentheses after a comment from a participant, there was a need to return to the audio to determine if the chuckle was an expression of good natured humour, or more of a cynical cluck.

Some themes were connected and interrelated in which case a detangling process needed to be applied. Some anticipated themes did emerge, while others were surprising to the researcher as unanticipated responses or commentaries beyond the scope of what the participants were asked in the course of the interviews. What was required at that point were several more careful readings with a notepad nearby to capture underlying themes and note the more surprising responses.

The following tables form a rudimentary guide of coding used in this research followed by an exploration of each theme as it emerged from the data. Major themes are indicated in Table 1. Underlying themes are indicated in Table 2, and were derivative of the researcher’s reflection on the responses gleaned from the interviews with participants.

The charts were created as a means to organize themes into major and underlying categories. The underlying themes emerged as attributed to or derivative of major themes. The underlying themes were most challenging to reveal as there were few or no transcribed passages which revealed them explicitly. Rather, they emerged to the researcher after the fact or on top of the process of discovering major themes.
Table 1

**Coding Grid – Major Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Pilot</th>
<th>Dr. Green</th>
<th>Dr. Blue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capacity for Discretion in Senior Administrative Role</td>
<td>Very significant</td>
<td>Very significant</td>
<td>Very significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Engagement in Discreet Dissension</td>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role satisfaction/ Fondness for Institution</td>
<td>Very significant</td>
<td>Very significant</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value Alignment</td>
<td>Very significant</td>
<td>Very significant</td>
<td>Very significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consideration of Risk</td>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>Limited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultation with Others prior/post decision and isolation</td>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>Limited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal Preparation for Administrative Role</td>
<td>None. Experiential preparation only</td>
<td>None. Experiential preparation only</td>
<td>None. Experiential preparation only</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

*Coding Grid – Underlying Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Pilot</th>
<th>Dr. Green</th>
<th>Dr. Blue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enthusiasm for sharing stories</td>
<td>Very significant</td>
<td>Very significant</td>
<td>Very significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pride in accomplishment</td>
<td>Very significant</td>
<td>Very significant</td>
<td>Very significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hints of sentimentality</td>
<td>Very significant</td>
<td>Very significant</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telling of stories off-the-record and in confidence, expressly not for inclusion in transcripts</td>
<td>Very significant</td>
<td>Very significant</td>
<td>Limited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of uniqueness and questioning the existence of an academic administrative phenotype.</td>
<td>Very significant</td>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>Very significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience with costs and rewards of service</td>
<td>Very significant</td>
<td>Very significant</td>
<td>Very significant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The process of ranking the potency of the theme in the interviews was a subjective scale applied by the researcher. While often like themes emerged among participants, they often did so with different levels of intensity. This researcher determined that a scale of available subjective measures from none to limited to moderate to significant to very significant would be a simple way to catalogue the emergence of a theme.

If a mixed method approach had been used, it may have been interesting to ask participants to self-report on the themes according to their potency as they related to their experiences. This may have been done by designing a Likert scale. However, such research design considerations were beyond the parameters of this particular research project which in its initial design was determined to be a qualitative analysis of narratives.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Respondents were able to focus their reflections in remarkable detail, taking me back to moments as they were experienced. This was indicated with not only remarks, but with a remarkable array of gestures and expressions that emerged in the narratives, enabling the emotive elements of the moment to be recaptured. Clearly, recollections were meaningful as they were recalled with relative ease, with few pauses for memory scans. This has led me to believe that the work was of import for each retiree, and had been thoughtfully and repeatedly subjected to individual reflection and individual analysis over time, before any encounter with this researcher.

Themes evidenced in transcriptions of interviews began to emerge and were classified according to major and underlying themes (Tables 1 and 2).

Capacity for Discretion in Senior Administrative Role

Each participant indicated that he had enormous discretion in the performance of his roles. In describing the expectations of his senior office, one participant detailed the vacuum of policy in which discretion so often occurs in senior management positions, the place where there is a void in terms of ascribed detail of policy and procedure.

Dr. Blue: "... there were very few policies in place that constrained what I could do; they just weren't there. There were no [participant's emphasis] policies in place that gave me any constraint whatsoever in the area of international activities, international development. There was nothing; there was just a void."

(Transcript of interview, March 17, 2006)

Discretion was seen as void or lack of constraint as well as institutionally permissible freedom. The response also indicates a difference in the level of formality in
different aspects of the same position. Some elements of a senior administrator’s portfolio may be anticipated, regulated, and codified, while other areas of responsibility within the same portfolio may not be. This participant returned to the question of the degree of discretion and emphasized that the discretion extended to the budget of the office.

**Dr. Blue:** “How much discretion did I have? Enormous discretion. One of the appealing things to me about the position was that there was no budget. I had no operating budget. I had no budget. I spent what I needed. I could do virtually anything that I chose to, to further the objectives of the university in graduate study development, graduate program development and in international initiatives. And so, the discretion was significant.” (Transcript of interview, March 17, 2006)

The next response speaks to the lack of constraint through policy in an emergent facet of the institution. It illustrates the principle that policy development often chases practical development rather than being a process which is anticipatory of practical development.

**Dr. Blue:** “There were very few graduate policies at the time. There were only, now I can’t be exact about this because it was a long time ago, but at the time there were very few graduate programs.” (Transcript of interview, March 17, 2006)

Another participant offered insight to discretion as intended and conferred by senior administration, but also acknowledged the reality of working in the gaps that exist within any emerging institution. It is interesting to note that this participant also speaks
to the development of the institution with the development of codified procedures and policies coming later to account for its reality.

