This study explored how women educators negotiate feminist interests in elementary and secondary schools. Three research questions guided the study: 1) What issues are raised by feminist educators? 2) What factors constrain and/or enable action? 3) What specific strategies are used in negotiation of feminist interests in schools?

This study used a qualitative methodology to explore participants’ subjective experiences as well as the social contexts that shaped those experiences. Ten women educators were interviewed. Participants ranged in age from mid-thirties to early sixties, and represented the roles of teacher, administrator, counselor and superintendent. The interview was structured around the recollection of one or more critical incidents of sexism in schools to which the participant was party, either as a target of sexism or acting on behalf of another woman or girl who was targeted.

The data revealed feminist educators raised issues of sexual harassment, battery and sexual discrimination, and that women and girls were equally likely to be the target of any particular form of sexism. Three main categories of factors that constrained or enabled action were identified. The first was beliefs stemming from the ideology of patriarchy. Three specific features of the ideology of patriarchy were identified: 1) denial that gender is an issue; 2) the schools’ rejection of responsibility for dealing with sexism; 3) a “blame the victim” mentality. The second factor found to constrain or enable action was the politics of patriarchy which manifested in the patriarchal social organization of
schools and in the breakdown of the negotiation process due to sabotage of the process by those in power positions.

The third factor found to constrain or enable action was personal characteristics. Three specific personal characteristics were identified: 1) a moral imperative to act, which was found to be the single most enabling factor; 2) political awareness, which functioned as an enabler of action if one was politically aware, but lack of awareness constrained action; 3) personal credibility, which was found to enable action, but was limited in its effectiveness for actual negotiation of feminist interests.

Data further revealed that feminist educators engaged three main strategies in the negotiation of feminist interests: 1) defensive strategies, including preparing well before engagement, distancing for protection of self and/or interests, and maintaining mental and emotional balance; 2) offensive strategies, which included calculation of when to act, (the timing of one’s actions), raising the issue to the individual or entity with the greatest degree of power to act, and following policy/procedure to advance and protect interests; 3) proactive strategies were future oriented and implemented to draw attention to the issue of sexism in schools.

Three main conclusions were drawn from the study. First, patriarchy marks the social life of schools and proved to be the most formidable opponent in negotiation of feminist interests. Second, that politics matter in negotiation of feminist interests was clearly illustrated in that most participants failed to account for political realities and subsequently fell short of their aims. Third, that successful negotiation of feminist interests in schools requires the engagement of all three types of strategies because each makes its own unique contribution. However, more attention and emphasis needs to be
given to pro-active strategies than is presently demonstrated because in their engagement
lies the greater potential for disruption of the status quo.

INDEX WORDS: Critical adult education, Elementary and secondary education,
Sexism, Feminist educators, Negotiation of interests, Gendered power relations
NEGOTIATING FEMINIST INTERESTS

IN

ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS

by

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PROLOGUE

“True rebels, after all, are as rare as true lovers, and, in both cases, to mistake a fever for a passion can destroy one’s life.”

James Baldwin, No Name in the Street

Expressed in this quote is the tension, the angst, the uncertainty of going against the flow of the status quo. There is a reason people do not readily jump into the fray of challenging the way things are, and in a word, it is risk. Many times the stakes are simply too high. Risk presents in various forms and at various levels. There are personal risks, including your own emotional and psychological welfare (when your insides are on the line) as well as the risk of disturbing close personal relationships, as with a spouse, children or other significant people in your life. There are social and professional risks, of being avoided or ostracized, at least talked about behind your back as being “overboard,” accused of making more of things than is really there. Frequently, economic risks must be considered because the threat of losing one’s job may be very real, endangering not only the individual, but if the person has a family, jeopardizing their welfare as well. And then, for some, the threat of loss of life is an inescapable reality. Multiple forces, internal and external, exert their influence simultaneously within and upon the would-be rebel, forces with which she or he must come to terms in order to calculate the costs of challenging the status quo.

Nonetheless, the struggle of the powerless against the powerful is a perennial theme in both fact and fiction. Throughout history there have been rebels whose passion, determination and sheer stamina stirred revolution in this
country — abolitionists, women’s suffrage, the civil rights movement, and labor movements — and resulted in social transformation. Popular fictional works like Dumas’ *The Three Musketeers*, the legend of *Zorro*, and most recently the overwhelmingly popular *Star Wars* all express the hope and the vision of the many for a more just society through overcoming the oppressive few. The people in these events, fact and fiction, are in many ways ordinary, but are, on the other hand, clearly extraordinary because they accepted the risks involved in challenging the status quo of social injustice. Somewhere and somehow they found within themselves the inspiration and the courage to act. So it is with the women who participated in this study, educators who found it within themselves to act despite the odds. It is to them that I turned in my endeavor to gain a deeper understanding of the complex and risky prospect of crossing swords, as it were, with the system.
CHAPTER ONE
THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Systems of power and oppression in society are structured in relation to the material realities of race, class and gender, and their intersections. These intersections, or positionalities (Maher & Tetreault, 1986) are endowed with various levels of cultural, social, economic and political capital creating power differentials which privilege some and disadvantage others. Structured power relations rest upon dominant ideologies, that is, shared beliefs and values which are animated through both formal discourse and everyday language, through customs and laws, and promulgated by social institutions. The role of ideology is to explain and justify behavior thus keeping intact the status quo. Although highly adaptable to challenge, ideology is not impenetrable or immutable (Brookfield, 1995; Creswell, 1993; Fineman, 1991).

Learning to challenge and effect change in existing systems of power and oppression has long been a prominent interest of adult education and in recent years particularly this subject has been the topic of many adult educators representing a wide array of concerns (Brookfield, 1993; Cervero & Wilson, 2001; Collins, 1995; Hart, 1995; Newman 1994; Tisdell, 1993, 1996; Welton, 1995). In large part interest in what can be called a power relations perspective on adult learning (Merriam & Caffarella, 1998) stems from a “critical turn” (Welton, 1995) in the field of adult education which has redirected attention to its early heritage of radical social projects, resurrecting discussion
about the role adult education can play in contributing to an increasingly just and democratic society.

From a power relations perspective the focus is on analysis of the context in which people live or work and on how life events and outcomes are influenced by culture, history, structural conditions and social institutions (Inglis, 1997; Merriam & Caffarella, 1998). This perspective is rooted in critical social theory which is distinguished by its moral imperative and emphasis on the need for both individual empowerment and social change. The aim of critical analysis is to expose structured power relations by identifying whose interests are being served by existing systems and calling into question assumptions made about the world we live in. Thus, critical analysis is a political act, one which seeks to “help people stop being passive victims who collude, at least partly, in their domination by external forces” (Welton, 1995, p. 37).

This study adopts a power relations perspective in an exploration of gendered power relations in elementary and secondary schools. My work as a school psychologist takes me into these schools every day where I have the opportunity to observe the many ways gendered power relations are played out and how gender influences, and in some cases determines, the outcome of many interactions.

Having reviewed much of the literature about gender bias and schooling I was initially optimistic that significant changes in the power asymmetry between males and females in schools would be forthcoming. Much to my disappointment, however, this has not proven true. My interest in this topic is fueled by one nagging question: Why is it that, despite volumes of research flooding both professional and popular audiences, years of discourse, and the introduction of numerous feminist intervention initiatives, have
gendered power relations in schools remained largely unchanged? In other words, why is it that arguments for a dress code include the rationale that short skirts and tank tops distract boys (girls are responsible for boys’ behavior)? Why is it that when an eighth grade boy pulls a girl’s head into his crotch the administration fails to call the act what it is, sexual harassment, perhaps even sexual battery, forfeiting the opportunity to take a public stand against such acts. And, just why is it that the administration of a large urban high school has not questioned a Key Club tradition of selling calendars depicting senior girls (Calendar Girls) chosen on the basis of popularity by an all male committee?

That situations such as these continue to occur every day across this country indicates there is much more to be learned about challenging and altering gendered power relations in schools. Many educators agree, calling for a more complete understanding of what we are up against systemically, but more urgently, asking what can be done to further feminist interests within the context of schools. Acker (1994), for example, exclaims that “a gap, indeed a chasm, exists between feminist scholarship and teachers’ everyday experience in schools” (p. 103). This study is meant to be a contribution to this project.

This first chapter presents a brief overview of gendered power relations in society, then moves to a more specific discussion of gendered power relations in schools. The chapter then sets forth the research problem and purpose of the study and concludes with a statement regarding the significance of the study.

Gendered Power Relations

Power relations structured on the basis of gender are rooted in the ideology of patriarchy, a tenacious and highly resilient force which has withstood over one hundred
years of resistance and challenge to its oppressive influence in the lives of American women. As the expression of patriarchal ideology, sexism permeates all spheres of public and private life so that it may be aptly described as the dye in the fabric of society and has historically been a barrier for women to opportunities and freedoms afforded to males (Connell, 1994; Dworkin, 1992; Lindsey, 1997).

Feminist movements in the U.S. have resulted in the acquisition of civil rights and liberties for women now protected by law which has had a significant impact on diminishing overt discrimination based on sex. However, legality does not guarantee laws will not be violated, as in the failure of schools to comply with the mandates of Title IX which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in programs by any educational institution receiving federal funds. Neither does it mean that legal rights are necessarily inalienable, as current debates surrounding abortion attest. Moreover, laws do nothing to alter attitudes, values or beliefs and consequently subtle and covert discrimination along with pervasive stereotyping of women continue (Hayes & Colin, 1993).

The precarious status of the welfare of women in U.S. society is well illustrated by two recent events. The first, which many would argue was “all in good fun” with “no harm intended,” concerns the 1999 World Cup win of the U.S. women’s soccer team. The win was the lead story for most network new programs the day of the victory, and within a few days Time and Newsweek magazines featured the team as their cover story. Lauded for strength, stamina, intelligence and competitiveness, they were the recipients of the nation’s accolades. Simultaneously, however, they were the recipients of sexist commentary as well. The Daily Show, a popular parody of network news programs also led with this story reporting “Victory Snatched!!” and while showing a video clip of the
team huddled together celebrating on the field, the announcer, looking dreamily at the
screen commented wistfully “a pile up like that is the dream of every man in America.”
All too common in the media, such sexual objectification of women as beings whose
primary function is the sexual gratification of men figuratively strips women of attributes
other than sexuality.

The second illustration is a story which aired on National Public Radio on
January 11, 2000 and reported by Nina Totenburg. The report was about the case of
Christie Brzonkala, a former student at Virginia Polytechnic Institute (VPI) who brought
charges of civil rights violation against Antonio Morrison, also a student at VPI, under
the Violence Against Women Act (VAMA). According to the transcript of the segment,
in 1994 Brzonkala was walking down the hallway of her dormitory when two fellow
students, Morrison and James Crawford, both well known football players on campus,
invited her into their room. According to Brzonkala within thirty minutes she was pinned
to the bed and the men took turns raping her. Traumatized, she did not report the rape.
She did however, became withdrawn, cut off her long hair and even tried to commit
suicide. It was several months later before she decided to take action.

Totenburg explained that since physical evidence had not been preserved
Brzonkala could not pursue criminal charges. She did, however, file a sexual assault
complaint with VPI. At a disciplinary hearing Morrison admitted that Brzonkala twice
told him “no” and testimony from other students revealed that he often bragged about
getting girls drunk and forcing them to have sex. In an interview with Brzonkala,
Tracey and Ferrato (2000) reported that the judicial board found Morrison guilty of
sexual assault and consequently, he was to be suspended. However, he retained legal
counsel who argued that the word “rape” was omitted from a description of sexual violence in the printing of the 1994-95 student code of conduct contained in the university rule book, and as such, Morrison could not have known from reading the code that rape was included in VPI’s sexual assault policy. This lead to a second hearing wherein the original finding of “sexual assault” was reduced by the judicial board to “abusive conduct,” but the suspension was upheld.

Brzonkala learned of the ruling in a letter to her from the judicial board, however, within one day of the letter, VPI’s football coach announced to the media that Morrison would be returning for the fall football season, a direct contradiction to what she had been told. It was discovered that the provost unilaterally reduced Morrison’s punishment to a one-hour session with a VPI affirmative-action counselor and reinstated his student status, including his athletic scholarship.

Learning of VPI’s reinstatement of Morrison from the Washington Post, not from VPI, Brzonkala reportedly feared for her safety and withdrew from school. Some time later she filed a federal lawsuit under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), an act passed by Congress under its 14th amendment authority to provide equal protection under the law and its authority to regulate interstate commerce. According to NPR, passage of VAWA was motivated by congressional testimony from state task forces on gender bias which revealed that women were many more times the victims of violent crime than men, that crimes involving women were treated less seriously than crimes that affect men, and that women often endured differential treatment, such as having victims of sexual assault submit to a lie detector test when male assault victims are not required to do so. After four years of hearings Congress found a “pervasive bias in the justice system among police officers, judges, juries and court employees” (p. 2). Congress concluded that
violence motivated by gender bias should be considered as serious as crimes motivated by racial or religious bias, and consequently, victims could sue in federal court for damages.

However, the courts disagreed. Brzonkala pursued her case through four courts, including the U.S. Supreme Court, and in each filing was found against on two points: 1) that Congress had “exceeded its constitutional authority when, in enacting VAWA, it claimed that violence against women affected interstate commerce” and 2) that VAWA was not “an appropriate response to the failure of state criminal courts to treat female and male victims of violence equally” (Tracey & Ferrato, 2000, p. 54). Nonetheless, Brzonkala’s right to physical, mental and emotional safety, and to individual liberty was literally stripped from her by force while Morrison, upheld and bankrolled by a social institution, continued his life plans.

Both accounts illustrate socially sanctioned discriminatory behaviors toward women and document the very real struggles women face. And, they send a clear message that no matter what a woman may have achieved, what abilities she may possess or contributions to society she may make, her rightful place is beneath a man, literally, figuratively or both. It is also important to note that both illustrations involve women of privilege in terms of race and class, yet this relative privilege did not insulate them from the pernicious effects of sexism, emphasizing the reality that gender remains a primary organizing principle for all women and that social institutions play a powerful role in sustaining sexist practices, attitudes and stereotypes of women.

Gendered Power Relations In Schools

The role of social institutions in sustaining and reproducing dominant racist, sexist and classist values of U. S. society is well documented (Apple, 1982; Flansburg,
Schools in particular have long been identified as one of the most influential social institutions in which gendered power relations are constituted. This is true for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that schooling in the U.S. is compulsory and as such children are exposed to the teaching of dominant social values from as early as five years of age until they graduate twelve years later. Through curriculum, materials depicting gender stereotype, local and state policy and laws, the gendered status quo has historically been promulgated. Thus, schools are highly influential in shaping individual behavior to conform to sexist stereotype (Flansburg, 1993; Hayes & Colin, 1993; Stromquist, 1990).

Over the past two decades a great deal of research in education has focused specifically on sexism and gender bias within U.S. schools setting forth the deleterious effects, particularly for girls (AAUW, 1991; Bailey, 1993; Gilligan, 1985, Sadker & Sadker, 1986). Some of the findings, for example, indicated that girls were not receiving the same quality or quantity of education as their brothers, that girls were systematically steered into stereotypical tracks of study, and alarmingly, revealed a steady decline in self-esteem and confidence in many girls beginning as early as fifth grade and continuing throughout their high school years.

Feminist efforts to address the problem of gender bias in schools has focused on abolishing discrimination based on gender so that girls had access to opportunities afforded males. Predominant initiatives for addressing inequities in schools include curricular changes, such as making available courses historically segregated by gender available to both male and female students, the selection of textbooks based on the absence of gender stereotype, and parity in teacher interaction with male and female students. Such mainstream initiatives stem from a liberal political theoretical perspective
and emphasize the appropriation of equal rights under law, policy or procedure. According to Weiler (1988), it was assumed that these changes would alter social relationships in schools to reflect more just and democratic social order, but in actuality instructional practices and social relationships within schools remain largely unchanged (Gore, 1993).

Analysis of the frailty of attempts to alter the social reality of schools reveal two primary contributing factors. First, while the initiatives launched are a necessary first step, they do little if anything to interrupt gendered power relations (Arnot, 1992). As Brody, et.al. (2000) explain, strategies used to create sex-same or sex-neutral learning environments typically ignore issues of male power and privilege. By centering discourse on achieving equity, that is, according male and female equal rights, power relations underlying the inequity and subsequent bias are not critically called into question and talked about openly. Thus the “why” of asymmetrical power relations escapes scrutiny and the status quo continues undisturbed.

Second, restricting intervention efforts to the classroom, instructional practices and curricula ignores the social conditions of schools, the micro-political dimension. O’Brien (as quoted in Abrogast, 1994) argues that solutions which fail to deal with equality of conditions as well as equality of opportunity are “fundamentally patriarchal in theory and practice” (p. 1). The folly of ignoring this broader perspective is summarized by Weiler (1988) in an explanation of why liberal, mainstream approaches for disrupting the status quo are limited:

....Implicit in this view is the concept that sexism exists within the realm of ideas, and if those ideas are changed, then social relationships will also change. Such a view ignores the constraints of the material world
and the various forms of power and privilege that work together in a complex and mutually reinforced process to make up social reality as we know it. It also ignores the complexity of consciousness and the existence of ideology and culture. (p. 28)

The importance of attending to the wider political dimension of schools in the interest of social change within them is addressed by a number of educators. Acker (1994), for example, found that the work conditions in schools figure prominently in the degree to which, or even whether, innovation is endorsed by teachers, an important factor when the aim is to alter power relations in schools. Ball (1987) goes a step further in claiming that “change in schools or resistance to it cannot be fully understood without taking into account the micro-political dimension” (p. 31). Gore (1993), a teacher educator, argues any attempt to alter the social reality of schools must take this dimension into account, calling for educators to “act in spheres wider than, but related to, curricula and pedagogy” (p. 144). Acting in wider spheres necessitates expanding the conceptualization of schools from sites where teachers teach and students come to learn to schools as work sites, organizations which employ hundreds of workers. Welton (1991) argues that “organizations are structures of action, communication and behavior between people within different degrees of power” (p. 39) (emphasis in the original). Conceptualized as such, schools are not neutral sites, but a microcosm of the larger society where issues surrounding race, gender, class, sexual orientation and other positionalities are in constant play and directly influence the process and outcome of interactions and situations. Whether the struggle for power is around material resources, budget expenditures, programs or curriculum, people within schools operate at various levels of power and have various interests at stake.
In an assessment of why organizations in the U.S. fail to accomplish many of their goals, that is, to get things done, Pfeffer (1994) places at the top of the list the failure to recognize structured power relations within the organization which exert influence on the process and outcome of projects. Furthermore, he emphasizes, when issues of power and influence in organizations are ignored the opportunity to gain deeper understanding of social processes critical to the success of any given effort is lost. Although their aims are much broader than getting things done, Cervero and Wilson (1994; 2001) who have examined power relations in the practice of adult education, make essentially the same argument that recognizing and understanding power relations is central to successful negotiation of interests. Thus, if the social reality of schools is to be altered educators must recognize and understand power relations operative within them. In other words, educators must learn to think and act politically (Forester, 1989).

Statement of the Problem and Purpose of the Study

Radical adult educators argue that the path to social transformation is through critical analysis of discourse and oppressive structures, and how they operate in people’s lives (Inglis, 1997). By becoming aware of oppressive structures and processes which limit personal and civil liberties people can, on the one hand, avoid complicity with them, and on the other influence social change (Inglis, 1997; Welton, 1995). Thus, people are not seen as subjects acted upon, but as actors capable of affecting the social, cultural, economic and political life of their worlds (Newman, 1994) — that is, capable of exercising and negotiating power. It is reasoned that by learning to identify and describe various forms of power, learning to name the enemy (Newman, 1994), emancipation from oppressive structures becomes possible. Clearly, what educators are calling for is the enactment of this perspective in addressing the problem of sexism in the schools.
However, the vision for a more just and democratic social order, and the ability to name and understand the enemy is not enough. Knowing how to enact the commitment to change is just as important as understanding the problem, knowing what needs to be done or having the heart to act. The problem lies therefore, not in the structural analysis of gendered power relations operative in schools or in our understanding of how they influence the lives of individuals, but rather in the lack of knowledge of specific strategies, tactics and practices for enacting a feminist agenda. Livingstone (1983) rightly points out that any effort to restructure social reality must include not only an understanding of existing society and a vision for the future, but a strategy for getting there as well. Found lacking in this regard is both the literature on gender and schooling and radical adult education literature is the “strategy for getting there,” the bridge to span the chasm between the theoretical and realization of the theoretical.

The strength of the critical perspective is its potential for emancipation in that it gives people a way of conceptualizing and reflecting on the forces at work in their lives, forces that both underlie and animate asymmetrical power relations, affording a certain mental preparedness. And, its optimism is inspirational, stirring emotions that spark the will to act. It falls short however, in the aim of social transformation because it fails to offer concrete ways to enact the commitment to change. Consequently, its political potential is thwarted.

Gore (1993) clearly expresses the need for direction saying, “Surely social change, especially that which is articulated within a language of possibility, requires that attention be directed to strategy, to specific practices,” and that the failure of critical education theorists to offer concrete suggestions “seems inconsistent with their project” (p. 38). If indeed social change is to be wrought in the gender mills (Sadker & Sadker,
1986) called schools, workable strategies which take into account the political realities of power and influence in schools must be identified.

To this end I argue two points. First, just as only women who are informed about sexism can speak authentically and specifically about the many ways their lives in the larger societal context are affected by sexism and how they deal with this reality, only women educators who are not only knowledgeable about sexism, but who also advocate for feminist interests, can speak authentically about sexism in schools and the ways in which the lives of girls and women are affected. In both contexts a woman’s perspective, her ability to identify sexism for what it is (naming the enemy), as well as her methods for challenging its many manifestations have evolved from her occupation of a social status subordinate to males. Her strategies for dealing with the problem of sexism in schools will therefore differ from that of a male who occupies the privileged position.

Second, since taking into account the social and political dimension of schools is critical to development of effective strategies for social change, it is important to seek out the experiences of not only teachers, but other educators as well, school counselors and administrators, for example, whose roles take them into situations the classroom teacher may not encounter.

The purpose of this study is to understand how women negotiate feminist interests in elementary and secondary schools. The study is guided by the three research questions:

1. What issues are raised by feminist educators?
2. What factors constrain and/or enable action?
3. What specific strategies are used in negotiation of feminist interests in schools?
Significance of the Study

This study is significant foremost because it contributes to a gap in the literature regarding specific strategies, practices and tactics so needed by practitioners whose interest it is to alter gendered power relations in schools. Without detailed attention to what is being done in the negotiation of feminist interests in schools and precisely how this is being done we are left with an incomplete understanding of what indeed has been successful, what does not work and why. Without this information, feminist educators are in a position reminiscent of Forester’s (1989) image of walking across a busy intersection with your eyes closed. Yet with this information the strengths and weaknesses of the opponent (the system) can be more accurately assessed as can the strengths and weaknesses of intervention efforts. Consequently the development of an effective repertoire of skills for negotiating in the face of structured power relations becomes possible and actions may become more focused and strategic.

Secondly, this study is significant by being situated in the larger social context of schools which breaks with historical and narrow focus on gender issues in the classroom. Doing so brings us out of the classroom and into the workplace which facilitates the important shift in focus from gender equity to analysis of power relations.

A third point of significance is that by again breaking with the more traditional focus on teachers and including as participants school counselors, administrators and school psychologists who also deal with issues of gender, this study creates the opportunity to discover perspectives and experiences distinctly different from those of teachers.

Most broadly, it is hoped that this study will contribute to the interest of radical adult education in learning more about effecting change in systems of oppression
operative in social institutions which may lead to the creation of a more just and democratic social order.
CHAPTER TWO
OF THE LITERATURE

_The best way to defeat an enemy is to understand his ways._

_Nzinga, Warrior Queen of Matamba_

Nzinga, Warrior Queen of Matamba (McKissack, 2000) is one in a series of children’s books based on real royal figures and actual historical events and situations. This story begins with Nzinga explaining that her people have been invaded by the Portugese and that she is now being forced to learn to read and write their language, the language of her bitter enemy. She consoles herself by recalling her father’s favorite saying: “The best way to defeat an enemy is to understand his ways.” Newman (1994) understands this logic, arguing that social reform leading to emancipation requires not only knowing who the enemy is, but also understanding the ways of the enemy and how it operates. The work of radical adult educators, Newman says, is to help people identify and study their enemies, without which the development of effective strategies for social change is not possible.

Naming the enemy and learning its ways are the guiding objectives of this chapter. The first section is a discussion of critical adult education and situates this study within the tradition. The next section begins the identification of the enemy with a discussion of gendered power relations and feminism in the U.S., then moves to a more specific discussion of gendered power relations in schools and analysis of feminist initiatives implemented thus far. The chapter closes with a proposal to conceptualize the
problem of gendered power relations in schools as a struggle for power (Inglis, 1997) and
the feminist educator as a social actor who negotiates power and interests within that
context

Critical Adult Education

Adult education as a field of practice has come under sharp criticism over the
recent years, rumblings from the margins as Welton (1995) describes it, accused of
having become “depoliticized, dehistoricized [and made] technicist” (Briton as quoted in
mentality, having relinquished its political, moral and social responsibilities. In tandem,
adult learning in the United States has been almost exclusively psychologically oriented
and concerned with individual growth and development, both within and outside formal
learning settings (Merriam & Caffarella, 1998). The learner is typically spoken of in
generic terms, unencumbered by positional descriptors such race, class, gender and
ableness, “as if learners are disembodied creatures and as if the social context in which
we all exist does not affect the processes of education” (Cunningham, 2000, p. 573).

Within this dominant paradigm the standpoint of most adult educators is one of
consensus building, facilitation of learning and privileging the personal and market
dimensions of learning over social dimensions. Thus, the practice of adult education is
largely one in which critique has no place, for it denies power and the myriad ways
power relationships affect the lives of people, and consequently, is often implicated in
maintaining systems of privilege (Cunningham, 2000).

Presently, however, the field of adult education is experiencing a certain critical
turn (Welton, 1995) with the most recent adult education literature reflecting a desire,
even a sense of urgency on the part of some, to reclaim the fields’ early heritage of moral, political and social responsibility, its sense of purpose as a conduit for adults to gain knowledge for freedom, equality and participation in civil society, and its vision as a vehicle for social justice (Cervero & Wilson, 1994; 2001; Cunningham, 1998; 2000; Merriam, 1991; Quigley, 2000). Attention is thus being redirected, away from a service industry orientation and the individual learner, and toward the larger systems of society, its institutions and culture, and how both learning and the lives of individuals are shaped by them (Merriam & Caffarella, 1998). Adult educators are once again called upon to reclaim their role as moral and political agents whose practice is informed by theories of justice and social theories of action. Horton (1990), for example, admonishes, “There is no such thing as just being a coordinator or facilitator, as if you don’t know anything. What the hell are you around for if you don’t know anything. Just get out of the way and let somebody have the space that knows something, believes something” (p. 143). Collins (1995) effectively throws down the gauntlet challenging us to have the courage to teach. In other words, we are being called upon to have the moral, ethical and political resolve to act to contribute to the greater common good driven by a vision of social justice.

Such a practice of adult education necessitates a critical approach to adult learning, one which questions and critiques assumptions we all make about the world we live in and the way things are done, analyzes whose interests are being served by existing structures of power, and seeks to find ways to challenge hegemonic forces which sustain structural inequities (Cunningham, 2000). In other words, to learn the ways of the enemy so that it may be defeated.
While clearly rooted in critical social theory, this perspective is also informed by other philosophical and theoretical orientations, including Marxism, feminism, postmodernism, and multiculturalism. Accordingly, the themes of race, class and gender, economics, and power and oppression are integral to analysis and discourse. That knowledge, truth, and reality are socially constructed is acknowledged and particular attention is given to how power relates to all three constructs (Merriam & Caffarella, 1998). Realizing that education is never neutral (Freire, 1971) and can be either emancipatory or reproductive of extant power relations (Ellsworth, 1989; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1997; Tisdell, 1993; 1998) the practice of critical adult educators is guided by asking “who’s knowledge, who’s truth and who’s reality” do we communicate, and to whose interest does it accrue (Cunningham, 2000). Ultimately, the aim of critical adult education is to contribute to the creation of a more just and democratic lived experience for all people.

Because of this hybrid nature, and to distinguish it from critical theory per se, Merriam and Caffarella (1998) suggest the use of the term “power relations perspective” to refer to this approach to adult learning. This study adopts a power relations perspective in an exploration of gendered power relations in schools, drawing from critical theory, giving analysis of power relations primacy, and from feminism, placing gender at the center of the inquiry, espousing that gender relations are not “natural” or immutable, but rather the product of socio-cultural and historical factors, and therefore, negotiable (Lather, 1991; Lindsey, 1997; Maher & Tetreault, 1986; Merriam & Caffarella, 1998; Tisdell, 1998). Both traditions are concerned with the relationship between the individual and oppressive social structures and with collective action, and both traditions carry with
them moral imperative to act in ways to bring about a more just and democratic society (Weiler, 1988).

**Critical Theory and Critical Adult Education**

The next section of this chapter presents a brief discussion of the historical roots of critical social theory, then moves more broadly to a discussion of critical adult education stemming from this tradition. This section is followed by a discussion of feminist thought and sets forth a definition of feminism as conceptualized for this study.

Critical theory is a theory of history and society originating in the 1940's with the Frankfurt School, which functions to provide an analysis of systems of power and privilege, impetus for political action and eradication of the causes of unjust social arrangements. According to Fay (1987) critical social theory “arises out of and speaks to, situations of social unhappiness, a situation which it interprets as the result both of the ignorance of those experiencing these feelings and of their domination by others” (p. 82). Particular attention is given to the forces of economics, class, race and gender, and to questions about whom knowledge is constructed and distributed, and whether knowledge serves to dominate or liberate (Merriam & Caffarella, 1998). Without a critical theory of society, Welton argues, “we will never know how even the individualist ideals we posit, the fulfillment of the individual, our commitment to “autonomous” self-directed learning, are systematically blocked and constrained: in our homes, workplaces, the public sphere, cultural and intellectual life...” (Welton, 1995 p. 12).

The individualist ideals Welton speaks of, Rudy (1999) explains, arise from a liberally-based philosophical perspective espoused by seventeenth and eighteenth century philosophers who argued that the individual member of a democracy could look after his
own interests and would govern himself. Thus, every free (white), human (male) subject could choose freely among actions without constraint or consideration of allegiance to religious authority or royal decree. The American political system is based on these convictions.

Theoretically, the liberal state assumes a value neutral position, assumes no interest, regulates behavior in a universally advantageous way, and maintains conditions for personal liberty through a system of declared rights. Individuals in the liberal state are considered to be autonomous and self-determining, free to choose what constitutes a good life. Ostensibly, then, in the liberally-based American political system, the individual is free to choose his or her own destiny, unencumbered by impositions of the state of how life should be lived, equally empowered and situated, therefore possessing equal opportunity to pursue happiness, with “liberty and justice for all.” Failure to achieve the life one wishes is considered to be a consequence of personal, (therefore private and no business of the state) choice. Rudy further explains:

the prevailing assumption within liberalism is that anyone who so desires can make it in the system. Thus, anyone who is poor or even working class must have freely chosen such a lifestyle for profoundly personal, private reasons. Because the system is wrapped up in the ideology of neutrality, social factors (such as race, gender, education, class) which help to determine a person’s social location are obscured. (p. 42)

It is to the obscuring of factors which inhibit individual freedoms that Welton (1995) refers when he speaks of systematic constraint. Driven by a passionate
commitment to understand and expose ideological systems and societal structures that impede development of human potential, critical theory seeks to critique and explain the social world, setting the stage for people to act individually and collectively to restructure unjust, oppressive social arrangements. The aim of critical theory is to open the eyes of people so they can more easily see how society is purposefully structured to constrain or block altogether their ability fulfill individual and collective ideals. An analogy of how critical theory functions in this manner is found the children’s book *Harriet the Spy*. In the story Harriet has a set of spy pens, writing instruments which allow her to communicate cryptically with others of her choosing. During her adventures she uses one pen to write a message which remains invisible on the page until the other pen is used to mark over it, then *Voila!* the message became visible for all to see. Critical social theory is this sort of instrument, a tool for making visible that which would otherwise remain invisible.

**A Critical Approach to Adult Learning**

Critical theorists and critical (or radical) educators agree that people are socialized across the life span to adhere to the status quo of the system, (the institutions which function to reproduce the status quo) and argue that “people are victims of causal processes that have power over them because they are unaware of the precise ways they have been implicated in the processes that oppress them”(Welton, 1995, p. 13). A critical approach to adult learning seeks to help people actually *unlearn* roles we so deftly play in collusion with hegemonic forces that keep us bound to and by the status quo. Accordingly, central to critical theoretical work is the question of just how do we unlearn our blind adherence to structural constraints and learn anew to be emancipated,
engaged actors influencing our life events and their outcomes? In order to gain a deeper understanding of all this endeavor entails, it is important to have a sense of what does not work to this end and why, as well as what critical adult educators say is necessary to achieve this end. To do so, I draw upon Cervero and Wilson’s (2001) discussion of three prevailing views of the relationship of adult education to power and society, and correlate these views with Inglis’ (1997) discrimination between empowerment and emancipation to situate this study clearly within the domain of education for social change.

Cervero and Wilson refer to the first view of adult education’s relationship to power and society as “romancing the learner,” so called because at its heart is the adult learner whose learning is nurtured and facilitated by the adult educator through helping him or her identify their own needs, hearing their “voice” and creating access to learning opportunities which historically have been denied. In other words, learner-centeredness guides the practice of the adult educator whose role is to “help” adult learners accomplish their goals for learning. In this view issues of politics and power are invisible, that is, the political is personal, and an explicit social vision is absent.

The second view, the political is practical, adopts a more explicit political stance, defining politics as the ability to get things done, meaning the ability to secure and mobilize resources in order to meet the goals he or she has identified as important. However, this view does not seek to alter existing power relations in social or organizational settings. Rather, it views existing power relations as acceptable or at least unchangeable. Much of the literature in this area focuses on decision-making in organizations, the context of higher education, policy making and legislative activities of the state, and issues of competition and collaboration among or between corporations.
This view has been criticized along two lines: 1) its definition of power is focused on the individual, harkening to the individualism of the liberal state. Further, in organizations the interests of those already in power define the politics, and does not address hierarchical relationships structured around race, class, gender and so forth, and 2) its privileging of “how-to” over “what-for,” that is, that importance of how to get things done is placed over why things are done, to what end(s), and in whose interest. Like the first view, romancing the learner, this view fails to conceptualize power in socio-cultural terms and lacks an explicit social vision.

In contrast to the first two views, the third view has both a socio-structural theory of power, arguing that socially structured power relations advantage some groups and disadvantage others, and an explicit social vision which proclaims a clear commitment to using adult education to redistribute power more justly. Thus, adult education is viewed as relational to the wider systems of society. For proponents of this view, the political is structural, as politics is concerned with how power operates, how it is exercised and distributed in the social structure, and with the struggle for power, all of which shape human life and directly affects life outcomes. The focus here is not the generic learner, but adult learners who are oppressed by socially structured power relations, learners with a face, a gender, a color, a culture, and other positionalities ignored by other views. From this frame of reference there is a commitment to using education to re-shape social systems to afford a more just and equitable life for all people.

A parallel is seen between Cervero and Wilson’s three views of adult education in relation to power and society and Inglis’ (1997) discrimination between the concepts of empowerment and emancipation. The first two views correspond to the concept of
empowerment which involves people developing capacities to act and be successful within the existing system and structures of power. Hand-in-hand with the evolvement of adult education from its early emphasis on radical social projects to its present concern with technocratic efficiency, the concept of empowerment has also evolved from an early association with radical social projects (Bookman, 1988; Davis, 1988; Hanks, 1987; Inglis, 1994; Kieffer, 1984; O’Sullivan, 1993; Soloman, 1976; Villerreal, 1988, as cited in Inglis, 1997) to having been co-opted by organizational management and industrial training. Thus defined, empowerment means getting people to buy into the same values and goals held by management and to secure workers cooperation and loyalty to strengthen the viability of the organization through increased competitiveness, productivity and profit. Central to this process is the redefinition of the workers role as a member of the family or community, so to speak, in which they are encouraged to view the organization as something to which they belong and thus share in a sense of identification with the organization.

Communication and interaction within the organization between workers and management occurs within existing hierarchical structures, therefore is not “dialogue between equal participants at the negotiating table. Rather, it is something that is created, supervised and when necessary, vetoed by management. Empowerment thus becomes a strategic discourse employed by management to legitimize changes to increase production and profit” (p. 6) which are, very often, not in the interests of the workers. As such, there is no democratic decision making, no action to bring about social or political change in the workplace, and certainly no discussion about those with less power. Rather, empowerment is about teaching people to be more skilled at working with and
within the existing system, to commit to the goals and objectives, policies and values of the organization as a means of improving ones chances for success (or survival?). This conceptualization of empowerment then, in actuality, is what Foucault (1977) cautions is a softer, more subtle and pervasive form of control rather than a process for increasing power to workers or for their learning to take more control over their own lives, the proverbial wolf in sheeps’ clothing.

In contrast, emancipation, Inglis continues, is concerned explicitly with critical analysis, resistance, challenge and subversion of existing structures of power, a position corresponding to the third view of adult education in relation to power and society— the political is structural. Emancipatory education is seen as a collective educational activity which has as its goal political and social transformation. Thus, emancipation is committed to social critique, of identifying and coming to understand the structural forces of oppression, what Welton (1995) calls the enemies of freedom, and to collective social action as the vehicle for remedying inequitable, unjust social relations. As Inglis puts it “being able to transform social life necessitates being able to understand different types of power and the ways in which they operate in society as a whole, as well as in the lives of individuals” (p. 8). This calls for a move away from an individual and psychologically oriented perspective because it proposes “an autonomous, rational subject set against an objective, material world” (p. 8), a practice critical theorists argue must be abandoned because “it undergirds the egocentric, domineering and possessive individualism that has so disfigured modern Western rationalism and driven it to exclude, dominate or assimilate whatever is different” (McCarthy, as quoted in Rudy, 1999, p. 244). Failure to abandon an individualistic, psychological, “empowerment” perspective
welds us to the status quo because it allows rationalization of what one wants in terms of individual rights and requires the individual look to the system to advance one’s interests.

Gendered Power Relations

An understanding of gendered power relations as conceptualized for this study necessitates situating the discussion first within a socio-cultural context, which views gender as embedded within cultural discourses and systems of social organization (Merriam & Caffarella, 1998). Lindsey (1997) writes that every society places its members into social categories, or statuses, which determine how they will be treated, and while social relations are ordered in a number of ways, gender is increasingly considered a key component of this ordering. The status of male or female is considered by sociologists to be a master status, because it is one which affects virtually every aspect of our lives. To further differentiate its members, the statuses are then ranked, creating system of social stratification. According to Lindsey, to date there has been no society where the status of female is consistently ranked higher than that of male.

Frequently, the terms sex and gender are used interchangeably, particularly in everyday parlance. However, it is important to distinguish between them because herein they are not used as one-in-the-same. The term “sex” refers to the biological aspects of an individual including anatomical, reproductive, chromosomal, hormonal and other physiological characteristics. On the other hand, gender is a term referring to socially constructed attributes of femaleness and maleness ascribed on the basis of one’s sex, and which are learned and change over time and from context to context, (Brody, et.al., 2000; Lindsey, 1997). Stromquist (1989) expands the concept of gender to mean “a system of values that shapes the relationships between individuals of the same or different sexes,
between individuals and society, and between individuals and power” (p. 428). This broader definition is important because it links power to gender. Since males occupy a higher social status than females, they also possess greater power, positioning them more advantageously in all respects (e.g., socially, politically, economically) than females. This power differential reflects a male-centeredness, or androcentricism, which permeates all social relations and social institutions. Thus gender differentiation represents much more than just difference. In most societies it is used to justify inequalities with those in the category of “female” having far less access than those in the category of “male” to social and economic resources.

In addition to material discrimination, the lives of women and girls are affected by the cultural devaluation of femaleness which, according to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), is a “significant element of everyday thinking in so many societies (1995, p. 5). This is clearly illustrated in the fact that women still outnumber men by two to one among the world’s illiterate people, and girls constitute the majority of the one hundred-thirty million children without access to primary school (UNDP, 1995). In many countries women are denied the right to manage their own property or control their own fertility (UNDP, 1997).

The Role and Function of Ideology

The privileging of male over female constitutes the ideology of patriarchy, a system of oppression (form of power) reflecting the belief that women are inferior to men in value and status. Patriarchy is expressed in everyday lived experiences through a variety of means, including the attitudes and behavior of individuals and groups, through social convention and traditions, and through oral and written language. Social
institutions (the state, education, religion, etc.), in turn, function to protect and maintain
gendered social relations through policy and law (Hayes & Colin, 1994).