**Dr. Green:** “Both Dr. [identifying proper name] and Dr. [identifying proper name] allowed me a great deal of discretion. That was their style of administration. Having said that, you mentioned earlier university policies and procedures, you have to remember that when I became Dean, the University was only [identifying numeral] years old, and it was struggling. So there was a lot of adhockery. Not much was written down. If you talk to people now in the administrative end, financial and other areas, only now are they consolidating procedures into something you can look up. We flew by the seat of our pants a great deal in those early days.” (Transcript of interview, January 13, 2006)

The discretion afforded each office may have been intentioned or the result of the fact that the participants were engaged in postsecondary institutions which were in phases of emergence. As retirees, all had been involved in periods of emergent growth with relatively newly established institutions in which administrative systems including policies and procedures were fewer and less developed than they are at present, though the complexity of academe in which they were administrators, arguably, was no less complex.

There was a level of energy and enthusiasm in reflecting on the level of discretion and the promise those open spaces held for the administrators entrusted in their roles. Further, that excitement hints at a level of courage for the administrators who were
charting their own professional course, but sensitive to the fact that they were charting the course for an emergent institution and its members.

Further, the discretion was welcomed as participants indicated that they would likely not have had satisfaction in their roles if that discretion had not existed.

**Dr. Blue:** “They weren’t policy rules so much as they were expectations of the senior administration, about me. In the head of the President and the Vice President Academic, there was a direction that they expected or hoped that I would go, that I resisted going to. There was nothing in writing. I had no job description. There was *nothing* [participant’s emphasis] in writing about my office or how I was supposed to behave, other than what I’ve described to you verbally and was put to me verbally. I sought nothing in writing. They offered nothing in writing.” (Transcript of interview, March 17, 2006)

These statements indicated that there was an enormous level of reciprocal trust among those in senior administration. A level of courage emerges in the participants’ willingness to accept a position, in essence, on a handshake. There is a level of confidence required to take on a position of such importance without predetermined, explicit standards of practice, philosophical expectations, and the like. Perhaps this speaks to another time and place in which such arrangements were more commonplace as course of business activity.

**Level of Engagement in Discreet Dissension**

Respondents had engaged in discreet dissension, to a greater or lesser extent, in the performance of their roles and/or as beneficiaries of the discreet dissension of another. Those who reported acting in discreet dissension did so typically when no
institutionally endorsed processes or procedures existed or when policies or practices collided with individual values.

**Dr. Green:** “...Anyway, I got fed up and I took over the department. This goes against all policy, but I said, “I've had enough of you people. I will chair the department, and you will do what I tell you to do.” I ran it like the Czar ran Russia and it worked beautifully. The dissidents were very angry, but they came around. But that was contrary to everything that was embedded in policy or in culture. Departments were self-contained units and all of a sudden this [identifying discipline area] scientist comes in and says, “You do this, and you do that.” And it worked. I’m not sure how long it would have worked, but it worked for about a year, and they calmed down and they’re very productive and successful department now. Although I think they still fight among themselves: nature of the beast [smiling].” (Transcript of interview, January 13, 2006)

This instance of dissent was, in fact, discreet in so far as the process or deviance from existing process was secret. Certainly the outcome of the discreet dissent was apparent (particularly to those within the department who would come to witness new leadership) but it would seem that they were not aware that this action was contrary to policy and convention, but may have presumed that the course of action was legitimately within the discretion of the senior administrator. This interviewer inferred that, had they been aware, there would have been protests and challenges.

The interviewer was, at this point, interested in what prompted the decision to act in dissent.
**Interviewer:** “How was it that you came to that particular decision then? You had mentioned “enough”...”

**Dr. Green:** “Well, I sat down and I figured how much time I was spending on this department. I had, in my domain, if you like, the [identifying discipline] program which was developing at a very rapid rate and needed a lot of attention. I was spending so much time arbitrating or trying to mediate petty differences that finally one day I decided I would try this. Much to my surprise [chuckling], it worked. It was just the accumulation of issues, none of which were substantial, even in total they weren’t substantial, but you only have so much time and energy and I decided, I’m going to try this, and it worked.” (Transcript of interview, January 13, 2006)

In this reported instance, not only did the dissent bring about resolution, but it seemed to have brought some satisfaction to the actor. Particular joy in intonation, facial expression, chuckling, and the like was evidenced in recall of discretion and dissension. This indicated satisfaction in discussing the moment and in the reflection. This was interpreted by the researcher as delight, rather than malice. This was, perhaps, an exception to the mundane; a moment in which the participant recalled creativity and esprit in expressing his personality and values through his work. This was a circumstance of justice served, as the weaker within the department were being protected from those who would turn their energies to infighting within a particular department. The participant in this context had nothing to gain, and the interviewer interpreted his decision to action as a genuine attempt to bring harmony to a disharmonious unit of people to the betterment of the institution.
Another participant commented on the boundaries of discreet dissension.

Dr. Blue: “I didn’t go along, often, with administration policies. In my own office, I could behave exactly as I chose and met the objectives that [participant’s emphasis] set. I assume those were the same objectives of senior administration because I was never told otherwise.” (Transcript of interview March 17, 2006)

The discreet dissent alluded to here involved a going to ground or retreat to an office in which decisions could be made according to the will of the administrator, his values, and the practical context in which was working. It is interesting to note that in the absence of reprimand or concern from senior administration, assumptions of support for uses of discretion are inferred by the participant. Yet, there was cognition of the idea of resistance to ideas of the direction intended for the office, though not formally expressed in the job description, as indicated by returning to the response,

Dr. Blue: “They weren’t policy rules so much as they were expectations of the senior administration, about me. In the head of the President and the Vice President Academic, there was a direction that they expected or hoped that I would go, that I resisted going to.” (Transcript of interview, March 17, 2006)

Role Satisfaction/ Fondness for Institution

Some participants were positive about their experiences as administrators and all held their former employing institutions in high regard with fondness, though one respondent indicated a lower level of personal satisfaction with the administrate role in comparison to other responsibilities he held, chiefly research. Competing interests within
academe make it difficult for people to chose one path, administration, at the cost of limiting or giving up participation in others (e.g., teaching or research).

**Dr. Blue:** “I left the position after 3 years. I was asked to continue and I refused because I felt that my academic career was suffering. I felt that my time with my graduate students was more limited. I missed undergraduate teaching, and I became cynical about the process of academic administration, and so I had no interest in continuing.” (Transcript of interview, March 17, 2006)

Later, in the same interview, the participant indicated the administrative experience was enjoyable, but not his first love in terms of a life’s work.

**Dr. Blue:** “I told you before that I had never done administration. I accepted the offer because I thought it would be an interesting thing to do; it seemed interesting to me, and it was [participant’s emphasis]. I was hugely [participant’s emphasis] interested in it. I worked hard at it. I enjoyed every minute of it. But, at the end of 3 years when I was invited to continue, I thought, you know what, I really don’t want to do administration [chuckling]. That’s all. I did some things that I thought were good and that I enjoyed doing, but I thought, okay that’s enough of that now, let’s go back to doing what I really enjoy doing in my department. I didn’t feel so beaten up by the system that I thought I’ve got to escape it. I didn’t feel that I was doing anything negative by leaving. I simply said, look, that’s great, thanks for the opportunity, it was good fun, I had a good time, I met lots of interesting people, I learned a lot and now I’m going back to what I’m trained to do and like to do.” (Transcript of interview, March 17, 2006)

Another participant had a quite different reflection.
Dr. Green: “You had asked me if there were things that I would have done differently, and this is very personal, but I loved being Vice President. I just loved that job, and I thought I did a good job.” (Transcript of interview, January 13, 2006)

And later in that same interview, the participant remarked,

Dr. Green: “It was a lot more than that. I was sitting next to a fellow the other day who had retired who was in administration and he said, “You know, we were there in the golden days. Everybody knew everybody else and we all had a personal commitment to the place, and those that didn’t, they had an awkward position to maintain.” (Transcript of interview, January 13, 2006)

In this response, the fondness and affection for the administrative experience and the sense of camaraderie shared with those in academe leapt out immediately. That acknowledgement of others sharing a lived experience is the mark of a humane administrator who is not driven by temptations of ego satisfaction at the dismissal of others’ concerns.

Value Alignment

On the whole, participants determined that their values were generally aligned with their respective institutions over the long term. I noticed a pattern of change in their relationship between their individual values and those of their institution over time. A slight parabola effect was noted by the researcher, whereby they arrived at academe with a particular orientation and lived experience in other realms, came to align themselves with the values embodied in the institution, and over time, began to diverge again. The
slight modulations did not seem to impact the performance of their roles or their reported uses of discretion.

**Dr. Green:** "I would say that they aligned fairly closely, but again, you have to realize that I came to the university late in life. I was 37 when I entered my first university teaching job. I had an MBA from [identifying a university]. I had been in the [identifying sector] business. The principles that prevail in a business context are quite different from those in a university, because in the university, consultation is valued and essential, and that's a constraint. So you are less inclined to act unilaterally in a university context than you would in another context, say a business context. It took me a while to accept that." (Transcript of interview, January 13, 2006)

Later in the interview, the participant continued on the theme of values alignment with:

**Dr. Green:** "The switch of universities to research orientation, with much more emphasis on research, because you get paid for research, strikes me as being detrimental to teaching. So I still think teaching is extremely important in the university. And I think while others would value it highly, I don't think they would put the same value on it as I do. I noticed that in my last 7 or 8 years as the university evolved, and so when I retired, I was ready to go, because all the time I spent in administration drew me away from research. I don't think I was ever going to be a good researcher. It was impossible when I was in administration to do research, and it was very difficult afterwards for me to do research because I just didn't have that orientation. It had faded away. It's hard to regain."

(Transcript of interview, January 13, 2006)
In describing another moment of value alignment and divergence in the same conversation:

Dr. Green: “Yes, there was dissonance. I’ll give you a couple of examples. I, at one point, was a firm believer in students evaluating faculty. They’re the consumers. But I taught huge courses; four, five, six hundred students in the course. And after a while, I didn’t care what most of them thought. I cared what the good ones thought. But the majority, I really didn’t care whether they liked my teaching or not. It so happened they liked it. So I diverged. I think people still believe it’s important to get these evaluations and I put less and less weight on them.” (Transcript of interview, January 13, 2006)

For another participant, the divergence occurred early on, though was overcome in relatively short order, though obviously still remained in memory.

Dr. Blue: “…That was the primary reason why I was put there. That was the responsibility attached to this office, of Associate Vice President Academic. That was the main purpose of that office. That was not my understanding when I accepted the position, as I described to you already. I resented that. In that sense, their intentions about where I should go in that office and my intentions about where I would go in that office diverged virtually immediately.” (Transcript of interview, March 17, 2006)

What is interesting about these reports is the fact that each saw themselves as individuals apart from the institutional roles. The dissonance in values, when it arose, was neither surprising nor disabling to the participants. There was an acknowledgement of temporal
development in the ebb and flow of value alignment over the course of careers, lifespan, and institutional history.