Because ideology is a such powerful force in maintenance of the social status quo, any project aimed at altering the status quo, as is this study, should be informed by an understanding of its role and function. A thorough grasp of ideology is important for two reasons. First, if people are to be enabled to act consciously and purposefully, they must learn about the forms of power operating in their lives (Inglis, 1997). Without knowing what we are up against, efforts to alter inequitable and unjust social conditions and relationships are easily thwarted. Exposing ideology underlying power inequities and the ensuing injustice is the first step toward naming the enemy and having a clearer assessment of the forces arrayed against challenges to the status quo of the system. Second, once the enemy is named (Newman, 1994) and understood, then action may become more focused and strategic, harkening to what Collins (1994) asserts is the initial task of critical adult education: to identify social structures and practices which (mis)shape social learning processes and undermine capacities adults already possess to control their own education.

The following section presents a discussion of the role and function of ideology generally, then moves to a more specific discussion of the ideology of patriarchy underlying gendered power relations. Primarily, the role and function of ideology in society is to legitimate the way things are, to explain and justify. Secondarily, it also serves as a reference point to assess what is fair or just, especially when people complain about the way things are. According to Tripp (1993), our actions are always subject to an ideology, and consciously or unconsciously, we become agents of it. He identifies six
characteristics of ideology: 1) ideologies are socially constructed and maintained, and serves the interests of certain groups in society, 2) ideologies always contain contradictions, 3) although dominant, ideologies are not deterministic, but can be challenged and resisted, 4) ideologies tend to create the forms in which it is resisted, 5) the more detail in which an idea is spelled out, the more easily it is resisted and the more obvious the methods of resistance become, 6) ideology can always be escaped, but only into another.

As important as identifying and challenging ideology, it is very difficult to do because it stands ever ready to rationalize and legitimize what seems to most to be “normal.” Cunningham (1988) says we have great difficulty seeing how we have constructed our own worlds, and quoting Mao Tse Tung explains “fish don’t know they are in water” (p. 135). Further, if, as an adult educator, we believe it is our role to act in ways to further a more democratic and just society and to contribute to the development of a critical consciousness in others, we must cultivate that same critical consciousness ourselves, we must “permeate the ideological envelope that encompasses each of us” (p. 138). Without an understanding of the ideology upon which our own worlds are constructed and lived out, we are unable to venture beyond its boundaries, prescribed and limited by unconscious beliefs.

Brookfield (1993) argues for the practice of “ideology critique,” the conscious examination of dominant ideologies, as a means to “penetrate the givens of everyday reality to reveal the inequities and oppression that lurk beneath...what strikes us as the normal order of life is revealed as a constructed reality that serves to protect the interests of the powerful” (p. 87). Hailing from the tradition of the Frankfurt School of Critical
Social Theory discussed earlier, ideology critique is a process which helps people recognize how unjust ideologies are embedded in everyday life. Giroux (as quoted in Wilson & Hayes, 2000) asserts ideology critique lays bare “the historically and socially sedimented values at work in the construction of knowledge, social relations and material practices....it situates critique within a radical notion of interest and social transformation” (p. 36). Situating critique within a radical notion of interest and social transformation is particularly relevant to this study as it seeks to lay bare historical and social forces at work in the maintenance of gendered power relations in schools, and articulates this purpose in language of interests at stake and transformation of social relationships within schools.

Fineman (1991) provides a concrete illustration of both the power and illusiveness of ideology, and the value of ideology critique in her analysis of the images of mothers in poverty discourses. Fineman found that although there have been alternative expressions of sexuality and redefinition of gender roles over the recent years the core images remain constant, mother and child are still defined by their relationship to the patriarch. The single mother is considered deviant, even threatening, to the dominant familial concept and social organization, and by reference to her marital status, she is separated from the institution of Mother where the relationship between husband and wife is assumed. No one, she argues, speaks of a “married mother.” Fineman concluded that “patriarchy as an ideology has adapted to ostensible challenging discourses and absorbed seemingly significant challenges while ensuring the relatively undisturbed continuation of power distribution within the family structure” (p. 293).
Thus, regardless of progressive rhetoric about gender roles, the status quo remains essentially unchanged.

She further explains that the ideology of patriarchy is clearly communicated in discourse. Ideology links discourses to power, a close examination of which will reveal implicit facets of the ideology underlying them. The term “power” as used in this context is explicitly political, defined as something manifested in and expressed by a dominant social group within the confines of institutions, therefore, “law and legal institutions are actually concrete manifestations or locations of power tethered to ideology” (p. 293).

Characteristically, ideology operates as a conservative force, she says, serving to “tame or domesticate discourses by exerting a confining pressure on their initial development, ultimately channeling even the most radical ideas into categories approved by the existing conceptual system” (p. 292).

A number of insights may be gleaned from Fineman’s analysis and applied to the task of challenging gendered power relations. First, as any ideology, patriarchy is dynamic and malleable, constantly accommodating itself to new challenges while managing to retain its hegemonic role (Creswell, 1993; Stromquist 1995). As such, feminist can expect conciliatory, symbolic gestures from social institutions in response to efforts to alter existing social arrangements. Second, that discourse links ideology to power alerts feminists that discourse surrounding gendered power relations in schools should be scrutinized carefully, and challenged when language, oral or written, serves to domesticate or maintain rather than liberate. Further, since discourse links ideology to power, feminist should be painstaking in their own discourse, speaking and writing to
interrupt that connection by exposing explicitly the role and function of patriarchy in everyday lived experiences.

**Gender and the State**

Calling patriarchy by name along with critical analysis of formal and informal discourse addressing gender is the first step toward challenging the gendered status quo and foundational to the development of specific strategies for practice. Also key to effectively challenge gendered power relations is understanding the relationship between gender and the state.

The state plays pivotal role in the definition of gender and is also a creative force in the dynamics of gender, such as in the creation of categories of social relations (homosexuality, marriage, family, for example), and in the creation of unequal social relations through legislation it passes or fails to pass, as in marriage and divorce, abortion, wife battery and wage discrimination (Connell, 1993; Walby, 1990). Understanding the state is particularly relevant for this study because of its role in the maintenance of the status quo of schooling.

In order to more fully understand how the state functions, it is necessary to define what is meant by “state.” A useful definition is provided by Omi and Winant (as cited in Stromquist, 1995, p. 424): “The state is composed social institutions, the policies they carry out, the conditions and rules which support and justify them, and the social relations in which they are embedded.” In other words, a way to organize the collective life of a given society. However, how collective social life is organized takes many forms and as such, there are a number of conceptualizations of the state. For example, the liberal view conceptualizes the state as social invention and neutral arbiter, whose aim is
to promote the common good and to protect individuals through citizenship and an array of civil rights. Another is the state as an instrument of domination used by the powerful, that is, those with access to (primarily economic) resources and their allocation, rather than neutral arbiter. And in yet a third, the state as an arena of struggle or conflict among groups with competing political interests and competing social visions. This latter view is consistent with the perspective of this study because of its position that gendered power relations are always being negotiated.

Feminist analyses of the state reveal that all conventional political theories of the state, regardless of their specific tenets, are gender blind, and therefore, could not possibly benefit women as they benefit men despite democratic rhetoric to the contrary (Stromquist, 1995). As Connell (1994) puts it, the state is a gendered and engendering institution in its mostly male composition, and in its management of ideology and economic relations. Walby (1990) succinctly summarizes the struggle for women as one not only over allocation of resources and competing interests, but also over the rules of the game and its underlying ideology.

Throughout history women have been engaged in this struggle over resources, interests, opportunities, and the rules of the game itself. A captivating analysis of one woman’s struggle is found in Dworkin’s (1987) analysis of the life of Joan of Arc. Although historically remote, its message is timeless because it so clearly articulates the enemy, and illustrates through Joan’s life, the power against which women have always struggled. While certainly dramatic and seemingly extreme, accounts all too akin to Joan’s experience continue today around the world, including America. Thus, it is vital to
the welfare of women and to the cause of elevating the status of women that we not turn our heads away, but look full face at the enemy.

Dworkin explains that Joan wanted freedom from the constraints, the degraded possibilities, social inferiority, sexual subordination and sexual accessibility associated with being female in the society of her day. Under patriarchy, then as now, men have freedom because they are men, and to have what men had meant being what men were. Rejecting the trappings of womens’ clothing, Joan wore men’s clothing, took up the sword, and became a warrior, an “exile from gender with a male vocation and male clothes” (p. 100).

Further, she chose virginity, which to her was freedom from what she considered the real meaning of being female. She rejected the status and the sex as one thing, as Dworkin puts it “she refused to be fucked and she refused civil insignificance, and it was one refusal ...a rejection of the social meaning of being female in its entirety...her virginity was a radical renunciation of a civil worthlessness rooted in real sexual practice” (p. 85). Joan was inspired and guided by the lives of two women, St. Catherine of Alexandria and St. Margaret of Antioch, who were very much alike politically. Both women were virgins sought after by powerful men, both turned them down, and both were subsequently imprisoned, tortured and eventually decapitated. They were militant in their opposition to male power, refused to capitulate and were killed for their resistance.

Refusing to be complicit in her own subordination cost Joan her life. Dworkin exposes the stark truth and clearly names the enemy when she writes, “Joan’s unselfconscious and unrepentant assumption of a male role (both martial and heroic) was
the crime against male supremacy that cost her life. She was killed for the freedom she took, the status she usurped, her defiance of the determinism of gender” (p. 100). This summary judgement of what cost Joan’s life is key to our present day understanding of what women are up against in a patriarchal society, all out resistance to efforts for equality, a reality with which women must come to terms if indeed there is to be liberation from its effects even at the individual level, and more so if there is to be liberation on a broader social level. As Inglis (1997) explains, the features and forms of power and the ways in which it is exercised in our lives must be laid bare, and if indeed there is a reasonable chance for its more just redistribution, people must learn how to read and interpret social life in terms of a struggle for power.

Tragically, incidents all too akin to this account continue today around the world, even in America. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2000) proclaims that violence against women and girls remains a major health and human rights concern, identifying it as a social problem that warrants an immediate coordinated response from multiple sectors. Speaking to this issue in an address to the National Press Club, human rights activist Kerry-Kennedy Cuomo (2000), cited the WHO in reporting that in twenty-four countries across four continents, twenty to fifty percent of adult women have been victims of domestic violence, and in fifty to sixty percent of those cases, the violence included rape. In the United States, the American Medical Association estimated there were four million cases of domestic violence in a single year, “still, we have more animal shelters in this country than battered women shelters” (p. 4). Continuing, she reports that sexual assault is epidemic. One in five American women are subjected to sexual assault by the time they are twenty-one years old, very often by someone they know, a father,
grandfather, a date, family friend, boss or superior officer, a stranger. Of course, these events carry with them other outcomes, that of psychological and emotional problems, physical health problems, such as sexually transmitted diseases, and loss of economic opportunities related to all the above, which affect not only the woman, but the welfare of children she may have.

The activism of women in during the 1960's civil rights and women’s movement and forward has done much to raise public awareness of discrimination against women and increasing women’s access to the public domain. Because of increased visibility in the public domain many people mistakenly have the impression that having the same civil rights as men means women are also equal in status.

However, people are most often unaware of the long and hard struggle that was, and continues to be, waged to secure and preserve the rights American women now have. For example, the right to vote was not secured until 1923, and it was certainly not given. Only after fifty years of marches and demonstrations, of getting knocked down and getting back up, of being betrayed by men in power and going on anyway, did women win the right to vote. And, not until 1975, only twenty-six years ago, did the U.S. Supreme Court rule that gender should not be considered when determining eligibility for jury service. Prior to this ruling, whether or not a woman was selected was influenced by societal views that a woman’s rightful place was in the private sphere, rendering her service conditional upon the degree to which service would interfere with her duties as wife, mother, homemaker. Furthermore, while more women are in positions of power in organizations, their number are very few relative to men (Bierema, 1998), and most women are still segregated into female intensive careers (such as nursing, teaching). But,
regardless of the occupation, women who work full time still earn less than men. In 1968 women earned 64 cents for every dollar a man earned, and in the year 2000, (thirty-seven years after passage of the Equal Pay Act), women have increased their earnings only twelve cents (AAUW, 1999; U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2000). And finally, although racist comments are now unacceptable in the media, sexist comments flood the airways and sexism provides the framework around which many television programs and films are constructed (Lindsey, 1997).

This discussion of gendered power relations and the status and condition of women is meant to draw attention to the reality that although advances in the interest of women have been made, they have not come without a high price, that women and their rights are violated to one extent or another in the face of law, that liberties won are not assured, (as recent debates surrounding abortion attest), and lastly, that there is a long way to go yet toward the establishment of just and democratic social arrangement between men and women.

The concerns of women are many and urgent. Whether the specific violation is physical or psychological safety, economic deprivation due to lack of access to education and jobs or wage discrimination and the “glass ceiling,” or to the steering of school girls onto stereotypical life paths, the cost is the same: the very life of girls and women, and all that life can mean. While forms of discrimination against women are wide ranging, the mechanism at the root of it all is the a belief system that women are inferior to men in worth and therefore in status which structures most societies and around which social life is organized. If women can get in touch with this reality on a visceral level, we may
then begin to better understand the strength of the enemy and the magnitude of the task of altering the status quo.

**Feminist Response to the Problem of Sexism**

The New Lexicon: Webster’s Dictionary of the English Language (1989) defines “feminism” as the policy, practice or advocacy of political, economic and social equality for women, and “feminist” as an advocate of feminism. This is a definition, or understanding of feminism, that most people who are concerned about the status and welfare of women could embrace. Beyond this shared concern about the status of women and the material conditions of women’s lives (Merriam & Caffarella, 1998), however, feminism is defined in many different ways and takes many forms depending upon the theoretical basis from which it springs and its political agenda. Thus, feminist perspectives differ in regard to how the problem is framed and what needs to be done to effectively address the problem. Consequently, various agendas emerge along with prospective methods for accomplishing them. Because there are many variations, gaining an understanding of “feminism” can be a daunting and confusing endeavor. Tisdell (1995; 1998), however, has simplified the matter by categorizing the various perspectives according to their main focus and their theoretical underpinnings, resulting in three models: Psychological Models, Structural Models and Poststructural Models.

First, the individually focused, psychological model of feminism is concerned with the psychological and developmental emancipation of women as individuals from their internalized acceptance of patriarchy as normative. Underpinned by a liberal theoretical base, this view treats women as generic, paying no substantive attention to race, ethnicity, or class differences, with the emphasis clearly being on how women are
alike. Critique of socially structured power relations is absent from this perspective and, logically, there is no connection to critical social theory or critical pedagogy, nor to multicultural interests.

Historically, liberal feminism has been the dominant force in American feminism and as such, more discussion will be given to this model than to the remaining two models. As long ago as 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft argued for women’s equal civil rights on the basis of a liberal platform, most notably for the right of women to be educated, citing education as the as the most effective tool for the making of women into “good, liberal subjects” (Rudy, 1999, p. 37). Education of upper-class, white women became the goal around which much of the liberal feminist organizing of the nineteenth and early twentieth century occurred. Rudy explains liberal feminism appealed to aspects of American ideology as entre’ to the public sphere, “configure itself within preexisting ideas about civility and public life... connected to an ideology well established in American culture” (p. 38). Because this position felt familiar and comfortable, it was accepted, where as more radical feminisms calling for the restructuring of public and private life were rejected.

Liberal feminism has remained the dominant and most viable political voice for women’s rights in America, exemplified by organizations such as the National Organization for Women, the American Association of University Women, the National Women’s Political Caucus, the Feminist Majority, and Ms. Foundation. And, “in an environment where individuality, autonomy, and abstract equality are orthodox, conventional political platforms for American citizens” (Rudy, 1999, p. 40), liberal feminists have achieved many of the advances in women’s rights, such as protection
from workplace discrimination based on sex, equal access to education, and most remarkably, the Supreme Court decision of Roe v. Wade (1973), granting the right to abortion based on the right to privacy. As can be seen, the role of liberal feminism has been an important one. However, it is not without its limitations which will be discussed at length at a later point.

Returning now to Tisdell, the second model is that of structural feminism, a perspective which attends to social structures or systems of oppression, such as patriarchy, capitalism, race and social class, and how these affect the lives of women. While the primary category of analysis is gender, there may also be analysis of how multiple systems converge to constrain and subordinate women. Further, structural feminism calls into question the politics of knowledge production and what becomes “official” knowledge.

Third, the postmodern or poststructural model attempts to account for multiple systems of privilege and oppression and their intersections, while at the same time acknowledging the individual’s capacity for resistance to and challenge of the status quo. Poststructural feminism builds upon, yet critiques structural feminist theories, arguing for the centrality of gender in analysis, but also emphasizes the intersection of gender with other systems of oppression and privilege in the formation of individual identity. For poststructural feminism, the primary units of analysis are the connections between the individual and the intersecting structural systems of privilege and oppression that influence learning, how they perceive and discuss their own experience and how they interact with their respective worlds.
Of the three models, this study draws mostly from structural feminism with its emphasis on analysis of systems of oppression and structured power relations within society and social institutions. Since the purpose of this study is to understand how women educators negotiate feminist interests in elementary and secondary schools, gendered power relations within that context must be analyzed. Supporting this is Newman’s (1994) argument that social reform leading to emancipation requires not only knowing who the enemy is, but also understanding the ways of the enemy and how it operates. However, rather than claim allegiance to any one theoretical model, I offer instead an understanding of feminism which is consistent with the theoretical framework of this study, a power relations perspective, and which captures its ideological and political orientation:

Feminism is politics. It is a politics directed at changing existing power relations between men and women in society. The power relations structure all areas of life, the family, education and welfare, the worlds of work and politics, culture and leisure. They determine who does what for whom, what we are, and what we may become. (Weedon, as quoted in Giroux, 1989, p. 6)

A liberal perspective is not appropriate because of its emphasis on the individual and its lack of critique of existing social arrangements. The poststructural perspective is inappropriate as well because of its emphasis on the connections between the individual and the intersecting structured power relations rather than on structural analysis itself.
Gendered Education

Nowhere can the subordination of the interests of women to those men be more clearly seen than in our nation’s schools. Schools in the United States, like other social institutions, reflect the androcentrism of the macro-society in that they are gendered and engendering. Gendered in that they are comprised mostly of women but in positions of less power, authority and status than males, and engendering in that they are primary sites for the transmission, reinforcement and sustaining of dominant cultural values. Schools, therefore, model and teach, consciously and unconsciously, the sexist, racist, and class values of dominant U.S. culture (Flansburg, 1993; Lather, 1991; Sikes, 1997; Stromquist, 1995; Weiler, 1988).

Schooling in the United States today reflects the original design of the educational system, that of educating and equipping white males for their public role and positions of power within society, whereas women remained relegated to their role within the private sphere of home and family. As such, the very nature and culture of schools are shaped by the needs and interests of males, creating a male model of schooling reflecting both the division of labor in capitalism and the social relationships of the macro-society. Consequently, a masculine bias lies at the heart of most academic disciplines (Graham, 1992; Stromquist, 1989, 1995). As (white) females gained access to education in the mid-nineteenth century, no modifications in the model of schooling were made. Presenting the white male system as universal and therefore normative, females were expected to adapt to a system which did not acknowledge that their needs and interests might be different from and just as legitimate as those of men, all the while professing to
offer equal education. However, equal access did not mean equal education then, nor does it now. In other words, the same is not equal.

The concept of “the same is not equal” is easily seen from a historical look at how the interests of girls and women have been advanced in the area of education. In keeping with the dominant liberal orientation, feminists have turned most often to legislation to improve the material condition of women in general, lobbying for laws to end gender discrimination. Specific to women’s education, three main statutes now exist which address the rights of women in education: Title IX of the Educational Amendments Act of 1972, the Women’s Educational Equity Act (WEEA) of 1975 and the Vocational Amendments Ace (VEA) of 1976 (Stromquist, 1989).

The most comprehensive of the three is Title IX which prohibited by law discrimination on the basis of sex, from any program or activity receiving Federal funds. It reads: “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.” The enforcement of Title IX was assigned to the duties of the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) rather than a separate agency being created to monitor and regulate its implementation. This virtually assured the likelihood that complaints about violations of Title IX would receive slow response, buried as they are in an avalanche of other civil rights violations.

Similarly, sexual harassment can be a form of discrimination and is prohibited by Title IX as well. A national survey (AAUW, 1993) 1,632 public school students in grades eight through twelve, found that 81 percent of respondents report they have experienced some type of unwanted and unwelcome sexual behavior that interferes with
their lives. While respondents were boys and girls, more girls reported being sexually harassed than boys. Behaviors include being the target of sexual comments, jokes, gestures or looks; being forced to kiss someone, being forced to do something other than kissing; being touched, grabbed, pinched or brushed up against in a sexual way, being blocked or cornered in a sexual way; having one’s clothes pulled down or off, and being shown, given or left unwanted sexual pictures or notes. Perpetrators are sometimes school employees, (teacher, coach, principal, bus driver or counselor, for example) but most sexual harassment occurs between peers. Incidents occur most often in hallways, then classrooms, outside of school on school grounds, in the gym or playing field, and on school transportation. The impact of sexual harassment includes students generally feeling less safe at school, therefore, not wanting to attend school, cutting a class in which the perpetrator will be, leading some to consider changing schools. Some students report more difficulty paying attention, making lower grades, and generally feeling more self-conscious and inhibited.