**Consideration of Risk**

Professional risk to administrators was always present, though not always determined and calculated prior to the dissension. However, risk was not a significant factor in the decision making. Respondents had confidence in their track-records, trust of their superiors, and were attuned to the fact that they were employed and skilled in other fields prior to entering educational administration and could easily be employed elsewhere again. These measures of confidence enabled them to act and effect without much consideration of risk. A measure of confidence in the senior administrators began to emerge within the theme of risk as the level of risk was off-hand if considered at all. This was a surprising theme to the researcher as it was consistent in the responses of all the participants.

In recalling an incidence of using discretion to act in dissent, the following was contributed by a participant:

**Dr. Green:** “I feared a backlash. It never came. I think they were as tired as I was of the dissent in the department.”

**Interviewer:** “You mentioned a backlash which leads into my next question. Had you anticipated a level of risk as you were making the decision?”

**Dr. Green:** “Yes. Yes, but I knew that Dr. [identifying proper name] would back me up. I told him that I was going to do this.”

**Interviewer:** “Had you gone through a calculus of determining your professional risk and your personal risk? Had that come into play in your decision making?”
Dr. Green: “No, because I didn’t see myself as a professional Dean. I was in for a term and then I expected to go out. So I didn’t think of it in terms of being a professional Dean and what that would do to me because I didn’t see a decanal career.” (Transcript of interview, January 13, 2006)

It is remarkable to consider the confidence with which the senior administrator assumed the risk of acting in discreet dissent. The downplay of risk may have been an inherent personal leadership quality of the individual. There may have also been some consideration of the fact that the livelihood of administrators who were formerly academics cannot be impeded due to the privilege of tenure afforded to those (who are eligible for tenure) within the university context.

Another participant indicated a similar near non-consideration of risk, with similar reasoning.

Dr. Blue: “No. I don’t recall ever having a level of risk. I was a tenured full professor first of all. I was serving at the invitation of the President and the Vice President. I could be told to go back to my department at any time. Did I ever feel risk? No. Did I ever feel threatened? No. Did I ever feel frustrated? Yes [participant’s emphasis]. Often. Did I ever feel irritated? Often. To the credit of the President and the Vice President, I never felt that I was going to be prevented from saying what I thought, or prevented from acting in a way that I thought was appropriate.” (Transcripts of interview March 17, 2006)

Again, the calculation of risk was hardly a consideration in acting in discreet dissension. The unique privilege of tenure in academe may provide some academic administrators who are also academic specialists in other discipline areas with a measure of security.
Consultation with Others in Decision Making; Isolation

All experienced some isolation in their positions as they determined that few colleagues would be consulted as decisions were made. In fact, most decisions were made unilaterally without advice from colleagues, though superiors were fully informed. In some cases, the administrators indicated that consultation was intentionally avoided, particularly with subordinates, as there was a consciousness of the potential of putting others into a difficult position, particularly if they were to be affected by the resulting decision.

Dr. Green: “It’s kind of a lonely thing. There weren’t many people to discuss these kinds of issues with. There were some organizational theory people around, but they were faculty members and I wasn’t quite sure whether I would be putting them in a compromising position, so I didn’t talk to them.” (Transcript of interview, January 13, 2006)

In another case, a participant indicated that sharing of the decision-making process was done with family and colleagues though they were outside of the senior administrative cadre.

Dr. Blue: “I shared it with my wife of course. I discussed it a lot with her. She was in middle management also. What I was doing was middle managing which in many ways can be almost as bad as being Chair of a department. Middle management is responsible to senior administration and there is enormous pressure coming from senior management to behave in certain ways. So, it’s tough to be in that position. I discussed it with my wife who understood the pressures that I was getting and putting on myself. She understood my reasons
for going back. I discussed it with some very good friends, academic friends, not administrators, academic colleagues of mine.” (Transcripts of interview March 17, 2006)

Each administrator indicated little consultation with parties involved in the situation requiring direction though each had the explicit or believed to have the implicit support of their superiors. This support was described in terms of being earned or banked over time, extending the sphere of discretion and latitude of risk afforded to them based on prior successes and confidence earned.

It would seem that the outcome of the decision could be shared among administrative colleagues, but not the process as it was going on in the mind of the individual administrator.

Further, consultation with others was seen by one participant to be a bureaucratic frustration. In recollecting the development of a particular piece of policy, the participant shared the frustration of the collaborative, consultative model.

Dr. Blue: “My view was that we had done a good job and that it needed very little change. That was not the position taken by the other people [chuckling], which resulted in endless [participant’s emphasis] discussions about “t” crossing and “i” dotting which in my view was a waste of time, and I would say so. I would say that this policy hits all the nails, covers everybody off, protects graduate students, undergraduates, and faculty and the university. Why are we wasting our time crossing all these “t”s? Which I thought were purely political issues rather than academic issues, and I would say so. I would be objected to, and they would continue crossing “t”s and dotting “i”s, ad infinitum. It just was a
waste of time and it annoyed me. There were other things that occurred. I felt that these Senior Administrative Committee meetings were inefficient, were political in the sense that people were waiting to hear what other people said before they took a position, so that they could be seen to be on the right side. That’s harsh, but it was my view, and I would make it know as my view, so I think that I was considered probably an irritant, you see.” (Transcripts of interview, March 17, 2006)

**Formal Preparation for Senior Administrative Role**

Each found themselves in administration without formal academic preparation in the scholarship of educational administration, and relied on their own experience in other positions in academe, scholarship in other discipline areas, well developed skill set, and moral compass to see them through the experience.

**Dr. Blue:** “…we are not trained to be administrators at all, so we don’t have any formal training. *Does anybody who is an administrator? I don’t think that anybody does. Is there a training to be an administrator? Sandra, I’m asking you* [participant’s emphasis].” (Transcript of interview, April, 7, 2006)

Participants had been invited into their positions, and, certainly, they were valued by reputation within their institutions for their previous work. One had prior experience as an administrator in academe. Neither competed for the position, but were invited by appointment to the senior administrative position.

**Dr. Green:** “Let me begin at the beginning. I was the first Dean of [identifying department] at [identifying employing university]. I served 2 three-year terms. I then had sabbatical after the second term. When I returned,
Dr. [identifying proper name], the then president, who had been president for quite a few years, without having a holiday, said, "I'd like to go away for 3 months, would you serve as Acting President?". And I agreed. Foolishly, in the sense that I carried a full teaching load while I was Acting President. Nuts [chuckling]. When he came back, he made me Vice President, no brackets, and I held that position until [identifying year], I believe. Then the new President, Dr. [identifying proper name], made me Vice President, brackets, Academic, and I held that for 1 year." (Transcript of interview, January 13, 2006)

In terms of preparation for senior administration, the same participant offered his experience.

**Dr. Green:** "I was still an assistant professor when I became Dean, and I had never met a Dean in my life until I came to [identifying employing university]. I had to do some fast learning on the job." (Transcript of interview, January 13, 2006)

Another participant offered:

**Dr Blue:** "...I think I'm a little different in the sense that I don't think I'm your normal administrator. The reason is that every administrator I've been involved with has always competed for and won the job. Presidents, Vice Presidents, Associate Vice Presidents, Deans, Chairs even, for God's sakes. People compete for the Chair in our department. We have elections. I hadn't done any of those things." (Transcript of interview April 7, 2006)
The participants were sought out by the senior administration, rather than indicating any level of lobbying for the positions or necessarily preparing for them with formal academic training.

One participant indicated no particular desire or necessity for mentoring or training.

**Dr. Blue:** “Probably not and the reason would be that I was over 50 when I stepped into that position. I was pretty much set in the way I did things. That’s possibly the reason why I was asked to do it in the first place. I wouldn’t have been very amenable to any kind of training because I wouldn’t have an interest in any kind of training, *at all* [participant’s emphasis]. My training was more experience in working with other administrators in seeing how they function and arguing with them, mostly Deans, about what they should or shouldn’t do. Through my experience with them, I could see how I would like to behave or how I would like *not* [participant’s emphasis] to behave, and in that sense, I had had some training. Because I had exposure to what people were like when they became administrators. So no, I wouldn’t have been amenable to any kind of training.” (Transcript of interview April 7, 2006)

In these remarks, the non-traditional process of entry to senior administration and the strong experiential basis, record of service, and moral compass were the extent of preparation for service.

**Underlying Themes**

The process of analyzing transcripts in search of expressed major themes generated hints to the existence of underlying themes. Evidence emerged of enthusiasm
from participants in sharing their stories of administrative experiences. Pride in having held positions of senior administration came to the fore in subtle gestures and intonations of voice. There were hints of sentimentality in recalling the years in service to academe. These themes speak to the principle that the life in service of the postsecondary institution is a life well lived, at least professionally.

Each participant recognized the rewards and costs of their administrative service, particularly in terms of the time, energy, and focus that administration demands, all of which encroach on (and in some cases overtake) other responsibilities and desired activities. In academe, service as an administrator translates into decline in participation in teaching and research activity.

Each alluded to the existence of some administrative phenotype, but wanted to be clear that he was not that phenotype. Each participant was a strong individual who did not identify with a type, though he was able to discuss types in other areas of academe they had encountered.

Fascinating to this researcher were the anecdotes that came to mind readily for participants, though they were not included in transcripts of interviews according to the wishes of the participants. Perhaps if there existed a more established relationship of trust between the researcher and participants, these stories may have been permitted to surface into research. Perhaps a career engaged in the familiar use of discretion means the skills of prudence and caution never leave the retired administrator, particularly when asked to reflect on the uses of that same discretion. With that said, I have heard them, learned from them, and will use my discretion to keep them secret forever and a day. I am grateful to the participants for having shared them with me. Most importantly, I have
also learned that I need to remember that, as I accumulate my own stories and secrets, others may benefit from my experience, and I will share some level of candor with others if asked to do so.
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Yes, Virginia, there are, or have been, guerrillas in the midst of academe. Be not afraid, for though they can be powerful, they can also be humane administrators, wise and morally refined, who act in discreet dissent to right wrongs and serve the higher order values of justice and fairness.

Through the course of this research, the first question to be answered had to do with whether administrators had engaged in discreet dissension in the course of doing their work. Most, in fact, said they had done so.

Discreet dissension has emerged as a vital skill set of the academic administrators interviewed in the course of this research. It is a means through which these administrators were able to accomplish work that propelled the aims of the institution, and a means through which they were able to articulate their values and increase their satisfaction within their roles. They indicated that, without the discretion, they would not have been able to fulfill their obligations and, in some cases, would not have been attracted to their positions in the first place, had the discretion not been available. All appear to have been highly individual in the dispensation of their duties and some indicated that they may not have been successful in a rule-dominant environment. The recognition of risk was low for each participant because of the uniqueness of tenure in academe. The freedom affords a confidence in performance unknown to any other sector of industry.