While the OCR (1997) provides guidance about what constitutes sexual harassment and how school personnel should respond to complaints, it also allows a great deal of flexibility in how to respond. In the event of a sexual harassment violation, Title IX permits the use of general disciplinary procedure, as with any “inappropriate” conduct in an effort to end the harassment. In other words, school personnel are not required to have policies or procedures dealing explicitly with sex discrimination or to inform perpetrators that their behavior constitutes a violation of law. This means that a perpetrator would most likely be suspended from school for a period of days, as with any “inappropriate” behavior, with no attention given to the nature of the violation.
Recently an incident illustrating this stance occurred in one of the schools in which I work. During change of classes an eighth grade boy pulled the head of a girl into his crotch while she was getting books from her bottom locker. The principal of the school suspended the boy for a few days, but failed to act proactively by publicly calling the act sexual harassment and taking an anti-sexism stance. As such, when the boy returned he found the status quo of gendered social relations in that school well intact. The OCR states only “if treating sexual harassment as inappropriate behavior is not effective in ending the harassment, or in preventing it from escalating, schools must take additional steps to ensure that students know that the conduct is prohibited sex discrimination” (Office of Civil Rights, 1997). In other words, once is not enough.

This so called “guidance” discriminates further against girls in schools by minimizing sex discrimination as merely “inappropriate,” and deals only with overt acts of discrimination. That is, as long as the same or similar behavior does not occur again, it is not necessary to deal with the situation for what it really is or to inform the perpetrator that the conduct is prohibited sex discrimination. Because the school fails to deal with sexual harassment as a social problem within the culture of the school, the girl (or boy as the case may be) is left to deal with the psychological and emotional difficulties surrounding the incident with no support from people who have the power to do something constructive about it. This is a clear example of how gendered power relations remain largely ignored in the school setting. Only when there is a complaint do school officials act and then the stance is reactionary and conservative rather than proactive.
Following Title IX are the two other statues, WEEA and VEA which provided financial resources and technical assistance to encourage the design, adoption and implementation of new programs to create and promote a more egalitarian culture in schools. However, there is no mandate from the state that either be implemented, both WEEA and VEA are voluntary statutes, meaning that unless the state or educational institution prioritizes gender as an important issue to be addressed and subsequently applies for funding, the law lies inert and silent. Once again the state fails to take a proactive stance regarding gender. Stromquist (1995) asserts that by such symbolic gestures, the state appears to be responsive to the needs and interests of girls and women, when in fact, although legislation was indeed passed to address gender equity and sexual harassment in education, means to render them largely ineffective are built in. In this way the state protects its own interests and sustains the gendered status quo of schools.

Feminist Initiatives in Schools

Over the past three decades the topic of gender and schools has been the focus of a great deal of interest in both professional and popular literature. Research articles appeared claiming a gender bias which privileged boys and “shortchanged” girls (AAUW, 1991; Sadker & Sadker, 1986; Shakeshaft, 1986), at the same time magazine and newspaper articles decried the injustice. Books such as Peggy Orensteins’ School Girls: Young Women, Self-Esteem and the Confidence Gap (1994) and Mary Pipher’s Reviving Ophelia (1994) even made the New York Times list of best sellers. Today, gender bias and gender equity in education continues to capture the attention of a varied audience, with some even considering it to have been “perhaps the most important
shaping force of the nineties in the growth and change of education and educational theory” (Graham, 1992, p. 1).

One of the more influential actions coming from liberal feminist efforts was an extensive review of literature about what girls experience in America’s public schools, from kindergarten through twelfth grade, including how they are taught and how they learn. Commissioned by the American Association of University Women (AAUW) Educational Foundation, the Wellesly College Center for Research on Women analyzed and synthesized over thirteen hundred studies, culminating in How Schools Shortchange Girls: the AAUW Report (1992). Hailed as being a “wake up call” to parents, teachers and policymakers (Orenstein, 1992), the AAUW report brought unprecedented attention to gender bias in our nation’s schools, and became the benchmark from which much of the research in this area has sprung since its publication.

The AAUW report asserts that “it is clear that sex and gender make a difference in the nation’s public elementary and secondary schools” (p. 3) and claims that whether one is looking at achievement scores, curriculum design, self-esteem levels or staffing patterns, the educational system is not meeting the needs of girls, and that girls are not receiving the same quantity or quality education as are boys. For example, the expectation of intellectual rigor placed upon boys was not the same for girls. Rather, teachers praised girls for compliance and neatness of their work, but gave them less attention, less praise, less effective feedback, and less detailed instruction than was given to boys. Differential expectations precede differential treatment. One of the more easily documented evidence of differential treatment is the systematic tracking of girls into traditionally “feminine” fields of study, such as teaching, nursing, and home economics,
and away from courses of study that more likely lead to higher paying, higher skilled and technological careers.

Differential expectations and treatment influence how girls (and boys) view themselves, their capabilities and what is possible for them. One of the more startling phenomena reported is that of a steady decline of self-esteem and erosion of self-confidence as girls move from childhood to adolescence. This pattern was observed in white, Black and Hispanic girls. Girls are said to begin first grade with skills, levels of confidence, ambition and self-esteem comparable to boys, yet by the end of high school, most have experienced a disproportionate loss of confidence in their academic abilities. Furthermore, it is reported that many girls come to believe that if indeed they do well, it is due to luck or hard work, not because they are intelligent and capable. Loss of confidence inhibits action. Uncertainty of one self and one’s capabilities influences even the dreams girls may have about what is possible and what they may become. Girls, more so than boys, it is reported, let go of their visions of what they most want to do with their lives, believing they are not good enough or smart enough to make it happen, and that they will likely end up doing something other than what they really want to do.

Despite acute attention given to gender by educational researchers and even the public, the subject has not been a priority of the U.S. Department of Education or of most state departments of education. This is not surprising, given the role of the state in maintenance of the gendered status quo. In actuality, differential power relations ascribed on the basis of sex and the ways in which it affects the lives of individual students remain largely ignored, both in the school setting (Brody, et.al., 2000; Wood, 1988) and in teacher education programs (Campbell & Sanders 1997). Teatreault and
Schmuck (as quoted in Shakeshaft, 1986), for example, conducted an analysis of school reform reports and found that “gender was not a relevant category in the analysis of the excellence of schools” (p. 500).

More recently, in a nationwide survey of 353 instructors of mathematics, science and technology, Campbell and Sanders (1997) found that while three-fourths of the respondents said they taught gender equity, they actually did so only two hours per semester. And, in yet another survey of thirty administrators and 247 faculty members from 30 pre-service teacher education programs in Michigan (Mader, 1994, as cited in Sanders, 1997), only 11 percent of the respondents said they had had extensive gender equity instruction and 38 percent reported minimal to no instruction about gender equity. Furthermore, textbooks used in teacher education programs virtually ignore the subject. Sanders (1997) reports that a 1980 analysis of 24 commonly used texts published since 1972 found that 23 of them gave less than one percent of space to discussion of gender, and one-third did not mention it at all. And, in a more recent review, eight post-1990 textbooks and found that the texts most widely used still do not include significant material about gender equity.

And perhaps the one of the most “telling” documents regarding the status of gender in education, is found in Goals 2000, a list of educational goals published by the U.S. Department of Education to be achieved by the year 2000. Despite educational research about gender disparities in schools, the authors of these magnanimous goals for the education of students all over the country, ignored gender and its impact on the lives of students. None of the goals are gender specific, reflecting the gender blindness of the state, and again failing to acknowledge gender matters and leaving intact the status quo
of schooling (AAUW, 1992). In a “revisit” to Goals 2000, Ohanian (2000) found once again that no mention of gender is made. Expressing grave concerns about “how the politico/corporate/infotainment brotherhood has infiltrated our classrooms” (p. 355), she argues that corporate and labor interests are promoted at the expense of the ideals of social justice and educating the citizenry for participation in a democracy. As such, critical social markers like race and gender are not addressed at all. Boys and girls in schools are still referred to as an undifferentiated mass of “students.”

Feminist efforts to address the problem of gender bias in schools has focused primarily on equity, the giving of differential treatment to disadvantaged individuals so that their rate of success in final outcomes may be comparable to the most privileged groups in society (Stromquist, 1989). Dominant initiatives for addressing inequities in schools stem from a liberal feminist perspective and include curricular changes, selection of textbooks based on the absence of gender stereotype, and parity in teacher interaction male and female students. According to Weiler (1988) it was assumed that such changes would alter social relationships in schools to reflect a more just and democratic social order, but in actuality, instructional practices and social relationships remain largely unchanged (Gore, 1993).

This point is illustrated in a study by Abrogast (1994) in which she explored the production and reproduction of gender relations in a coeducational setting, a combined home economics and technical studies program in an inner city secondary school. Traditionally segregated courses, the school changed its policy to require girls to take the technical course and boys to take the home economics course. According to the author, the study resulted in three salient findings. One, the coeducation setting “provided
explaining that a small group of boys dominated student-teacher interaction, and verbally abused girls, less powerful boys and the woman teacher. However, the teacher rationalized that because of the boys “natural” dominance, their behavior should not be taken seriously. Thus, the teacher validated the behavior and solidified relations of power and powerlessness.

Second, in this study, coeducation did not provide an equal education for girls and boys. The fact that boys were in a home economics class and the girls in a technical studies class did not lead to any alteration of curriculum based on the students’ interests, various ways of knowing or other differences. In other words, there was no acknowledgment that the gendered experiences of the students should be taken into consideration. Rather, curriculum was organized around the teacher’s perceptions of the students’ needs and interests. Abrogast found that teachers overall privileged boys and left girls marginalized. Third, requiring girls and boys to take both home economics and technical studies did nothing to challenge the sexual division of labor. The coeducational experience did not alter students’ beliefs about who should do which work, nor did it change their beliefs about the value assigned to each area. All in all, the study indicated that classroom practices and discourse supported existing social arrangements between male and female, leading to the conclusion that “clearly, adding boys to home economics and girls to technical studies does not deal with the complexity of gender relations, nor does it present a serious challenge to patriarchal structures” (p. 263).

A recently published study (Brody, et.al., 2000) about the role gender played in three schools facing the transition from single-sex to coeducation further illustrates this
conclusion. The authors examined the effects that society’s collective consciousness about gender and the unspoken assumptions about male privilege have on school learning environments, and how the culture of the school organization shapes experiences of all its members. The study was situated in three schools facing transition from single-sex to coeducation. The authors reported the dialectic between privilege and gender was seen in the “unquestioned primacy of the male and the effects that patriarchy have in casting fundamental assumptions about what is valued and what is not valued in a school” (p. 134). According to the authors, the “primacy of males” means that the standard male norm is dominant, and therefore to be female is to be “other,” deviant from the norm, a condition which directly affected the school culture, policies and practices. For example, at Xavier, the all male school that was becoming coeducational, faculty members did not change the academic or extra-curricular programs when females entered the school because it was believed that the curriculum was already the best it could be, presuming that what is good for males is good for females. In this vein, Xavier planned and implemented an equally impressive athletic program for girls as it had for boys, however, the boy’s coaches complained because having to share resources reduced the number of boys that could be recruited, thereby decreasing their pool of players.

On the contrary, at St. Theresa’s of the Grove, an all female school that was also becoming coeducational, many changes were made in curriculum, academic programs and extra-curricular offerings as males entered. “As a school originally designed for girls, Grove was not [emphasis in the original] good enough for boys” (p. 89). For example, although the transition to coeducation began with the entrance of freshmen boys, the school developed and adopted a varsity level basketball program, including
hiring a well known, winning coach even though the freshman class did not include
enough boys to make a basketball team. This “sudden and starkly contrasted
commitment to sports excellence for boys” (p. 89) did not go unnoticed by the girls. The
experience at Grove also gives an example of male primacy unrivaled by any others.
After the decision was made that St. Theresa’s would become coeducational concern was
expressed about the school’s name— “Guy’s don’t want to go to a girls’ school” (p. 8) it
was said. Consequently the name was changed from St. Theresa’s of the Grove to Grove
Catholic High School to make it sound less “female.” Through such changes the
leadership at Grove sought to create a school culture more appealing to the male students,
communicating what is good for girls was not also good for boys. As these examples
illustrate, the effects of male privilege in schools are not abstract, theoretical
potentialities, but very real life events which disadvantage and devalue females. The
authors conclude that when all is said and done, the “primacy of the male” still reigns and
that if power is to be equalized in schools, educators must move beyond gender
consciousness and a focus on equity to actually challenging the existing framework of
schooling.

Rudy’s (1999) critique of liberal feminism illuminates why initiatives originating
from a liberal theoretical foundation are ineffective and inappropriate for challenging
power relations. She explains that feminism based on liberal theory is ultimately
problematic and cannot represent the interests of all women for a number of reasons.
One, liberal theory believes that autonomy can overcome the race and class we were born
into, overcome poor nutrition, low levels of education and lack of acculturation
corresponding to various social statuses. Two, liberalism depends on a servile class to
reproduce daily life. She writes “as a theory, it is based on the separation and hierarchization of public and private spheres, with the tasks associated with the privacy occupying the less valued position” (p. 44). Thus, white, middle-class women leave the private sphere for the public and hire poorer, darker women to do the work of the private sphere such as cooking, cleaning and child care. The gains of liberal feminism, therefore, reach mostly women who are already positioned materially to walk through the doors of opportunity opened by its efforts.

Further, liberal feminism has no argument with the existing political, economic, or class structure of society as it is, just that it should not be sexist, that is, all people are created equal and therefore should not be denied equality of opportunity because of gender. Thus, liberal feminists do not question the state or state apparatuses, rather, they work with and within the existing system, focusing on what needs to be done to obtain equal access, rights and opportunities afforded to males (Lindsey, 1997). As such, the liberal feminist perspective is consistent with the concept of empowerment with its modus operandi of working with and through the system to achieve its goal of equity in education, and is consistent with the learner centeredness of mainstream adult education practice with its focus on nurturing individual growth and development, and until very recently, its treatment of women as an undifferentiated, generic mass.

Weiler (1988) succinctly summarizes all that has been discussed to this point about why liberal, mainstream approaches simply will not work to the end of challenging and restructuring the gendered status quo of schools:

...implicit in this view is the concept that sexism exists within the realm of ideas, and if those ideas are changed, then social relationships will also
change. Such a view ignores the constraints of the material world and the various forms of power and privilege that work together in a complex and mutually reinforced process to make up social reality as we know it. It also ignores the complexity of consciousness and the existence of ideology and culture. (p. 28)

In other words, the social conditions of schools matter and matter greatly, that is, race matters, gender matters, money matters, ideology matters, culture matters. When people walk through the door of the school building, these socio/politico/cultural realities are not left on the doorstep, but rather enter with them (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1997). O’Brien (as quoted in Abrogast, 1994) argues that solutions which fail to deal with the equality of conditions as well as equality of opportunity are “fundamentally patriarchal in theory and practice” (p. 1). Thus, liberal mainstream feminist initiatives in schools are essentially patriarchal in that they do nothing to alter patriarchal structures and therefore contribute little, if anything, to improving the status of women, and consequently the value of women. The “why” of asymmetrical power relations escapes scrutiny and the status quo continues undisturbed.

Efforts to improve the lived experiences of women and girls in schools must take into account the socio-political realities that permeate their lives and create the culture of the learning environment, which requires acute departure from the dominant liberal feminist approach in a number of ways. First, the problem must be reframed from one of inequity to one of inequality, positioning feminist educators to turn attention to the socio/politico/cultural realities which underlie and sustain differential power relations based on gender. Willis (1978, as quoted in Rudy, 1999) writes “the common theme of
liberal feminism is the denial of the need for militant resistance to an oppressive system...At best liberal feminism’s self-improvement, individual-based philosophy is relevant only to an elite” (p. 54). Because individualism is held as the highest and greatest good, and the fact that the state supports no particular view of what constitutes a good life, liberal feminism has no vision of social justice. Effective challenge to power relations requires recognition of the system as oppressive and the adoption of a proactive, even provocative stance.

The second point of departure from liberal feminism is reconsideration of what is to be done about the problem. Gore (1993) argues that any serious attempt to challenge and ultimately alter gendered power relations in schools calls for educators to “act in spheres wider than, but related to, curricula and pedagogy” (p.144). Thus, the feminist educators must move out of the classroom where mainstream, liberal initiatives have been focused, and into the social life of schools. Taking this step necessitates the adoption of a feminist perspective which embraces a vision of social justice, without which power is not called into question. Lack of a social vision restricts intervention to the classroom, instructional practices and curricula, because in its absence, the social conditions of schools are ignored. When the social conditions of schools are ignored, change in them (and just as importantly, resistance to it) cannot be fully understood. Only when structured power relations are exposed and called into question is there hope for the creation of more just social arrangements. It will be recalled that by learning to identify and describe various forms of power, emancipation from oppressive structures becomes possible. Newman (1998) warns, however, of the tendency to identify abstract concepts such as “hegemony,” “society,” or “patriarchy” as the enemy when in fact,
getting to that point is only the beginning. He argues that learners need to find out more about, and adult educators should strive to give substance to, the abstraction by asking specific questions, such as who are the people involved in the sustaining or promotion of the status quo and what role do they play:

- Are they main players or bit players in the exercise of oppression?
- Are they beneficiaries of a hegemonic control or merely the foot soldiers?...what kind of power do they wield?...in what domain are they operating...instrumental? ...interpretive? ...or ideology, values and assumptions. (p. 149).

Without such specificity educators and learners are at an impasse in the endeavor of change.

Acting in spheres wider than curricula and pedagogy is further enabled a third departure from the liberal feminist perspective, expanding the narrow conceptualization of schools as primarily teachers, classrooms and students, to one of schools as organizations employing hundreds of people from many backgrounds, reflecting the structured power relations and competing interests of the larger society. Organizations, Welton (1991) says, are “structures of action, communication and behavior between people with different degrees of power” (p. 39) [emphasis in the original].

Conceptualized as such, schools become more in one’s understanding than classrooms, teachers and students, and are more easily understood as a microcosm of the larger society where power is structured in relation to race, class, gender, and other positionalities which interplay to influence the process and outcome of situations. People within schools then, as any other organization, operate at various levels of power
and have various interests at stake. According to Pfeffer (1994), recognizing and taking into account structured power relations in organizations is key to getting things done and making things happen, citing failure to do so as the number one reason why organizations in the U.S. fail to accomplish their goals. Further, he cautions, when structured power relations in organizations are ignored, the opportunity to gain deeper understanding of social processes critical to the success of any effort is lost. Similarly, in order to more fully understand social change in schools, as well as resistance to it, feminist efforts must identify and take into account the various forms of power and privilege at work within them. As Brody, et.al. (2000) concluded, educators simply must come to terms with the fact that schools are gendered organizations in order to effect change in the norms and culture.

Radical adult educators argue that the path to social transformation is through such critical analysis of discourse and oppressive structures and how they operate in people’s lives (Inglis, 1997). Thus, having recast the everyday lived experiences of women and girls in society at large and in the micro-society of schools as struggles for power, and having learned to name the enemy and how it operates in society as well as in the lives of individuals, feminist educators are seemingly poised to act. However, the critical perspective on adult learning has been criticized for its failure to offer concrete direction for practice (Cervero & Wilson, 2001), falling short of its aim of social transformation, because it leaves the practical question of “Now what?” unanswered.

Collins (1995) asserts that a critical practice of adult education should not only seek to evade complicity with modern society’s repressive structures and practices, but also offer concrete strategies, tactics and practices of just how this is done. Similarly,
Gore (1993) laments that social change, especially articulated in a language of possibility, requires that attention be directed to specific practices. Livingstone (1983) may have put it best, however, by saying that any effort to restructure social reality must include not only an understanding of existing society and a vision for the future, but a strategy for getting there as well. It is to discussion of possible directions for practice that I now turn.

**Negotiating Feminist Interests**

As has been shown, practices and strategies stemming from the dominant liberal feminist perspective, while an important force, is politically limited by its predilection for working with the system and its romancing of the state. Further, feminist researchers have made clear that it is time to move beyond gender consciousness/awareness and act in ways that challenge the underlying patriarchal framework of schools and its inherent male privilege, acting so that discourses and structures can be restructured or even revolutionized (Brody, et.al, 2000; Cervero & Wilson, 2001). Newman (1994) further explains, “to bring about social rather than individual change...it is crucial for disempowered groups to consider adopting proactive strategies...strategies that will impinge on their enemies as well as on themselves,” and that the role of educators is to help learners discover ways to “take the struggle up to or even into other parties’ camps” (p. 162), or as Collins (1991) puts it, become engaged in “definable concrete projects for social change without which talk of injustice, emancipation, and equality becomes hollow rhetoric” (p. 119).

As such, the message for feminist educators is that there must be an adoption of a proactive, even provocative, stance calling for social change, not individual change or
adaptation to the status quo of gendered power relations in schools. As Weiler (1988) comments, bringing to light forms of power that oppress will create tensions and conflict, but unless this is done, they cannot be challenged effectively.

Although the critical theoretical camp has not been forthcoming in identifying concrete ways practitioners may implement the commitment to change, a practical response to the question of “Now what?,” may be found in the work of Forester (1989) and Cervero and Wilson (1994) who blend together a critical theoretical framework with the practical work of program planning in organizational contexts. Concrete direction for practice guided by principles of democracy are proposed, which can be extrapolated and applied to the negotiation of feminist interests in elementary and secondary schools. While certainly not prescriptive or specific to the school setting, their approach to program planning in organizational contexts offers insight in to how feminist educators could conceptualize their work in the school organization, as well as enable the articulation of concrete strategies for practice.

Forester (1989), an urban planner and policy analyst, refers to his work as planning in the face of power, explaining that “In a world of intensely conflicting interests and great inequalities of status and resources, planning in the face of power is at once a daily necessity and a constant ethical challenge” (p. 3). This one sentence captures the context of the planners’ work and describes the tone that can be expected. Planners do not work on a neutral stage, Forester explains, but rather in politically charged situations where people have interests at stake and who will act in various ways to protect those interests. To behave as though this is not the case is to be politically naive and rendered ineffective.
Particularly important to successful planning efforts is the ability to both assess and account for constraints in the organizational setting which determine boundaries within which the practitioner must operate, integral to what Newman (1994) would call naming the enemy. Forester warns, “ignoring the opportunities and dangers of an organizational setting is like walking across a busy intersection with one’s eyes closed” (p. 7). On the other hand, the planner whose eyes are wide open can more accurately anticipate conflict and obstacles, enabling him or her to respond practically and effectively, which of course, makes all the difference in the outcome of any given situation. Therefore, if relations of power are to be anticipated and reshaped, we must learn to think and act politically.

Finding traditional models of planning practice inadequate for addressing the troublesome issues of “what for” and “for whom” rather than the technical “how-to,” Cervero and Wilson (1994) drew upon and expanded the work of Forester (1989) to develop a guide for planning practice which is both practical and ethical. Program planning, they say, is “a social practice, one squarely within a context of people acting purposefully in structured relationships of interests and power” (p. 172). Whenever people act in organizational settings, more often than not, they act within asymmetrical relationships of power, and logically, program planners must negotiate between conflicting interests. Thus, power and interests are central to any course of action, and the politics of any situation always matters.

Practice, in turn, is understood as human action within structured social contexts, and is “always conducted within a complex set of personal, social and organizational relationships of power among people who may have similar, different or conflicting sets
of interests regarding the program” (p. 4). The social context is thus key to understanding why people act in various ways. As such, while planners act purposefully, they do so contingently and within relationships of power, situations rife with conflicts and uncertainties which present several potential courses of action. If planners are to be successful, then, they must find a way, despite the ambiguity and contingency of the situation, to envision and pursue deliberate courses of action. Integral to the choice of a course of action is addressing questions about to whom planners are ethically and politically answerable, that is, whose interests will be negotiated and to what end, as well as the articulation of one’s ethical viewpoint. Cervero and Wilson argue that such a practice can be guided by the principle of democracy which forms the basis of American society and guides efforts to structure social relationships more justly, leading to “a substantively democratic planning process of representing people and their interests as a standard by which to gauge the ‘what for’ of practice” (p. 187). Viewed as such, planning practice is a human social endeavor that is located in a context of interests and power, and in which the fundamental activity is negotiation. The planner is a knowledgeable social actor whose work is situational, ethical and engaged, characteristics which distinguish the practitioner from the technician.

Similarly, the feminist educator whose aim is to alter gendered power relations in schools will be acting in the face of power, within organizational relationships of power, and confronting different or conflicting interests surrounding the particular incident or agenda undertaken. Thus, the social context of schools, as in other organizational settings, is key to understanding how and why people act in various ways. Learning to
identify constraints, anticipate conflict and obstacles in the school setting is central to the development of specific practices, strategies, and tactics.

Honoring direction for practice even further, is the work of Newman (1998), who also argues that negotiation is an effective strategy that adults can learn to use in actually advancing specific or particular interests. Drawing upon his experience in labor relations, he explains in that arena there are institutionalized opponents as well as established ways with which opponents deal with each other. Thus, conflicts of interest are expected and commonly dealt with in a proactive manner.

Distinct from both consultation, wherein the parties common interests outweigh differences, and dispute wherein the parties are at odds and conflicting interests outweigh any common ones, negotiation is a strategy used when there is a view toward reaching agreement in some form, even though there are conflicts of interest. Newman describes negotiation as “...a process whereby two or more parties with both common and conflicting interests come together to talk with a view to reaching an agreement” (p. 153). It is a process which allows the parties to voice their view and argue for their interests, and each party comes away with something, whether a little or a lot, but the overriding outcome is that things are no longer the same. However, that an agreement was reached does not imply finality of a matter, necessarily. It may be that the parties will resume the process at another time to re-negotiate the terms.

Notice that this understanding of negotiation allows for both common and conflicting interests, reflecting a range of possible action and potential outcomes. It also preludes the complexity of the process. Newman explains that typically, the common interests force the parties to the negotiating table, but it is the conflicting interests that
require the “difficult and stressful” process of negotiation. Notice also the use of the words “force” and “require.” These words accurately portray the condition(s) in which negotiation begins, and they aptly describe the tone of the process, it is not what people necessarily want to do, but because something that matters to them and is at stake, they are forced to the table to protect their interests.

The process of negotiation is fluid and responsive, with no set procedures, no chair or rules about who should talk when, no firm agenda, and no set time limits. The process may breakdown, or abruptly stop, then resume. But, because the parties have common as well as conflicting interests, usually they continue until an agreement is fashioned. During this process each party states their position or makes their demands, propose possible outcomes in order to “size up” the other party and to attempt to get a “read” on what the opponent is or is not willing to do, take or give up. Then finally, what the parties are willing to do is spelled out plainly. If both parties find the ultimatum, the bottom line, acceptable, then particular details can be worked out, the negotiation ends, and the parties involved resume their everyday working relations.

Of course, this is a more-or-less ideal scenario. While, generally speaking, this pattern can be expected, many negotiations do not go along smoothly, which brings up two very important points Newman says one should never lose sight of. The first is to never enter a negotiation assuming that enemies do not exist. He argues that indeed:

We live in a world where we have harsh and unpalatable conflicts, and where we have real and tangible enemies....irresponsible multi-nationals that put profit before anything else, and whose executives ignore or deny the humanity of the people they employ...we have racists...we have
corporate oligarchies, groups of the ‘elite,’ people with access to power and privilege who try to restrict the extent to which ordinary people exercise democracy. (p. 31)

Second, Newman says, you must be clear in your own heart and mind of the point beyond which you will not be pushed, to know without a doubt what is really negotiable and what is not. The lodestar being “what people before us have fought for, sacrificed for and won should not be negotiable...if we are moral beings at all, we must all have a bottom line” (p. 158).

Negotiation, as described by Newman, is an appropriate strategy for challenging gendered power relations in elementary and secondary schools because it recognizes that there is indeed an enemy, it is proactive, responding to the call for a more militant resistance (Walby, 1990) to male primacy, and it is a specific process that can be learned and implemented. Negotiation as a process also possesses properties necessary for challenging the malleability and adaptability of ideological forces sustaining gendered power relations, as well as offers concrete, specific direction for bringing feminist issues to the negotiation table.

Conclusion

This literature review has shown that the historically dominant liberal feminist perspective is inadequate for the task of challenging gendered power relations in schools. On the contrary, feminist educators must learn to think and act both politically and provocatively to alter the gendered status quo. Feminism, as set forth herein, is a political commitment to change. Guided by principles of democracy and driven by a vision of social justice, feminist interests should be taken up and even into the enemy’s camp, as
Newman (1994) says. Adult educators who fail to speak out or act against discrimination and oppression are not being neutral or “apolitical,” rather, they are proclaiming that the status quo of existing social arrangements is acceptable. As Cunningham (2000) says, human activity does cause social change, and by adopting an anti-sexist, anti-racist and anti-any other basis on which people are discriminated against position can morally wrong means for social control and oppression be reconstructed. We must have the courage to take sides, to actively seek specific ways to make the world more a more just place for all to live, and to deliberately choose courses of action which lead increasingly to that end.
CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

“Find a spot on the horizon each morning and steer by it.”
Denys Finch-Hatton to Karen Blixen
in Out of Africa

When considering a research design and methodology for this study I recalled a scene from the film Out of Africa. The film is based on a novella written by Karen Blixen (1934) about her experiences during the years she lived in Kenya. The scene recalled is one in which Blixen went on safari to take supplies to the battle front where her husband had joined Lord Delamere in the English resistance to German advance into Africa. Accompanied by a caravan of native peoples and pack animals, she had traveled days through the desert on horseback when, failing to pass a landmark which would confirm not only that she was where she should be at that point, but also how much further she had to go before reaching her destination, she realized she was off course, quite possibly lost. A miscalculation such as this could lead to not only failing the mission, but worse, jeopardize the welfare of everyone because supplies were figured based on her choice of route, projections of distance and the time needed to get there. Fortunately, Finch-Hatton, a friend and ivory trader on safari himself, crossed paths with the caravan. Giving her a compass, he told her to find a spot on the horizon each morning and steer by it, South by Southwest. With that, Blixen once again set about her journey, her confidence restored that indeed she would make it.
This scene calls attention to critical considerations. You see, although Blixen had a clear destination in mind and even a map in hand, she lacked solid orientation and markers to check her bearings daily, ensuring she would get where she wanted to go. Similarly, I must have more than a notion of what I want to find out from this study, my destination. I, too, must have the tool(s), correct orientation and markers to check my course all along the way because, as Merriam (1998) cautions “the best way to proceed may not always be obvious” (p. 20). A rigorously crafted design and selection of appropriate research methods or strategies are the tools and markers necessary to ensure the researcher stays on course and that the study’s purpose is fulfilled.

The purpose of this study was to understand how women negotiate feminist interests in elementary and secondary schools. This chapter presents the rationale for the selection of a qualitative design and the methodology proposed to answer the following research questions:

1. What issues are raised by feminist educators?
2. What factors constrain and/or enable action?
3. What specific strategies are used in negotiation of feminist interests in schools?

This study is exploratory in nature, with no predetermined outcomes projected or hypotheses to be tested. Its aim is to contribute to our present knowledge base and understanding of how to enact a radical project within the confines of traditional schools, and in so doing, contribute to building a bridge between its theoretical claims and the realization of those claims.
The Research Design

The choice of a study’s design should flow from its purpose, and data collection methods should be selected for their ability to access the information sought by the research questions. In order to accomplish the purpose of this study, I selected an approach which is compatible in spirit and aims. I chose to use qualitative inquiry because it is an approach oriented toward discovery and exploration, and seeks to gain in-depth understanding of a process or phenomenon (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990). Qualitative inquiry is flexible, accommodating change as emergent conditions warrant. Just as in one’s travels, adjustments are frequently made in the itinerary due to changes in conditions, resources and sometimes inclination, the original conceptualization of a qualitative study may undergo frequent adjustments as well, depending on what is discovered along the way. The qualitative approach allows for adaptation to the unexpected. Questions posed by this type of inquiry are formulated not only to allow for, but to also reveal the complexities of human experience and the multiple dimensions of a problem or situation (Creswell, 1998).

Merriam (1998) has identified characteristics most frequently used to describe qualitative research. I will briefly discuss four of these characteristics which will further illuminate why this approach was best suited for this study.

**Qualitative Research Seeks to Understand the Meaning People Have Constructed.**

Qualitative research rejects the notion of an independent social reality, an objective “Truth” against which one’s approximation to it can be measured or in some way assessed for accuracy (Smith & Heshusius, 1986). Rather, the main philosophical assumption underlying all qualitative research is that reality is constructed by individuals
interacting with their social worlds. As such, what a person experiences as reality is relative to one’s race, class, gender and other materialities, as well as one’s own subjective experience of her social world within a specific historical context. The interaction of these variables creates a uniquely lived experience which the qualitative researcher seeks to access and understand. Patton (1985) as quoted in Merriam (1998) explains that the qualitative research process is:

an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as a part of a particular context and the interactions there. This understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting; what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what’s going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting, and in the analysis to be able to communicate that faithfully to others who are interested in that setting....

The analysis strives for depth of understanding. (p. 6)

This study sought to gain deeper understanding of a process about which little is known, which required that I access the subjective realities of the women who engage in the process, to enter into their respective worlds and into the conditions in which they work, to get the emic, or insider’s, perspective. For instance, when negotiating feminist interests, I wanted to know what they thought and felt; how they assessed whether to act or not take action, speak out or remain silent; and, about the timing of their actions, a variable which can mean all the difference between success and failure. I wanted to know if they attempt to “read” a situation or person, or plunge in without that appraisal. In
Patton’s words, I wanted to know what it is like for them to be in their particular work settings, what’s going on for them, and what their meanings are. Qualitative inquiry provides the mechanism through which I could accomplish this.

The Researcher is the Primary Instrument of Data Collection and Analysis.

Contrary to the positivist paradigm which seeks objectivity through use of instrumentation, standardized measurement and distancing the values and biases of the researcher from the research process, qualitative research relies upon the researcher as the primary instrument through which data is collected, filtered, analyzed and interpreted. Rather than variables to be controlled for, the characteristics of the human researcher are integral to the research process, and make accessing the kind of information sought in this study possible. Other instruments of data collection such as questionnaires, surveys, or observation for example, would not be appropriate or adequate.

This role of primary instrument of data collection and interpretation carries with it, however, a caveat of responsibility for the researcher to become consciously aware of her own biases, assumptions and values and how these influence the entire research process. Lather (1991), reminding us that all research is value laden, calls for rigorous self-reflexivity on the part of the researcher, through which our awareness of and sensitivity to how researcher values permeate inquiry should be ever increasing. In a similar vein Peshkin (1988) urges us to systematically search out our own subjectivities throughout the research process, from the first conceptualization of a study and the selection of research questions, to interpretation of the data and outcomes, for the purpose of becoming increasingly aware of how inquiry is shaped by them. In doing so, researchers “may avoid the trap of perceiving just that which my [our] own untamed
sentiments have sought out and served up as data” (p. 20). Keeping biases, assumptions and sentiments in check is one marker used to keep us on course and increases the trustworthiness of one’s work.

Recent educational research (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1998; Stalker, 1996; Tisdell, 1998) has placed in the foreground analysis of one’s positionality in the research process, a concept related to, but distinct from subjectivities. First introduced by Maher and Tetreault (1987) positionality is a term used as a referent to material realities such as race, class, sex, ability, sexual orientation, culture and so forth, which intersect to position us in certain locations of power and privilege within society. Since positional identities cannot be simply set aside or checked at the door like a coat or a hat (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1998) they are brought into the research process by both participant and researcher and subsequently influences all that transpires.

Peshkin’s admonition regarding subjectivities applies to positionality as well. Attention to positionality is central to research underpinned by a critical theoretical framework, as was this study. In my view, a critical perspective always asks questions about making explicit power relations and dynamics. Many feminist researchers raise issues of power and power differentials, particularly between researcher and participant, emphasizing the responsibility to negotiate power ethically (Johnson-Bailey, 1994). The intersection of feminism and qualitative research stems back to the late seventies and early eighties, and has brought more pointed attention to the relationship between researcher and participant and heightened awareness of the political implications of research (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).
Clearly, that the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and interpretation poses its challenges, but it is a means for connecting with people other methods cannot afford. Our humanness is the common ground, albeit different terrain. We all have our stories, our life and experiences, and I believe we all want someone to listen to our stories, to know that someone wants to hear those stories, what we think and how we feel. In this nexus of connection and validation which occurs between researcher and participant lies the possibility for learning new information, gaining new insights and constructing knowledge. In the scenario of this study it is through the interaction between researcher and participant that the information I sought emerged.

**An Inductive Approach to Analysis**

Qualitative inquiry primarily uses an inductive research strategy to develop themes and categories from the data instead of projecting them in advance of the research (Creswell, 1998), adopting a stance of learning from the data as it emerges, and moving from particulars toward more general concepts, hypotheses or theories (Merriam, 1998). As the study proceeds, the researcher pieces data together and, based on what is discovered, decides the steps to be taken next, then picks another spot on the horizon and continues.

**Findings that are Richly Descriptive**

Because qualitative inquiry is oriented toward discovery, process and making meaning, findings are presented in words and pictures which capture, as much as possible, the richness, complexity and essence of the experience. Facts and figures alone are inadequate. When presenting findings of a qualitative study, the researcher wants to transport the reader in time to the place and context of the interaction between researcher
and participant, to get a sense of who the participant is and what she is like, as well as the “feel” of what transpired. Rich, elaborate description paints a portrait of the participant, such as a nervous habit, a style of dress, or an interesting laugh, and the world in which she works or lives, connecting the reader to the study in a way that facts and figures alone simply cannot do. Further, findings presented with rich, thick description facilitates the readers’ assessment of the applicability of the findings to other settings, an issue related to the validity of a study. Vivid language and illustration contributes to the persuasiveness of one’s argument about the conclusions drawn from a study, allowing the reader to “see” the basis on which conclusions are drawn. Findings are re-presented as faithfully as possible reflecting the reality constructed and experienced by the participant.

Discussion of the foregoing characteristics of qualitative research make clear its compatibility with the purpose of this study and its appropriateness as a means to fulfill the purpose. I chose a topic which needs to be explored in depth and about which a detailed description is needed in order to expand and perhaps reconfigure our present understanding of negotiating feminist interests in schools.

Sampling and Selection Criteria

Sampling refers to the act of deciding on the unit of analysis, that is, whom or what is to be studied. The sampling strategy most frequently used in qualitative inquiry is a type of non-random sampling, involving the purposeful selection of participants based on specific criteria. Participants from whom the most can be learned or from whom the most insight or understanding may be gained are identified and sought out purposefully (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998). They are
“information rich cases... from which the most can be learned about the issues central to the purpose of the study” (Patton, 1990, p. 169).

Purposeful selection begins with establishing criteria essential for choosing participants or sites to study (Merriam, 1998). Typically, a list of attributes is developed and then participants and/or sites who fit these descriptors are sought out. Sometimes referred to as criterion sampling (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Miles & Huberman, 1994) participants will have all experienced the phenomenon of interest and meet other criteria considered essential for addressing the purposes of the study (Creswell, 1998).

Selection criteria for this study was significantly guided by the literature on gender and education (Acker, 1994; AAUW, 1991; Bailey, 1993; Flanagan, 1993; Gilligan, 1992; Stromquist, 1990; Weiler, 1988). This body of research suggests women educators have historically occupied a subordinate status in the social hierarchy of schools, that female students are shortchanged by a bias which privileges the male experience as normative, and that schools are arms of the state which perpetuate differential power relations based on sex.

With few exceptions, studies analyzing power relations in educational institutions have almost exclusively been situated in the context of higher education (Resenbrink, 1995). Consequently, negotiation of gendered power relations in the elementary and secondary context is relatively unexplored territory. Doing so, however, is important and strategic, both from the broader critical theoretical perspective and the more specific feminist perspective. Because schooling at this level is compulsory, almost every individual in our society is immersed in the sexist, racist and classist values of dominant U.S. culture as promulgated by the schools. Since the project of critical education
research is to contribute to the transformation of existing inequitable social, political, and economic structures, it makes sense to situate investigation at sites known for the reproduction of the status quo and to intervene at the earliest opportunity.

Moreover, studies of power relations in education have largely limited their focus to the sphere of the classroom, ignoring the larger social context of schools and the conditions in which educators work, factors which profoundly influence the degree to which attempts to enact a feminist agenda occur (Acker, 1994; Gore, 1993). A great many gendered interactions occur in the hallways, across the lunch table and in faculty meetings for instance, which parallel those in the larger society but which may not, however, manifest in a classroom context. Together these factors led to the decision to situate the study at elementary and secondary levels and to select women educators as participants.