It was also reported by participants that they had the confidence of superiors which provided some safety for risk-taking administrators. What of those at the pinnacle? Where do the Presidents draw their reserve, if not from confidence of
superiors, and are they able to articulate their individual wills through discreet dissension? It would seem that those at the end of the corridor of power would need to draw on some other measure of strength if, in fact, dissent is within their grasp and intention. At that summit of hierarchy, perhaps there is no language of dissent, but rather a language of change. If this is the case, a President could dissent from rules of his or her own design without compromising the integrity of his/her resolve. It would certainly seem possible for dissent to occur, as the library and litany of policies, procedures, and conventions would have had a long history of authors, and any President of the moment would inherit the library which predated him or her. It is also necessary to note that the democratization of institutions and the checks and balances demanded for risk management of public institutions would necessitate disclosure of dissent from existing conventions. Yet, this is the moment that dissent becomes change. Further, the pinnacle of the hierarchy may have become somewhat of a myth, as the accountability is distributed among many authoring their own meanings.

The second question to be answered in the research was what made discreet dissension the only or preferred course of action for the administrator. In most cases, the discreet dissension was the course selected because there were no explicit institutional rules with which to achieve the desired result which were congruent with the administrator's values. In some instances, this gap was attributed to the emergent nature of the institutions in which policy was only beginning to be created to address activity. In other cases, the existing policies and rules were at variance with the higher order values of justice and fairness held by the individual administrators. Again, unique to academe is an unusual reporting structure, uncommon in other industry. In short, the
day-to-day functioning of academics is largely unscrutinized. They are, perhaps, the furthest removed from the piece worker. Certainly, that is not to say that their teaching, research, and administration are not without supervision and regulation. Those toiling with academe are subject to the rigors of public, institutional, and academic discipline-specific guidelines and protocols. However, that scrutiny is often applied to the ends rather than the day-to-day activities in which tremendous discretion (and occasionally discreet dissent) can be exercised. In light of the fact that academic administrators are guiding the energies of colleagues, similarly credentialed and skilled in reason and logic, there is an acknowledgement that decision making is subject to analysis which does not lend itself to expediency or a common value system within the membership of the institution. Thusly, discreet dissension may be a preferred mode of action when the administrator needs to make a unilateral decision based on considerations of his/her own judgment and moral reasoning.

The third and final question to be addressed had to do with the extent of preparation or formal training in administration, and particularly in the humane use of discreet dissension, that each administrator had. Participants in this particular study indicated no formal academic training, mentorship, or preparation for administrative responsibilities within the academe. This is no cause for alarm.

Becoming capable of doing a job is only one thing, of course; making others take note is another. But the two are closely linked, as they ought to be. Success in teaching and research, plus some common sense and interest in others, make one potentially a capable administrator; and success in research automatically brings
one to the attention of others. Admittedly, mentors can be directly helpful here, but again only if you-the-product already exist. (Martin, pseudonym, 1988, p. 76)

As was evidenced in the interviews, the irony is that the successful researcher and teacher, who is recognized to have latent potential as an administrator, is removed from the activities that brought accolade and attention once they arrive in administrative office. That arrival is colloquially if not formally seen to be a promotion from whatever arena the participant had been previously engaged in. Perhaps this notion of latent capacity is one that needs to be understood as talent, in an artistic sense rather than corporate ascension up a ladder of hierarchy. Administration as an art form would suggest that those with talent find their way to those offices. It may be a calling, or an invitation from those who recognize the latent talent of humane administrators in waiting.

The question arises, what is the end of administrative sciences as disciplines of study? Academic administration is unique from administration in sectors, such as business, human resource management, finance, and others. Academic administration lacks the same rigid command hierarchy as other sectors due to the fact that academic administrators are typically academics first. As they move into administration, they are directing colleagues who hold like credentials in academe, rather than those who would consider themselves subordinates in terms of skills and credentials as in the progressive chain of administrative assistant, office manager, regional manager, and proprietor. As a result, the administrator in academe must be, largely, content with the notion of participatory decision making rather than top-down management strategies effective in other sectors which would have a higher tolerance for unilateral decision making. Academic administrators must not only have the trust of their superiors and their
colleagues, they must demonstrate their competence and rationale when called upon to make decisions to a degree not demanded of systems of rigid hierarchies. This necessarily pushes some humane dissension into the shadows, away from the political frontlines of academe.

What does the future hold for graduate and postgraduate study in academic administration? What is their value in terms of instruction of aspiring academic administrators? Perhaps their utility will be as arenas for further research and reflection on practice, rather than instruction, as the academic administrative life appears to be one lived, rather than instructed and rehearsed.

The examination of the administrative guerrilla becomes a component of the consideration of academic administration as an art, rather than a science. The goal turns to the understanding of how administration is conducted by individuals, rather than how administration should be conducted according to socio-scientific theories. This return to the perspective of administration as art form is typified by the relation between art and artist, and by extension, administrator and administration.

...we can for the time being sum up the relation of the artist to his art as follows: the artist, as a definite creative individual, uses the art-form that he finds ready to his hand in order to express something personal; this personal must therefore be somehow connected with the prevailing artistic or cultural ideology since otherwise he could not make use of them, but it must also differ, since otherwise he would not need to use them in order to produce something of his own...the general ideology of the culture, which determines its religion, morals, and society as well as its art, is again only the expression of the human types of the age, and
of this the artist and the creative personality generally are the most definite crystallization. (Rank, 1932, p. 6)

Perhaps this is the examination of the uniqueness of human beings as quartz crystals that Greenfield (1978) implored administrative study to examine.

**Implications for Future Research**

Answering questions regarding the extent to which discreet dissension is a practice of educational administrators would benefit from a more extensive study involving larger numbers of participants. I intend to expand this research project to involve a broader pool of participants in future.

Further research would necessitate a return to Baumgartner’s (1992) notion of predictability in discretionary decision making. “More concretely, people differ in such matters as their age, sex, wealth, education, group memberships, personal networks, ethnicity, religion and respectability. All of these influence the exercise of discretion in predicable ways” (p. 129). There is a temptation to begin research in profiling senior administrators to the end of determining some sort of descriptive profile of their cadre if, in fact, one exists. It would then be possible to contrast the profile to the individuals encountered in the senior offices.

Any examination of uses of discretion must consider not only the individual within the administrative office but also the cadre of academic administrators in their historical context according to common variables. If, for example, the composition of senior administrators in any given era were discovered to be similar in their background, gender and other variables, would the influence on their discretionary decision making be
the same? In other words, would a like group use their discretion in like ways? Further research would be revealing.

This initial project has opened a window to a research path to understanding the administrative character embodied in individuals and the patterns that may exist in broader considerations across historical time periods or within specific categories of postsecondary institutions.

More narrative inquiry is essential to collecting the stories of administrators and their discreet and explicit uses of discretion. There are many more questions that need to be posed to retired senior administrators. For instance, did they nurture the same skill set of discreet dissension in subordinates who might potentially aspire to similar administrative positions? To the questions of character and personal virtue, it would be of interest to determine whether the administrator could identify a tendency or proclivity for guerrilla behaviour in other aspects of their lives. Did they break rules and covenants in the shadows of their relationships or domestic and sporting/recreational lives in order to achieve some goal?

A research project comparing and contrasting the attitudes of retired and engaged administrators could yield data relating to the historical positioning of discreet dissension and its potency from one era to another.

A longitudinal study of novice administrators as they progress through their careers of service would assist in understanding the developmental aspects of individual values as they correspond to administrative experience articulated in the relationship to rule adherence and dissension.
A comparative research study of male and female administrators and their attitudes and applications to dissension in the course of their work may illuminate differences and similarities from gender specific perspectives.

Conclusions

There are, indeed, guerrillas in the mi(d)st of academe. I have encountered them in the course of this research. They are matured, possessed of confidence in their abilities, and humane in their encounters with others.

The retired administrators who participated in this research engaged in discreet dissension in the interests of doing work that impacted others and their respective institutions. Their discretion was implicitly approved by their senior administrators and by virtue of the fact that it was not explicitly charged within a formal job description. Further, administrators accessed avenues for discretion because of the limited codified policy and procedure which existed within their institutions at the time of their service. Administrators also claimed a level of discretion as an articulation of their personality and values. Within these discretionary spaces, administrators engaged in discreet dissension, whereby they acted against existing policies or conventions to the humane aim of expeditiously satisfying values of justice and fairness for those they worked with within the institution.

These acts of discreet dissension resulted in substantive effect, though their process was clandestine. The necessity for some level of secrecy had to do with the expediency of the process in action, rather than some calculation of risk. Further, the clandestine nature of the dissension was secreted only from affected actors, as participants indicated that they had apprised their senior administrators of their intentions.
The inspiration for the dissension was often rooted in righting an existing wrong or in consideration of the notion of justice. Discreet dissension was undertaken when there were no avenues of institutionally permissible behaviour which would have garnered the same result, or when the institutional avenues, if they existed at all, were inadequate to meet the needs of the situation at hand.

Discreet dissension emerged as a common sense skill, honed after years of experience. None of the participants had encountered the notion of discreet dissent prior to engaging in this research project though, once it was explained, they were easily able to acknowledge its existence and role in their own administrative practice. They valued their skills in discreet dissension, though they had no formal training in its humane use. They relied instead on their wisdom accrued through their lived experiences and well defined moral compasses.

Within the character of every administrator is posited the capacity for discreet dissension in service to the people within their institutions. To engage this capacity, administrators needed to call on their personal attributes of confidence, decisiveness, innovative thinking, and humane orientation in relation to self and others.

The path to a career in administrative service may lie not in formal training in the discipline of academic administration, but through a lived administrative life in academe. In demonstrating personal character, values, effective uses of discretion, rule adherence and dissension, the potential administrators are noticed and perhaps guided to administration.

While the work is rewarding and challenging, intrinsically and extrinsically, it comes at a cost of exclusion to other academic responsibilities of teaching and research.
The academic administrator must ultimately make the choice of devotion to a career of service.

The contemporary climate of increasing codification and development of institutional policies and practices is an era in which transparency and accountability are benchmarks of administrative success. One is left to wonder whether the capacity for discreet dissension is still within the realm of the skillful administrator. If the retired administrator were to return to contemporary service, would the measures of success and individual satisfaction be the same? The answer is yes, for policies, procedures, and conventions can never, nor would we ever want them to, entirely cover every human effort and intention in academe to the point where the values of humane guerrilla could not have expression. There is room for the administrative guerrilla in the mature organization. It is not merely a phenomenon for which only emergent organizations are fertile. In fact, the administrative guerrillas and their influence on institutions and their membership may be more critical than ever before in our historical context.

The creation of new and innovative management theory along with its successful application seemed to open a near limitless frontier of exploration and pursuit. However, there is increasing evidence that management theorists and practitioners, regardless of the seemingly positive nature of their actions, have been and are creating and maintaining institutions which are destructive for mankind. The creation and maintenance of these institutions implies an insulated role of management in a highly interrelated, technological society. That is, too many managers today are so caught up in the procedural demands of their work that they easily lose sight of the important end result of their activities. It is
precisely this insulation or encapsulation from large societal and moral questions which Albert Speer became aware of during his imprisonment at Spandau...