That the participants are women was important because of the relevance of speaking from their own gendered experience of schooling as well as from their perspective as a female employee in patriarchal institution (Campbell, 2000). Three additional eligibility criteria for participation in this study were, one, that the participants are thirty years of age or older. This criterion is important because by age thirty they would have experienced the influence of patriarchy in the shaping of their lives. Secondly, that the participants have worked in the elementary or secondary context for at least three years. It is reasoned that three years of experience will afford a level of familiarity with the context in which they work unavailable to the novice. The third eligibility criteria was that the participants could recall one or more critical incidents in which they acted to negotiate feminist interests in the school setting. The use of critical
incidents as a selection criterion is important because I want to avoid “armchair radicals,” a term sometimes used in reference to postmodern feminists, but which I apply to any feminist critique which stops short of active engagement in efforts to alter existing power relations. Brody, et.al. (2000) found that some teachers who professed a strong commitment and even “rhetorical passion” (p. 141) were, for various reasons, unable to actualize their intentions. That the participants have such incidents to recall demonstrates their activism.

Participants

Participants were identified through a strategy known as snowball, chain, or network sampling. This strategy involved asking likely referral sources to direct me to individuals who meet the study’s eligibility criteria (Merriam, 1998). For example, participants for the pilot interviews I conducted were located through a series of referrals which began with a suggestion by two of my committee members that I contact a particular doctoral student affiliated with the teacher education department of this University. She, in turn, referred me to several people she thought would be eligible for the study and who would likely agree to participate. She also recommended I contact one particular person before the others, which I did. The person readily agreed to participate and referred me to the second participant. I continued this process of recruiting new participants throughout the data collection process.

The initial conceptualization of this study called for the identification of “feminist” educators as participants. I reasoned that naming exactly what I was seeking would more quickly and accurately discriminate between educators who are feminist and those who are not, and ergo, educators most likely to challenge sexism in schools. This
proved to be difficult, however, for a number of reasons. First, since there is no one feminism, but actually many feminisms (Tisdell, 1993) which may be expressed in myriad ways, creating a definition of a “feminist educator” was difficult. Secondly, even women who self identify as “feminist” frequently do not publically proclaim their stance, although they covertly and quietly act in the interest of the feminism they embrace (Acker, 1994). Finally, there are many women do not think of themselves as feminist, nor would they call themselves feminist, yet they act to challenge sexism in schools when it arises.

Because of these difficulties, I decided to specify concrete descriptions of behavior or action as the means by which I would characterize and identify participants as “feminist,” thereby circumventing the need for a definition, removing the qualification that the participant proclaim herself feminist, and expanding the potential number of participants by providing a way for the woman who typically would not think of herself as feminist to nevertheless recognize herself in the alternative descriptive terms. For the purpose of this study a “feminist educator” was characterized by her activism along two lines: 1) she challenges sexist incidents, practices and policies, and/or 2) she seeks opportunities to inform others about sexism in the schools. Such activism may occur formally, as in staff development, or informally as in interaction with parents, other faculty, students or administration. In either case, for the purposes of this study, the feminist educator is one who recognizes power differentials based on sex and whose agenda is to do something about it. Ultimately, ten women were selected as participants. While not a selection criteria, I did strive to achieve diversity in terms of the positions
held by the women in order to more adequately address the broader social/political context of schools.

Data Collection

Major data collection methods in qualitative research include interviewing, observation, and document analysis. Interviewing, however, is almost always used in qualitative inquiry largely because it is a way to get information otherwise unobtainable. Because it is an interactive process, the researcher is enabled to discover what another person thinks and feels, their view of an experience and what sense they make of it (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998). Because the purpose of this study is to discover new information, and to gain insight and understanding into the negotiation of feminist interests in schools, I needed to hear from the people who actually engage in the process, to learn what it is like from their perspective. Of the various methods available, interviewing is the method most compatible with this aim.

Data for this study was collected through semi-structured interviews with participants about critical incidents they experienced in practice (See Appendix A). A list of questions were developed to guide the interview, although the exact wording of the questions and the order in which they were discussed varied from interview to interview (Merriam, 1998). A semi-structured format was chosen for this study because, while a certain core of information was sought, how the participant goes about presenting the information or the order in which it is presented is of less concern. The semi-structured format allows the participant to tell the recollected event in a manner that makes the most sense to her, using the interview guide as just that, a guide, not a prescriptive procedure.
Critical Incidents

The use of critical incidents has evolved from its initial introduction by Flanagan (1954) as a behaviorist method for determining the critical requirements of specific work activity to a constructivist methodology used in qualitative research. According to Brookfield (1995) critical incidents are “vivid happenings that for some reason people remember as being significant” (p. 114). In the scenario of this study it might have been a situation in which the participant attempted to accomplish something specific and things went particularly well. Or, it may be that her efforts were obstructed or challenged in some way, thwarting her efforts. And then, there may have been a situation in which the participant was not sure of what to do or say or even if to say or do anything, the uncertainty itself being the characteristic defining the situation as critical.

Ellinger and Watkins (1998) argue that the use of critical incidents in qualitative research is an effective method for the production of rich narratives which captures both context and meaning from the participants’ perspective. By retaining the specificity inherent in the original conceptualization of critical incidents, but expanding beyond these limits through in-depth questioning, probing and clarification in the interview, the potential for obtaining information most relevant to the purpose of the study is enhanced. The use of critical incidents provides a means of establishing clear parameters within which to focus semi-structured interviews about the specific process of negotiating feminist interests. Throughout the course of a day, the participants may have negotiated any number of interests, but I wanted them to focus only on those related to gendered power relations. Finally, the use of critical incidents is considered by some to be less
threatening and may potentially reveal more about the participants assumptions, worldview and motivation than direct questioning (Brookfield, 1991; Tripp, 1993).

Prior to the scheduled interview I explained the study to the participants and asked them to think of critical incidents to be discussed at that time. Also prior to the scheduled interview I sent to the participant a description of the study, the interview guide and two consent forms. I explained that I would contact them after they had opportunity to review the material to determine if the incident they recalled could indeed contribute to the purpose of the study and if they wanted to participate. Once this was established a date and time for the interview was chosen. The consent forms were signed and collected before the interview began.

Pilot Interviews

Two pilot interviews were conducted in order to ascertain whether the research questions posed by this study were adequately addressed through the questions developed to guide the interview. As was discussed earlier, participants for the pilot interviews were identified through network sampling and initial contact with the participants was made by telephone. In most cases, however, the referral source could not be certain that the prospective participant would have one or more critical incident(s) to recall. As such, at the time of this initial telephone call I explained the study then confirmed that the prospective participant could indeed recall one or more incident(s) in which she acted to challenge sexism in the schools. If during initial contact I determined selection criteria had been met, I told the participant I would provide them with a description of the study and the interview guide to facilitate their preparation for the interview.
Also included were two consent forms with the direction to sign both forms and bring one to the interview (Appendix A). I deferred to their preferences regarding a date, time and place for the interview. I followed the same protocol with each participant.

At the time of the interview, I began by thanking them for their participation, collected the consent forms, signed both copies and returned one to the participant. Turning to discussion of the interview itself, I confirmed permission to tape record the interview. Both participants chose to use a pseudonym. I then asked if the participants had any questions about the interview procedure before beginning. Responding they did not, we proceeded with the interview. The first interview lasted sixty-five minutes, while the second lasted ninety minutes. Both interviews were transcribed verbatim. Review of the transcripts in light of the research questions revealed that both participants provided information pertinent to each question. However, upon review of the interview guide with the methodologist for this study, changes in terminology of some questions were made although the questions remained essentially the same, and then others were discarded. Changes in terminology were also made to the Description of the Study to enhance understanding of the study’s purpose. The revised interview guide and Description of the Study were then used for subsequent interviews (See Appendix B). Because the pilot interviews were determined to provide substantial responses to the research questions, both were retained and included in the findings of the study.

For seven of the subsequent eight interviews, I followed the procedure described above and I was able to successfully determine eligibility from the initial contact for six of the seven participants contacted. However, when I contacted the fourth participant, I followed the procedure and she confirmed that yes, indeed, there were incidents of
sexism she could discuss, and so a date and time were established for the interview. I then forwarded to her the Description of the Study, Interview Guide, and two consent forms. Upon arrival at her office, however, I discovered that she had not read any of the material I had sent. Having it in her office, she read it quickly and then said had not understood the study as it appeared in the description, and as it turned out, had no incidents to share. She was very apologetic, but nonetheless, could not contribute to the study.

I learned from this mishap not to assume the participant has read and/or understands the material I send them prior to the interview. Subsequently, I made a follow-up contact with the participants to confirm their understanding of the study and to I also asked them to tell me briefly about the incident(s) they had in mind. Both procedures assured me that the person could contribute to the study.

However, a similar situation occurred when I contacted the tenth participant, again due to my error. Margaret was known in the community for her activism in education and well known for taking a stand against sexism in schools. Although I did follow-up the initial contact with a confirmation call, I failed to ask her to briefly describe the incident(s) she had in mind. Because of her reputation, I again made an assumption that the incident(s) she could bring would be substantial. To my disappointment, once the interview began I learned that she had only one incident in mind and that, by her own admission, she had given it little thought by way of preparation for the interview. Consequently, the information she provided, while useful and even a sterling example of sexism in schools, did not allow the depth of analysis
afforded by the other interviews. The interviews in total, however, provided deep and rich information which adequately addressed each research question.

The interview with each participant began with a brief synopsis of her career path and present work situation. Six participants were working in the schools at the time of the interview, two were employed in positions other than the schools, and two had retired from their careers in education. We then moved into discussion of the critical incident(s) recalled generally following the interview guide. Transcripts of the interviews provided the primary data for this study. Table 1 provides a summary of the critical incidents discussed by participants.

Analysis Procedures

Data analysis is the process of making sense of the data. On the surface this sounds simple, yet in actuality, data analysis is a complex and creative process in which the researcher is immersed from the beginning of the study to its end. In the tradition of qualitative inquiry, data are collected and analyzed simultaneously. According to Merriam (1998) "data analysis is one of the few facets, perhaps the only facet of doing qualitative research in which there is a right way and a wrong way....the right way to analyze data in a qualitative study is to do it simultaneously with data collection" (p. 162, emphasis in the original).

This study employed the constant comparative method of data analysis. This involved the constant comparing of an incident of one interview with another incident in the same set of data or in a different set (Merriam, 1998). From such continuous comparison, small bits of information, or units of data, were sorted into groupings or categories based on the commonalities found. Categories are not the data themselves, but
rather, representations of the data which are typically named or labeled to indicate how the data within them are alike. Categories discovered should be answers to the research questions and reflect the purpose of the study (Dey, 1998; Merriam, 1998).

I began analysis of the data with this dictum in mind, starting with transcripts of the first three interviews. Placing the research questions close at hand for easy reference, I searched the each transcript for answers to the questions, coding each statement I thought even remotely addressed each one with the words “issue(s),” “constraint,” “enabler” or “strategy.” Once this procedure was completed for the three transcripts, I created a document summarizing participants responses for each research question. At the top of the page I placed the research question. Below the question I placed the participants pseudonyms horizontally across the page under which I placed their respective responses to the three research questions. Essentially, there were three columns, headed by the pseudonym. This procedure allowed me to see the responses of three participants at once, which I later found facilitated grouping the responses into categories. I then reviewed these initial results with the methodologist who determined the procedure was yielding the information sought. The only change made was to add the line number of the participants’ response for ease and efficiency of reference. This process continued until all ten transcripts had been analyzed, coded and summarized according to the issue(s) raised, factors that enabled and/or constrained action, and specific strategies used in negotiation of feminist interests.

The second step in analysis of the data was the creation of initial categories which were given initial conceptual names. I began this step by looking for commonalities across the data from first three transcripts. For example, one of the responses from the
first participant to the question “what enables action?” was having good rapport with the principal and colleagues. I then reviewed responses from the two other participants to see if this factor was identified by them as well. If so, I grouped them together initially as the category “Personal” since the factor seemed to be mostly related to personal characteristics or attributes. I then moved to the next response, for example, following established policy and procedure, then looked across the data from the other two transcripts to determine if the other participants also identified this factor. If so, I created an initial category for the factor. I proceeded in this manner with each response to each question for the first three participants. This process was continued for two to three sets of data as they were collected until all transcripts had been analyzed. Next, I created a document listing the initial categories of responses to each research question on the left side, and then to the right of the category I listed the number of the transcript from which it came to indicate how many participants had identified that factor. Doing so enabled me to see the preponderance of the data more clearly and facilitated finalizing categorical names. From this analysis, I then constructed general themes or patterns of meaning suggested which formed the major findings of this study.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are constructs which refer to the degree or extent to which the consumer of research can have confidence in the findings of a study. Both terms in their traditional, positivistic usage are problematic in qualitative research.

In quantitative research, reliability refers to the extent to which findings of a study can be reproduced (Merriam, 1998). However, in qualitative research this definition is problematic because, being based on the assumption that reality is uniquely
constructed by individuals, findings cannot be replicated. Rather, the qualitative researcher presents a fit between what he or she records as data and what actually occurred (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998), and re-presents the findings in such a way that they are consistent with the data collected. Lincoln and Guba, (1985) suggest using the terms “dependability” and “consistency” as substitutes for reliability. Dependability is strengthened by the researcher’s careful attention to the design of the study, how the study was conducted, including making explicit the assumptions and theoretical framework of the study, and on what basis conclusions, or findings, were drawn (Merriam, 1998).

Internal validity deals with the legitimacy of the findings, that is, do they represent what is really there? Is the researchers’ presentation an accurate portrayal of what transpired? The concept of internal validity is inextricably linked to the concept of “reality” but the qualitative researcher would ask “whose reality?” Given the philosophical assumption of multiple realities underlying qualitative research, how does the qualitative researcher go about verifying, or demonstrating the validity of his or her findings? Many perspectives exist regarding the appropriateness of using the term validity at all (Creswell, 1998), arguing instead for a reconceptualization of validity to better reflect the essence of qualitative research. Wolcott (1990), for example uses the term understanding to portray what he seeks from research, and from which to present plausible interpretations, while Creswell (1998) suggests the use of the term verification rather than validity for the qualitative approach.

External validity is concerned with the extent to which the findings of a study may be transferred or generalized to other situations. The qualitative researcher is
interested in “understanding the particular in depth not to find out what is generally true of the many (Merriam, 1998, p. 208), and consequently statistical generalization is not the aim. Rather, the argument is made that the general lies in the particular, that is, that application can be drawn from a particular event or situation. It is the task of the researcher to facilitate transferrability by presenting the findings in such a manner that the reader can evaluate whether findings really apply to them.

A number of strategies for verification and establishing the trustworthiness of a study are available to the qualitative researcher (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998). I employed three strategies: 1) an explanation of my assumptions and biases underlying the study, 2) presenting the findings in rich, thick descriptive terms so that the reader may more easily determine if or to what extent they apply to their own situation and experience, and 3) peer review or debriefing, which occurred throughout the study by consulting with my major professor and methodologist.

Researcher Bias and Limitations of the Study

Researcher bias is a subject of concern to all researchers, one which necessarily commands attention because, on the one hand, no one can divest themselves of their own experiences and the subjectivities born of them when they begin a study, yet the potential for one’s biases to contaminate the study if unchecked is very real. It is important, therefore, for the researcher to be as consciously aware as possible of her own subjectivities and biases in order to produce a faithful presentation of the participants’ view of the world, their experiences and the sense they make of them.

Bogden and Biklen (1998) recommend that the researcher acknowledge that controlling for personal bias is limited, that no matter how much one may wish to, “you
cannot divorce your research and writing from your past experiences, who you are, what you believe and what you value” (p. 34). Nor, in my opinion, would you want to; one person’s biases is another person’s passion. It is subjectivity that prompts the definition of a research problem, the choice research topic, and who, when and where to conduct a study. Our politics are always embedded in our practice (Cervero & Wilson, 2001). The task for the researcher is to seek out her own subjectivities (Peshkin, 1988) and biases so that when they are encountered they may be more readily recognized and kept in perspective.

One method for seeking them out is by articulating as clearly as possible, those of which you are already aware. Some of my biases are easy for me to identify, while others remain more obscure. The world I experience is structured by asymmetrical power relations that shape the course of individual lives and even determine the outcome of many situations. I do not see these as the natural order of things, but rather as socially constructed in ways that advantage the few at the expense of the many. Being female I am most acutely aware of the many ways my life has been shaped and limited by gendered power relations, and now that I am a mother of two daughters, my usual sensitivity to the effects of sexism on the lives of girls has blossomed into near religious fervor.

My subjective view of the world has also been shaped by my being white and middle class, heterosexual and married, (the stereotypical “white bread”as an African American friend calls me) and in most ways privileged because of it. Somehow, though, this relative privilege does not obscure my concern about social justice, broadly speaking,
or about the welfare of women less advantaged than I, nor does it lessen my commitment to contribute, in any way possible, to the creation of a more just and democratic society.

Many times, however, one’s subjectivities and biases are not so easily recognizable. In such instances we would do well to heed Peshkin’s (1988) advice to be conscious of feelings, reactions, thoughts and any other sensations that may cue us as to what our beliefs and values may be. As he says:

I looked for the warm and the cool spots, the emergence of positive and negative feelings, the experiences I wanted more of or wanted to avoid, and when I felt moved to act in roles beyond those necessary to fulfill my research needs. In short, I felt that to identify my subjectivity I had to sense how I was feeling. (p. 18)

Throughout this study it will be necessary for me to carefully monitor my thoughts, responses, and feelings to prevent contamination of the study’s findings. I propose to do this by systematically recording them as they occur and by establishing regular debriefing sessions with either the methodologist for the study or the major professor. This study, as all others, has its limitations. First, I am relying on the participants recollection of critical events which may have become distorted with the passage of time, with some details forgotten, embellished or otherwise reshaped. Further, corroborating the incidents with others who may have been involved is not possible, and as such I must rely on the account given by the participants.
CHAPTER FOUR
THE WOMEN’S PROFILES AND CRITICAL INCIDENTS

Now, I say that with cruelty and oppression it is everybody’s business to interfere.
Ana Sewell in Black Beauty

Each woman in this study was moved to act by something inside themselves that would allow them to do nothing else, seemingly driven by the belief that with cruelty and oppression it was their business to interfere. This chapter introduces the women through a biographical summary and then presents a brief discussion of the critical incident(s) they discussed in their interview.

The participants in this study are women who range in age from the early thirties to early sixties and whose work in elementary and secondary schools ranges from ten to forty years. Through those years they have occupied a variety of roles, beginning with teaching and branching into counseling and administration at all levels. Though their age, years of experience and job roles vary, all have experienced the effects of sexism in schools, either as targets themselves or as advocates of others who are targeted. The following section introduces the participants through a brief biographical sketch and presents a summary of the critical incident they discussed. Table 1 presents a demographic summary of the participants and Table 2 presents the critical incidents.

Sally

Sally is a white woman in her mid- 40's who has taught in public school for eight years. She grew up “in the projects” of Baltimore and Virginia, giving her what she calls
Table 1

Participant Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>Degree Held</th>
<th>Position at Time of Incident</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>Teacher/Middle School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>Teacher/Middle School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carolyn</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Doctoral</td>
<td>Counselor/Highschool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Principal/Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Doctoral</td>
<td>Principal/Middle School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>Teacher/Highschool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>Teacher/Highschool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Doctoral</td>
<td>Superintendent/System Wide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephanie</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Teacher/Counselor/Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margaret</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Doctoral</td>
<td>Principal/Highschool</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a blue-collar perspective of life. Her mother was married three times, each time to an alcoholic, all of whom were “usually gone a lot” and she was glad when they were not in the picture. Sally’s father was a lawyer, but he left the family when she was two years-old, and so she and her two siblings were “petty much independent at a young age.” She feels that these early life experiences greatly shaped her view of women, the role of women in society, the relationships between women and men, and ultimately her sense of social justice more broadly.
Sally has led colorful life. She has worked in a variety of jobs, such as driving a dump truck and operating a fork lift, and others including managing a restaurant, and working in orchards picking and packing fruit as she hitch-hiked across the country.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Critical Incident</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>Female students are targets of sexual harassment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female student is victim of sexual battery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>Middle school girls are targets of sexual discrimination by teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Middle school girl impregnated by father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carolyn</td>
<td>Target of sexual harassment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Target of physical battery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Middle school grade girls are victims of sexual battery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Middle school girl target of sexual discrimination by male teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>Target of sexual discrimination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim</td>
<td>Target of sexual harassment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane</td>
<td>Sexual discrimination in hiring practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>High school girls are targets of sexual discrimination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephanie</td>
<td>Target of sexual discrimination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Middle school girl target of sexual discrimination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margaret</td>
<td>High school girls targets of sexual discrimination</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once, when she was married, she and her musician husband lived in a teepee. As she puts it “I had kind of a bohemian sort of lifestyle for a while.” Later, she had a child, a
son, and when he was about 5 or 6 years old she enrolled in him a Montessori school. It was then that she began reassessing her own life, realized she “didn’t want to do restaurant work forever,” adding “little did I know that standing on my feet was the reason, until I became a teacher!”