(Singer & Wooton, 1976, p. 98)

The administrative guerrilla in the mi(d)st of academe is poised to bring elegance to this conception of discretion:

Discretion is an authority conferred by law to act in certain conditions or situations in accordance with an official’s or an official agency’s own considered judgment and conscience. It is an idea of morals, belonging to the twilight zone between law and morals. (Pound, 1960, p. 926)

This research study has critically evaluated the administrative theories and paradigms in respect to their capacity to explore or explain the phenomenon of discreet dissension. Traditional and contemporary socio-scientific theories cannot provide sufficient account for discreet dissension. A new direction toward consideration of administration as an art form is required. Further, this study has discovered the problem of understanding discreet dissension which has not received significant attention to date. It is of the problems that Getzels (1970) described as discovered rather than presented problem situations, where presented problems are merely at hand, with known formulation, method of solution and known solution. In this way, Getzels (1970) states, I would suggest a parallel distinction between creative and non-creative administration. The uncreative administrator, like the detective, waits for problems to happen – he is set to deal with presented problems – and accordingly restricts his and the organization’s activity only to enforced or expedited change. The creative administrator is set to deal not only with presented problems but with
discovered problems as well, and aspires to essential change – change which is founded not merely in accommodation or reaction but in creative imagination and voluntarism within the organization. (p. 84)

It is in this creative element that the administrator functions as artist more so than scientist.

Finally, I am heartened, through the encounter with participants, to know that humane academic administrators are not a construct, but exist as a reality. The trust of governance of massive numbers of members of academe and their individual and collective energies is not misplaced among those who serve humanely. To know that there are those who approach the practicalities of rule use, dissension and discretion with thoughtful moral consideration and with individual aplomb fosters hope and anticipation for those who look forward to a career of service in academe.
REFERENCES


Brewer, E. C. (no date). The dictionary of phrase and fable: Giving the derivation, source, or origin of common phrases, allusions and words that have a tale to tell. Bath, England: Galley Press.


Greenfield, T. B. (1986). The decline and fall of science in educational administration. Interchange, 17 (2), 57-80.


Appendix A

Interview Guide

Preamble:

Within every administrative office, there exists a latitude of discretion of authority, not necessarily expressly articulated in policy or procedure, which enables administrators to accomplish work. Traditional administrative theory suggests that discretion exists to enable the administrator to resolve conflicts and propel the aims of the institution in ways which could not have been anticipated by the architects of the position description and accompanying policies and procedures. In that way, discretion is seen as a flexibility administrators use as they propel the values of the institution through their work. The series of questions I am about to ask have to do with how you used your discretion in particular circumstances, whether that use of discretion was aligned with traditional theory, and how your values affected your application of discretion. Further, I am interested in directing your focused reflection in order to determine whether your application of discretion had ever, on any level, caused you to depart from policies, procedures or precedents of the institution.

Describe the last senior administrative position, including the title and responsibilities, which you held prior to your retirement.

Describe the extent of the discretion which was afforded your office.

To what extent did the expressed principles of the organization align with your individual values? Did this alignment change over the course of your career of service?

In thinking back to your career as an administrator, were there occasions in which you deliberately chose to use your discretion to act ways contrary to the conventions and policies of the organization and what were the circumstances of such an incident?

How did you come to the decision to depart from any rule, convention or policy?

Recall your feelings on the occasion of using your discretion in acting in dissent of existing conventions. What was it like to be in that position? What were the emotions that you felt?

What was the level of personal or professional risk you anticipated?

What did your own values have to do with your decision to act in dissent?

With whom, if anyone, did you share your decision to dissent, prior to or after engaging in the behaviour?
At that point in your career, what had been your experience with those who may have broken a rule for you at their own peril?

Now that you have retired, as you think back on the decisions you made, do you feel that you were justified in making the decisions you did? Would you make the same decisions again?
Appendix B

Brock University Ethics Approval

DATE: June 8, 2005
FROM: Linda Rose-Krasnor, Chair
Research Ethics Board (REB)
TO: Michael Manley-Casimir, Education
Sandra Plavinskis
FILE: 04-386 PLAVINSKIS
TITLE: Guerillas in the Mi(d)st: A Study of Discrete Dissention Among Academic Administrators

The Brock University Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above research proposal.

DECISION: Accepted as clarified.

This project has received ethics clearance for the period of June 8, 2005 to August 31, 2006 subject to full REB ratification at the Research Ethics Board's next scheduled meeting. The clearance period may be extended upon request. The study may now proceed.

Please note that the Research Ethics Board (REB) requires that you adhere to the protocol as last reviewed and cleared by the REB. During the course of research no deviations from, or changes to, the protocol, recruitment, or consent form may be initiated without prior written clearance from the REB. The Board must provide clearance for any modifications before they can be implemented. If you wish to modify your research project, please refer to http://www.brocku.ca/researchservices/forms to complete the appropriate form Revision or Modification to an Ongoing Application.

Adverse or unexpected events must be reported to the REB as soon as possible with an indication of how these events affect, in the view of the Principal Investigator, the safety of the participants and the continuation of the protocol.

If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and clearance of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of any research protocols.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be monitored. A Final Report is required for all projects upon completion of the project. Researchers with projects lasting more than one year are required to submit a Continuing Review Report annually. The Office of Research Services will contact you when this form Continuing Review/Final Report is required.

Please quote your REB file number on all future correspondence.

LRK/bb