A non-traditional student in terms of age, Sally started college at 29. Wanting to begin with taking a photography class, but discovering it was full, she opted for a geology course instead. She loved it so much she decided to become a science teacher. Sally graduated from college at 33 and got her first teaching job at 34 teaching fifth grade. The remainder of her experience has been at the middle school level in sixth grade. In addition to teaching, Sally was very active in other roles related to her work, such as becoming grade-level leader of thirteen teachers during her second year, serving on the SACS committee and a steering committee in her school.

At the time of this interview, Sally was no longer married and had been out of the classroom two years, having left to pursue a doctoral degree in education. Sally described herself as a feminist, and that graduate classes had given her a forum to begin articulating that perspective more clearly. She spoke of how much she enjoyed discussions about feminism and feminist concerns in her graduate classes since “it’s not talked about in the classroom or in the school setting very often, but in an academic setting it’s talked about on a regular basis.”

Sally seems more ready and able than many to deal with life as it comes, to take risks, and not only be willing to accept, but make the most of the outcome of her choices and actions. She seems confident of her ability to handle life situations, even when the way to deal with things is anything but clear.
Sally discussed two critical incidents that occurred at the middle school where she taught. The first incident was one of sexual harassment of female students by male students. She explained that the sexual harassment of female students by male students was an everyday occurrence and a dominant feature of the school culture. Sally intervened by proposing to the principal that an expert in the area of sexual harassment be invited to work with the faculty. The principal gave consent for her to proceed with planning the program, but was subsequently instrumental in the project’s failure. The second incident Sally discussed involved a female high school student and a male high school student who were accused of engaging in sexual activity on the school campus. They were discovered by a coach after school hours in a restroom of the gymnasium. Both were required to appear before a tribunal of school personnel who would make disposition of their cases. Sally was asked to sit as a member of the panel to hear the female student’s case. If found “guilty,” the girl would be expelled for the remainder of the school year, jeopardizing her graduation and opportunity for college. Sally recounts that during the proceedings the panel was given partial information, and were not allowed to consider circumstances which led to the incident, or to openly discuss the case and deliberate among themselves. Sally believed the proceedings were not fair or just, and that she and the other panel members were prohibited from acting in the best interest of the student.

Beth

Beth is a 47 year-old, white woman who has been teaching nineteen years. Initially she taught at the elementary level, but most of her work experience has been in middle school. Presently, Beth teaches social studies and language arts in a
predominately Black, rural school system with very low socio-economic status. She is part of what she describes as a strong team of teachers who “work hard to give emotional support to our students” as well as to deliver a sound curriculum.

She was once married and is the mother of two children, both boys. Beth grew up with the assumption that females could achieve anything they wanted to achieve and when she left high school in 1970 she was “pretty determined to change things.” Instead, she says “I left that scene and became a mother and school teacher, two of the most traditional things I could have possibly done.” At times she felt embarrassed by her choice to become a mother and a teacher. Later however, she realized that she could apply her philosophy to her work in the schools because what she saw as “just common sense,” (that girls could do and be anything) still escaped many teachers and parents of students.

As Beth talked about her views and how she had come to them, I heard in what she said a strong desire to be fair and just, and accept people, including her students, for what and who they are, whether male or female. Her experience raising her sons sensitized her to the fact that not everyone fit the stereotypical gender norm, explaining that one of them “fit the mold” of what a boy is supposed to be like while the other would rather be painting or dressing his bear. This realization created in her a certain mental and emotional flexibility which she applies in her work with students.

When she spoke of the injustice she sees while at work, the pain of loss was in her voice, a fretting, if not grieving, over the loss of opportunity for children to find out what they might become and what they might do with their lives because of sexism, racism, poverty and ignorance. As she said, “I think there is still probably a majority of parents in
poor rural setting who don’t see opportunities for their young kids.” Even so, Beth
struggles with just exactly what her role in this scenario is, and what the boundaries are?
When does advocacy become an imposition of her values on another person? As she put
it, “If I talk to a poor mother, a poor parent whose child is pregnant, it’s just no getting
through to them; they are like the fifth generation who have gotten pregnant as a
teenager, and you know, who am I to tell them that they would be happier if they had a
career?” And, underneath it all, she wonders if there is anything she can do at all that will
make a difference, adding “I feel real helpless when it comes to talking to them [parents]
about choices for their young girls because their lives are so different from mine.” The
feelings of helplessness and the struggle to find lines of demarcation do not keep her
from acting, however, she just tries to sort it out along the way.

Beth brought two critical incidents for discussion. The first is one involved the
chronic sexual harassment of middle school girls by a female teacher. Beth recounted that
the teacher routinely targeted girls, accusing them of dressing and behaving in ways that
were sexually solicitous. Typically, she would bring the girl out into the hallway and
barrage her with verbal abuse. Beth and her colleagues decided to bring a complaint to
the principal and asked that he intervene on behalf of the students. The principal said that
he would talk with the teacher about her behavior, and while he claimed to have done so,
the teacher’s behavior did not change and the abuse continued unabated.

The second incident was sexual discrimination by the school administration and
teachers toward a middle school girl who was being sexually abused by her father.
Although Beth had brought the abuse to the attention of administration and insisted that
something be done to protect the girl, the school failed to act. Subsequently, Beth learned
from a friend of the girl that she had become pregnant. She then went outside the school to the Department of Family and Children’s Services (DFACS). Although the father was removed from the home and ordered by the court to stay away from the girl, the order was not enforced and the abuse continued.

Carolyn

Carolyn is a white woman in her early 60's who is married and has two adult daughters. Her experience in education has spanned forty years and a variety of positions including teaching math in middle schools and counseling in middle and high school. She has also worked in administration at the college level. After eight years of teaching, she decided to pursue a master’s degree in guidance and counseling, and later earned a doctoral degree. The last nineteen years of her career has been as a counselor at the middle and high school levels. Through the years she has served on many committees, such as the school improvement committee, but at present she job-shares a full time position with another counselor and so limits her activities to counseling.

Carolyn was friendly and generous with comments, thoughts and feelings about the incidents she brought to the interview, but kept the discussion largely confined to the task at hand. She spoke little about herself personally except to say “I’m sometimes a PollyAnna and think that right will prevail when we know it doesn’t [always],” and describing herself as a “fairly passive person until I get really mad.” Her characteristic passivity does not prevent her from acting, however, when the welfare of herself or others is at stake, as when issues of sexism arise in the schools. There have been many times Carolyn has intervened in sexist incidents because, as she said, “it’s just so common, that I don’t see it as anything out of the ordinary.” Inherent in her comment is
an assertion that sexism is indeed to be dealt with and that she does so by matter of routine, whether at the individual level of talking with a student, recommending suspension or expulsion or appearing as a witness in court when an offense becomes a legal matter. Apparently, sexism in schools is something about which she gets “really mad.”

Carolyn recounts two critical incidents, one of being the target of sexual harassment, and another of being the target of physical battery. In the first incident, Carolyn was verbally harassed by the superintendent of the school system who directed comments to her publicly. This behavior was characteristic for the man and she was not his only target. However, no one had confronted him or complained to the school board about his behavior. After careful consideration of how to deal with the situation, Carolyn decided not to confront him because she believed nothing would be done. Rather, she decided to distance herself from him as much as possible and then move to another school system when the opportunity arose.

The second incident Carolyn discussed involved her being hoisted across the shoulder of a male assistant principal, an act she described as “very powerful” and unsettling. Carolyn reported the incident to the principal, a male, who subsequently addressed the matter with the assistant principal. She was told that a reprimand was placed in the man’s employment file, although she was not certain this occurred. Apparently the incident was addressed, however, because the assistant principal became very hostile toward Carolyn.
Jane

Jane is a white woman in her 50's who worked in the field of education for thirty-five years before retiring in 2000. She began her career as an English teacher in a middle-school, and then in high-school. She also holds a master’s degree in counseling and in administration. Most of Jane’s work experience was in the high school setting. However, she was in the elementary school setting, first as a counselor and then as principal, for the last ten years of her career.

Jane is down-to-earth, plain-spoken and direct, believing the best plan is “dealing with things now instead of letting it fester and get out of hand.” Keenly aware of and deeply troubled by the problem of sexism in the schools, she seemed a bit agitated as she talked about it, shifting in her chair as her voice rose a bit in volume and intensity. She spoke with clarity and passion about the importance of treating gender as a “critical issue” to which a great deal of attention needs to be paid, and with just as much frustration and anger that, in actuality, gender is a “non-issue” to most school personnel. Even though risks and repercussions are certain, she does not shrink from acting swiftly and surely when sexist incidents arise, saying “this is very serious business to me.”

Jane recalled two incidents during the interview. The first incident involved the sexual battery of sixth-grade girls by sixth-grade boys. Jane learned that this behavior had been occurring quite a while before a female student, one of the targets, finally told her what had been happening. According to the student, a group of boys colluded to coerce or force girls into a vacant classroom, close the door and turn out the lights, then feel the girl’s body. Jane rightly interpreted the incident as a violation of law, and as such, reported the incident to local law enforcement who came immediately to the school
and removed the boys. The boys were subsequently suspended for the remainder of the school year. Jane did have to face a great deal of backlash from the boys’ parents, but she also enjoyed the support many other parents who told her that because of her action they felt their children would be protected while at school.

The second incident Jane discussed occurred when she was a counselor at a middle school. A female student reported to her that a desk in which she was assigned to sit had been defaced with lewd, vulgar, sexist language which she says was “obviously written by a male.” Since seating arrangements are assigned, Jane said it was easy to determine the author of the comments. Jane reported the situation to the assistant principal, a male, because it was his responsibility to deal with disciplinary matters. When she described the condition of the desk, the assistant principal laughed, trivializing the incident, saying “you know how boys are!” He then proceeded to clean the desk himself and never confronted the student author. Jane summarized his actions as communicating that it was alright, even expected, for boys to engage in sexist behaviors and how such behavior affects girls simply does not matter.

Susan

Susan is a married, white woman in her 40's who is presently a principal of a middle-school in a rural area. She began her career in 1981 as a teacher of gifted students in the elementary school setting. Since then she has held positions as assistant principal and principal at the elementary and middle school levels, in rural and metropolitan areas, and earned a doctoral degree along the way. She relates that she is actively involved in a state educational organization, serving as an officer and appearing
as a presenter at meetings, and teaches adjunct at a nearby university. There is a
cultivated professionalism about her, the kind of person who attends to detail.

Progressive and innovative, she is one who has visions of what a school can be
and do, and she works hard to make the vision(s) a reality. She believes that while the
school personnel may be very diverse and have many diverse interests, they share a
“common bond,” that of working with students to help them become better persons, and
that differences should be subordinate to this one aim. Susan sees it as her responsibility
as principal to “raise teachers to a different level...to make them stretch” by challenging
them to do things such as submitting proposals and attending workshops and seminars.
However, she has “ruffled feathers” from time to time in her desire to root out
complacency but, she says, “you don’t make great strides without making enemies.”

Susan discussed one incident in which she became the target of sexual
discrimination by a male superintendent whom she had been warned did not like strong,
competent women. She had been in the position as principal a couple of years prior to the
superintendent’s appointment to the system. The conflict between Susan and the
superintendent arose from a student’s violation of school rules which required
administrative disciplinary action. Susan acted according to school policy and
recommended the student be suspended.

However, the family of the student appealed the decision and the appeal became
an opportunity for the superintendent to, as Susan put it, “come after me.” The conflict
erupted into what to her felt like an all-out war. Increasingly Susan became convinced
that she was in professional jeopardy and consequently sought legal counsel. Counsel
agreed she was in jeopardy, and projecting she was likely to be fired, advised her to strike
first by resigning, which she did. This action angered the superintendent and sparked
protests by her supporters (parents mostly), and attracted the attention of local media.
Nonetheless, Susan held to her resignation, believing it to be in the best interest of the
school, the students and herself. She later accepted a position as professor at a university.
At the time of the interview for this study, she had accepted a position as principal at a
newly opened middle school.

Kim

Kim is a white woman in her 30's who is married and has two children. She has
held a number of teaching positions in both regular education programs and special
education programs. Most recently she has added an administrative position to her
experience, having accepted a position as assistant principal in a small, rural elementary
school.

Kim is very open, easily and freely discussing her family of origin and
educational background. She recalls becoming aware of gender differences at an early
age when her brothers were given privileges that she and her sister were denied. Most of
her teenage years, she says, “centered around my rights to take hikes in the woods and
being outraged that my brothers didn’t have to do their laundry.” This was during the
70's, she said, the height of the women’s movement, and “I had reached full throttle with
my parents...I was really quite distressing to them.”

She was also quite the activist from an early age as well, taking on the
administration at the private high-school she attended over the issue of a girls’ right to
wear pants to school. All students were required to wear uniforms, but girls could only
wear skirts. It was during her junior year, she began “pushing for pants” and in protest
one day she wore waffled-print, long underwear under her skirt. Apparently the point was well made since soon thereafter the rules were changed so that girls, too, could wear pants. This was a very empowering moment for her, she said, one which taught her that sometimes the system can indeed be changed.

Kim describes herself as a “feminist” who has always fought for a woman’s right to choose and against restrictions imposed on women simply because they are women. She feels it is imperative that a woman be free to choose her own way in life, her own roles, and to make her own decisions about what she will and will not do with her life.

Kim discussed an incident in which she was the target of sexual harassment. During her first year of teaching, a male teacher much older than herself, befriended her and became somewhat of a mentor. However, one day when he stopped by her classroom after school as he had often done, he propositioned her for sex. She told him she was shocked and dismayed that he would do such a thing, but he just laughed and assured her she would “come around.” Uncertain at first what to do about the situation, she recalled feeling very afraid and insecure. Within a few days, however, she did report the incident to the principal who agreed the man’s behavior was inappropriate, yet simultaneously he held her responsible, saying she should have seen it coming. From that point on, Kim distanced herself from the man as much as possible and he never approached her again.

Diane

Diane is a black woman in her 40's who has recently retired after thirty-two years of teaching health and personal fitness, and physical education in one school system, with twenty-eight of those years in one school. Diane enjoys a reputation as a fair person who lays her cards on the table, there is no wondering where she stands on any given issue.
While she is more than willing listen to others, she is just as willing to stand her ground in a disagreement. She is quick to add, however, that even in disagreement people should be treated with respect. She believes in striving to do what is in the best interest of all persons concerned, and in placing the interests of students ahead of all others, saying “...the students that we serve, that’s what it’s all about.”

Specific to gender issues, she relates that in “over thirty-two years of teaching you see a lot of things going on that aren’t necessarily in the best interest of females.” She describes herself as “always the person to make people aware, whether it was the principal or my staff... and to think outside the box” of stereotype and status quo, and to look at the “big picture,” which to her is one that includes the perspective of the female. Clearly, Diane is willing to challenge unjust situations and practices, and to assume the risks that are an inevitable part of any challenge. She does not seem daunted by the “what-if’s” that precede one’s decision to act or not to act, the same ones that in the end restrain many women in similar situations. There is a calm assuredness about her, an assuredness about who she is, her capabilities and her competence.

Diane discussed one incident that occurred the year she was retiring. Diane was the head of the department of health and physical education and the only woman on staff. She had recommended, and the principal agreed, that since the department taught male and female students, filling her position with a woman was in the best interest of all parties involved. However, as April of the school year approached, the interviewing process had not begun and Diane wondered why the principal was waiting so late in the year to fill the position. She soon learned from another faculty member that the principal had already hired a male who could also coach athletics. Diane confronted the principal
who pretended surprise that she did not know he had hired the man. She reminded the principal of their agreement to hire a woman and the many reasons for doing so. He dismissed the matter by saying he could not be worried about gender when he had coaching positions to fill.

Diane learned further that the principal had hoped she would not discover what he had done until after the monthly meeting of the school board two days later, at which time the man’s hiring would be approved. Diane challenged the principal by contacting the superintendent and school board members by letter and telephone calls, making her argument about why a woman should fill the position. She was successful in her efforts, and the principal was required to fill the position with a female.

Michelle

Michelle is a white woman in her 50's who has worked in the field of education for about thirty years. Her experience spans the range of positions in education, having been a classroom teacher, administrator, coordinator for science curriculum, curriculum director, superintendent, and higher education professor. Presently, she is an educational researcher with a non-profit organization. Michelle says she thinks these varied experiences have given her an interesting perspective on change in education over the last three decades, affording her the cultivation of a comfortable familiarity with change.

Michelle is committed to acting in the long-term best interests of students. Gathering from the incidents about which Michelle spoke, she seems to rather naturally take stock of the status of a school or school system regarding its ability to meet the needs of students. When found lacking, changes ensue, either through altering existing situations, or creating an altogether new approach, intervention or program to deal with
unaddressed situations. She is also circumspect, considering not only factors at the local level influencing a specific situation in a particular school system, but also taking into account social, political, and economic factors at the state and national levels that influence educational policy and practice.

Michelle appears particularly politically savvy, able to size-up a situation quickly as well as realizing when to move ahead and push for a certain outcome and when to cut her losses. As puts it there is “just a good time to go away, everybody should do that once in their life.”

The incident Michelle discussed was one for which she forged ahead: the implementation of a childcare program on the campus of the high school. She and the school counselor particularly did a great deal of research about such programs, even visited existing programs in other school systems prior to proposing a program for their own system. While she secured support from the school board, she encountered vigorous opposition from the community and many female high school teachers. She had expected resistance, even some opposition, but she underestimated the emotional intensity she encountered, describing it as a “scarlet letter mentality” toward the girls. However, she added, the role of the boy in the pregnancy and his responsibility for the child was never raised by the opponents.

In the face of strong opposition, Michelle forged ahead and implemented the childcare program at the high school. Even after its opening, the criticism continued. Michelle continued in her position as superintendent for another year, then left the school system. Once she departed, the childcare program was discontinued.
Margaret

Margaret is a white woman in her fifties, who is married and has two adult daughters. She graduated from college with a degree in music education and taught piano privately for three years. At that time she said “I realized I didn’t want to spend my life doing that” and so became an elementary school teacher. Later she moved into administration as a principal, first at the elementary level for sixteen years, then to middle-school for four years, and most recently at the high-school level where she has been for the past three years. As a matter of fact, Margaret is the first woman in her county of residence to become a high-school principal. Having been a principal for twenty-five years she has spent her professional life “in a man’s world” and she says during those years there were many times she felt “minimized because I am a woman...it happens regularly.”

Margaret describes herself as “probably one of the most direct people [anyone] will have to deal with...I’m real forthright and was raised to believe I can do anything.” This is evident in how she lives her life. She has a reputation for being an activist in her community, known especially in educational circles as an outspoken, direct person who is clear on where she stands on issues and who is willing to voice that position without hesitation.” Her position on sexism in schools is very clear, saying “there are some things that are up for discussion and some things are not” and tolerating sexism is one that is not up for discussion. However, Margaret seems to balance her passion with reason, saying that while addressing a specific issue is imperative, trying to deal with situations in a way that addresses it adequately yet maintains positive working relationships if possible is perhaps equally important and integral to changing unacceptable behaviors. Furthermore,
she feels that as principal, it is her responsibility to provide the necessary leadership for dealing with the issue of sexism in schools by first making it an issue, and by modeling for others how to effectively confront the problem.

Margaret told of one incident that occurred during a conversation with a male coach at the high school where she is now principal. They were discussing the wrestling program when the coach referred to the female assistants as “mat maids.” Margaret had never heard the term before and asked the coach what it meant. The coach, completely oblivious to the sexist connotation, explained that the “mat maids” were girls who took care of the equipment, picked up the mats after the matches, and generally cleaning up the area. Margaret wasted no time informing him that it was fine to have female assistants, if the role was also open to males, and if the females wanted to do it, but they would not be referred to as “mat maids.” Margaret conceded that the coach did not consciously and intentionally demean the girls, but nonetheless she explained to him that the term was demeaning and unacceptable, and as such would no longer be used.

Stephanie

Stephanie is a single, white woman in her thirties who graduated from college with a degree in physical education. She taught for four years before going back to school to get a masters in guidance and counseling, saying “my heart had always been in counseling.” She graduated with her master’s in 1998. After working a while in counseling she says she realized there were clinical skills she was lacking, and so she left the school system to work for a private mental health provider and to pursue her licensure in professional counseling. At the time of this interview she was contemplating returning to school counseling.
Stephanie was very open about her life experiences, particularly about having been reared in a “religiously conservative, legalistic family” in which females were expected to grow up and get married, not go to college and travel the world as she has done. Needless to say, Stephanie did not fit the norm of her family or of the religious community in which she was raised. Consequently, Stephanie spent most of her life in opposition to the most influential forces in her life — family and religion. At an early age Stephanie noticed the difference between how girls and boys were treated, saying girls could not wear shorts or jeans, only dresses, and no make-up or jewelry. And, whereas boys could participate in sports, “it was absolutely forbidden for girls.” Recalling “family nights” at church she said “the guys could get out there [and play sports] because they could wear pants while the girls sat and watched.” This was particularly difficult for Stephanie because she was very athletic and outgoing. Furthermore, she knew no women who worked outside the home.

When she finished high-school she said “everybody just thought I would go from high-school to marriage,” but instead she announced she was going to college and ended a relationship with her boyfriend. Despite their differences, Stephanie says she and her family have maintained a good relationship, and for them, she has been the catalyst for change on many occasions. Her life experiences have made her particularly aware of and sensitive to how women and girls are treated differentially just because they are female. And, just as she advocated for her own rights and interests, Stephanie advocates for the rights of girls in school.

Stephanie recalled two incidents during her interview. The first incident occurred when she was a first year teacher. Having finally realized her dream of becoming a
physical education teacher she arrived at school wearing athletic attire and eager to begin the day. However, she was quickly told by another female physical education teacher that they, being female, were not allowed to wear pants or shorts in the school building. Rather, they were to keep a skirt with them and were to wear the skirt whenever they were not on the field or in gym class, whereas the male teachers could wear athletic attire, shorts or pants, with no restrictions.

Realizing this practice was discriminatory, Stephanie discussed the matter with the principal, a veteran of more than thirty years with that school system. He informed her that this was just “his rule” and that was the way it had always been and that is the way it would stay.

Stephanie discussed the matter with other teachers, most of whom readily agreed the practice was “a woman thing” and discriminatory, yet no one had ever challenged his behavior. At the time, Stephanie felt she had no power to influence a change, and as such, followed his “rule” until she took another job sometime later in a different system.

The second incident occurred when Stephanie was a counselor and involved a middle school girl, fourteen years old, who became pregnant. She recalled that the girl had been a good student and was well liked by many teachers and that she had a number of friends. When she became pregnant, however, all but a few of her peers and only a couple of teachers continued to befriend her.

Stephanie began counseling with her almost immediately and became a great source of support for her. She learned that the student had little support from her mother, who was absent from the home much of the time, and no support from her father who had long been absent from her life. A great deal of the time the girl lived with her
grandmother, who was quite frail. In essence, she was alone much of the time. Realizing she had very few resources, Stephanie, two teachers and a few friends of the girl proposed having a shower for her one day at school, but after school hours. She made the request to the principal who agreed it would be a generous gesture.

However, within a couple of days, the principal informed Stephanie that the shower could not be held on school grounds due to an onslaught of opposition from teachers who felt that doing so would be sending a message that to get pregnant at her age was acceptable. Stephanie explained the shower was not to celebrate the pregnancy, but to provide the girl with items necessary for her welfare and for the baby’s welfare. Nonetheless, the principal did not support Stephanie and would not allow the shower to be held at the school. Opponents acted in hostile, intimidating ways toward Stephanie, including threatening to write letters to the school board complaining of her actions. While their behavior was frightening to Stephanie, she also believed it was her role to protect the student and act on her behalf. As such, emotions and tensions remained strained for quite a long time. The student became increasingly distressed and eventually transferred to another school. Stephanie continued in her role as counselor and relationships between her and the opponents eventually eased.

In summary, ten women representing a wide range of ages and years of experience, and who filled various job roles all encountered sexist incidents in the context of elementary and secondary schools. A total of fifteen sexist incidents to which they were party, either as a target themselves or as one who acted on behalf of another woman or girl who was targeted, were presented.
CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS

*We may be able to use whatever it is we learn from being hurt, but can it be fixed? No. It cannot be fixed...we have to change our focus, we have to stop it from happening....the war against women is a real war— there is nothing abstract about it.*

*Andrea Dworkin in Life and Death*

This chapter discusses in detail real-life experiences of women educators in America’s schools as they challenge sexism in its many manifestations. The stories they tell bring alive just how long-lasting the hurt is, and how indeed the focus must shift to prevention, rather than remain on the management of, or reduction, in the number of violations against women and girls in schools. Some of the women discuss incidents that happened as long ago as twenty years, and they can still vividly recall tones of voice, facial expressions and the feeling in the pit of their stomachs. Other incidents recalled happened more recently, and of course recollections surrounding them were also vivid. But, recent or remote, the effects were the same. Can it be fixed? No, it cannot. But, the stories these women tell offer insight into how we can to stop it from happening.

The purpose of this study was to discover how women negotiate feminist interests in elementary and secondary schools. The heart of the information I sought and around which the interviews were conducted are reflected in three research questions:

1. What issues are raised by feminist educators?

2. What factors constrain and/or enable action?
3. What specific strategies are used in negotiation of feminist interests?

This chapter begins with discussion of findings for each research question. The chapter concludes with a summary of overall findings.

Issues Raised by Feminist Educators

The first step toward discovering how women negotiate feminist interests in schools was to identify sexist issues facing them in their day-to-day practice. I asked each participant to recall one or more incident(s) which they considered to be critical, either because upon acting things went particularly well or because things were particularly troublesome and did not turn out well. Participants discussed a total of fifteen incidents, all of which are accounted for in the following three categories: 1) sexual harassment, 2) battery and 3) sexual discrimination. The next section of this chapter presents the specific incidents discussed by participants according to the issue raised.

Sexual Harassment

For the purposes of this study the term sexual harassment is used to describe any unsolicited, unwelcome and nonreciprocal behavior of a sexual nature including, but not limited to, unwanted touching, verbal comments, sexual advances and gestures that provokes feelings of discomfort and uneasiness in the target. Sally and Beth tell stories of chronic sexual harassment of girls in middle school, while Kim and Carolyn recount their own experiences being the target of sexual harassment.

Sally prefaced her discussion of the incident with a description of the social climate of the schools saying “our girls took a lot of abuse from...males, verbal abuse, being told you’re stupid, you’re ugly, you’re worthless. They heard it a lot, constantly
undermining them.” And, she said, “the boys at that time were also becoming increasingly physically aggressive, in the hallways and outside the classroom setting...they were touching the girls more.” Because of the social condition and hostile climate in the school Sally lamented that she was not at all sure of how much of the rhetoric of possibility for girls, as she put it, “be a scientist, speak up and assert yourself” she discussed in the classroom actually made a difference in the lives of the girls.

Table 3

### Issues Raised by Feminist Educators

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Nonetheless, she was hopeful that the issue of sexual harassment could be addressed through the steering committee for school climate because, after all, that was its purpose: to allow issues that affect the lives of students to be brought to the table for discussion and resolution. Her hopes were short lived, however, because there failed to be the required majority of committee members in support of bringing the issue to the table. She explained there had to be three out of five committee members in agreement about what to bring up, and this issue “smacked of feminism to them and it seemed way too political.” So, Sally took up the issue herself, approaching the principal with a proposal to invite an expert on sexual harassment to come to the school to work with the faculty. The principal gave consent for the program, but in the end, did not cooperate with Sally on finalizing plans, and as such, was instrumental in the project’s failure.

Beth raised the issue of sexual harassment in regard to the behavior of a 7th grade female teacher, “a mean, big red-neck,” who was verbally abusive to both male and female students, but who specifically targeted girls, accusing them of dressing or behaving in ways that were sexually solicitous. Typically, the way she operated was to bring a girl out into the hallway and then berate her with an avalanche of accusatory remarks. Beth is quick to say that there are a number of girls who do indeed dress inappropriately for school, but the girls she was speaking of, those being abused by the teacher, were not dressed inappropriately. Rather, as she put it, “we have a lot of little girls that one day their clothes fit them and a few days later they have outgrown them and parents can’t go buy clothes every time they get tight.” But, she adds, “this teacher will just scream, ‘What do you want done by wearing this?! What are you asking for?!’” Many other times, Beth heard the teacher say things such as:
I brought you out here because I’ve noticed you need a bra, doesn’t your mother realize that you need to now wear a bra? Look at you...you’re sticking out of that shirt....are you starting your period or something? Hold your head up, look at me don’t you start crying, why are you crying?

and, Beth says, “you could just feel the air letting out of this little girl...it was just horrible.”

The strain in Beth’s voice communicated unmistakable distress at what she named as horror to which these girls were subjected, knowing that her classmates could hear everything the teacher was saying and when time for classes to change, everyone would be looking at her, knowing what was being said to her. Empathizing deeply, Beth says “you know how these little girls are, one day they are flat-chested and the next day there are these goofy-looking things sticking out that you don’t want anybody to notice. Then, there’s this teacher pointing it out!”

Carolyn was a high school counselor when she was sitting in the waiting room of the superintendents’ office, along with her secretary, for an appointment with the assistant superintendent. Returning from an outside appointment, the superintendent walks into the office and addresses her with “Oh, hello” and, turning to her secretary said “she and I were at a motel together last night.” What actually happened, Carolyn explained, was that they were both in attendance at an event to honor the school Star Student. She recalls “I could have just died.” This was only one of many encounters, as she put it, she had with him, “where he would say demeaning, hostile things.” She was not the only target, however, as he routinely made such comments to other women.
Kim was also the target of sexual harassment when, as a 21 year-old, first year teacher, she was propositioned for sex by a male teacher who had, as she put it, taken her under his wings and mentored her. She recounts “I was shocked and I was scared, it just completely took me off my foundation.” When she told him she was shocked and dismayed that he would even suggest it, “he just laughed and he assured me that I would come around.”

Battery

The term ‘battery’ is used here to distinguish behaviors that include making physical contact with a person from behaviors that do not. The issue of battery was raised by three participants. Sally and Jane raised the issue of sexual battery, and Carolyn raised the issue of physical battery.

The term sexual battery is used to mean behavior involving the touching of another person’s body in a sexual way. Sally was approached by the administration to serve as a member of an expulsion tribunal, which is much like jury service in that the members are required to render judgement of the case presented. The all-white tribunal panel was comprised of Sally, a female elementary school principal, and four males, all teachers or principals in the system. The superintendent was present but did not take an active role in the proceedings. The high school principal was, as she put it, “prosecuting the case, and he was real serious about it...he had a legal pad, pacing up and down, very hostile.” The incident involved a Black high-school girl who was accused of engaging in a “sexual encounter” with a Black male while at school, an offense warranting expulsion if found guilty. The girl’s parents were with her, but had no legal representation. Sally recounted the incident, saying:
the case was that a coach had walked into the locker room after hours and found this boy in the bathroom and a girl leaning against the wall with her underwear around her legs and her feet, sitting there, and they were supposed to be doing sexual activity.

Sally was perplexed by the situation because she knew the girl, having taught her in middle school, recalling that she was “a wonderful student, never had a bit of trouble from her ever, an A-B student.” As the case was discussed Sally learned that “basically, this kid had refused to let this girl break up with him and was stalking her on a regular basis.” The girl stated in the proceeding that he would follow her, watch who she talked to, and that her friends told her he was saying that she could not break up with him.

She was told, however, by the guardians of the tribunal rules, that she was not to consider these facts, only to determine whether the girl was indeed where she was said to be and in the condition described. The weight of the task hit Sally full force. Repercussions for the girl raced through Sally’s mind: “she was going to be a senior and she was going to be expelled for of the rest of the year, which means her college chances were just plummeting, and she was just beside herself.” There she was in the heat of a situation with little information, yet charged with making a judgment that would dramatically affect the life of this girl.

Jane also raised the issue of sexual battery, but which occurred at the elementary level, a school housing grades K-6 where she was principal. The incident involved sixth graders who were returning from physical education class and after which they have a few minutes to get their materials together before going to the next class. It was during
this unsupervised time that a group of boys enacted a plan to accost a girl as she passed by in the hall, force her into a vacant classroom and then feel her body. This had been going on for quite some time before Jane learned of it from a girl who came to her after becoming the victim of their abuse. The girl told Jane the boys grabbed her bookbag away from her and threw it into a vacant classroom where one or more boys waited, hidden from sight behind the open classroom door. When she went into the room to get her bookbag the boys closed the door, turned off the light, and “put their hands all over her body.” At other times, Jane learned, the boys would shove a girl into the room and do the same. In either scenario, the reality was that the girl was trapped in the room and could get out only when the boys decided to let her out. The girl then told Jane of four other girls who had also been assaulted who corroborated her account.

The issue of physical battery was raised by Carolyn who was the target in this incident which occurred in her office early in her career as a high school counselor. Physical battery is used to mean the unwelcome, unsolicited touching of a person’s body in a forceful manner. Carolyn and two other women and a male assistant principal were in her office talking informally about matters related to school when, she says, the assistant principal, who was very much the good ol’ boy decided to pick me up and throw me over his shoulder... it was a very degrading kind of act, a very powerful act on his part...in his value system women were toys, frivolous...he was just having fun, with my fanny up in the air.

Carolyn informed the principal about the incident who later told her he reprimanded the man and she was assured “something went in his file,” although she
never saw any proof that this was actually done. From then on, however, the assistant principal was hostile toward her. The effect on her, she says “was to make me back off and be less friendly to males in the work setting...I thought they could be friends, but I decided I couldn’t do that.”

**Sexual Discrimination**

Sexual discrimination is used to mean the act, practice or an instance of discriminating categorically rather than individually. Participants raised the issue of sexual discrimination more than any other. Five incidents are discrimination against students, one is against a female principal, one is against a female teacher, and the remaining incident involves a discriminatory hiring practice.

Beth brought an incident of discrimination which occurred in the middle school where she taught. She recounts “I had this wonderful little girl, she really was a little girl in seventh grade, she wore little dresses and looked like a nine year-old girl...she started going through a major slump.” Of course, Beth asked her what was wrong, but the girl did not tell her. She learned of the problem from another student who told her that the girl’s father was having sex with her. Thinking something had to be done immediately, she considered her options and decided to go to the principal. Much to Beth’s dismay, the principal, who was a woman, showed little alarm or concern, saying “well, that’s the so-and-so family, meaning ‘what do you expect?’” Beth explained that this little girl and her family lived in “truly shacks” near the community grocery store. She had two older sisters and it was well known that men who delivered goods to the grocery store had sex with the older girls. So, she said, the principal took the position that they are just that way, and left it at that. Throughout the ordeal the little girl, as Beth called her, continued
to come to school where some of the teachers “would not give her the time of day because she was pregnant, and were mean to her; she suffered so greatly.”

Jane also raises the issue of sexual discrimination against a student. In this scenario, a middle-school girl reported to Jane, a school counselor at the time, that on the desk in which she sat for a particular class had been written profane and sexually oriented comments. The student was offended by this and wanted something done about it. Jane examined the desk and agreed that the comments written on the desk were “vile” and according to her “obviously written by a male.” Identifying the author of the comments would be easy since students are assigned seats, Jane believed the student should be held accountable for his actions. She then approached the assistant principal, a male, who was the appropriate person to deal with disciplinary matters. When she told him of the situation, “he went down there and looked at it and he laughed. He said well, you know how boys are.” Jane said he then proceeded to clean the desk off himself and never said a word to the boy, the message to the boy being “it’s OK, you can do things like this and someone will come along and clean it up for you” and to the girl that what she says is not important.

Michelle was a superintendent of a conservative, suburban school system where there was a high teen-age pregnancy rate. Realizing that most of the girls who had a child did not return to school and well aware of the link between single parenthood and poverty, she proposed the implementation of a child-care program so girls could continue their education. She recounts that while the school board was supportive, there was an outcry against it from the community. She was alarmed to learn that the community opinion was that “the girls had been promiscuous and that was why they were
in trouble, that they sort of deserved what happened to them, and we shouldn’t be rewarding them by allowing them to have childcare and come back to school.” There was “an element of outright vindictiveness, to making sure that the females acted the way they were supposed to act, according to them.”

Margaret raised the issue of sexual discrimination during her first year as a high-school principal when the coach of the boys’ wrestling team referred to girls who assisted with the program as “mat maids.” It appears, she explained, that in the world of high-school wrestling, assistants frequently are female and commonly referred to as “mat maids.” Never having heard this term before, Margaret asked the coach what he meant by “mat maids.” The coach replied, “Oh, we have girls who take care of the equipment and do whatever needs to be done in terms of providing assistance,” never realizing the discriminatory connotation. She persisted and asked him if there was a rule or other mandate that the assistants be female, and he said “no, its just what they are.” Margaret responded,

Well, then, I need to say to you we won’t have that at [this school]. First of all, if you need wrestling assistants, then get wrestling assistants, and we won’t call them “mat maids.” If they are girls, fine...if they are boys, fine...I don’t care as long as they are selected on their desire to do this job.

The coach looked at her as if to ask how they could be called something else, since this is the standard label for them. Margaret conceded that the coach did not consciously intend to demean women, but nonetheless the term was demeaning and she made it very clear that its use was unacceptable.
Stephanie recounts two incidents of sexual discrimination, one directed at her and the other against a student. The first incident occurred in the fourth year of her teaching career, but her first position as a physical education teacher. She was very excited about this position because for her, it represented the fulfillment of two goals. First, she was finally in the field of study she loved and second, for the first time she felt “grown-up” having come into her own after breaking away from the constraints and impositions of her early years. She recalled arriving at the school the first day with her own shorts and t-shirt “excited about starting my P.E. career.”

Her excitement soon turned to confusion and disbelief, however, when another physical education teacher told her “we can’t wear shorts in the building, we have to wear skirts in the building.” Stephanie kept hoping she was kidding, but “she had her little skirt wrapped up in her arms.” The teacher explained that they could take their skirts off and put on shorts when they went out to the field, but when returning to the building, they had to put the skirts back on. Stephanie later learned this “rule” was due to the principal’s religious views and worse, that the religion was the same as the one in which she grew up. She could hardly believe her ears, after all she said, “I could not put that in a school, separation of church and state...” and having thought she had finally escaped such discriminatory prescriptions in her personal life only to find it in the workplace was unthinkable. “It was obvious,” Stephanie said, “that it was a female issue...the guys didn’t have to change their clothes, they could wear shorts and nothing was said.” This was not just Stephanie’s assessment of the situation. The women faculty discussed among themselves that this was a “female thing,” saying “you know, if you
were a guy you wouldn’t have to do this.” Furthermore, when female students wore shorts to school “it was a big deal, but you never heard it mentioned to the guys.”

After learning that the men did not have to change their clothes as did the women, Stephanie decided to talk with the principal about the issue, but to no avail. He told her that this was “just one of his rules he had always had, and that was just how it would be.” She had hoped he would see how absurd the situation was, but she said, “it was just a huge let down.” There were days that Stephanie wanted to approach him again, but she never did.

The second sexual discrimination incident discussed by Stephanie occurred in a different school, a small rural middle school of about two hundred and seventy students, where she was the counselor. The incident surrounded a 14 year-old student who had gotten pregnant. She was a bright girl and a straight “A” student, but after learning she was pregnant, her grades began to fall and her self-esteem plummeted. After talking with her on several occasions, Stephanie learned that she was basically on her own. Although she lived with her mother, she “petty much worked all the time, and the father was away” so the girl was left alone a great deal. Furthermore, the young man with whom she had sex had disappeared. Stephanie spent a lot of time working with the girl, making sure she had necessary information and helping her plan how to deal with the situation, especially encouraging her not to quit school.

Several students approached Stephanie with the idea of having a shower for her, and while she thought it was a good idea, she discussed it with another teacher, who did agree with her. As she said:
We thought this could be a point in her life where it makes or breaks her and we wanted to help her through it...not condoning it, but everybody makes mistakes and we just wanted to be there to support her.

Stephanie then approached the principal with the idea and his first reaction was agreeable, calling her gesture “a sweet idea.” However, his sentiment changed after talking with other teachers in the school, whose opinion was that “we’re not supporting somebody who’s done that, we’re just not.” So, his final answer was an “automatic no.” When pressed for an explanation about his change of positions, he explained that it was “upsetting to the community and that it would appear as though the school was condoning her behavior.”

Susan was the target of sexual discrimination when, as principal of a middle-school, she questioned the actions of the school board and superintendent surrounding their violation of a policy regarding disciplinary actions taken against a student at her school. Having thoroughly investigated the facts surrounding the students’ infraction, Susan followed established policy and procedure in its resolution, including a tribunal hearing resulting in standard recommendation of disciplinary action for the offense which was suspension. The student’s family was very powerful in the community and immediately appealed the decision. Unknown to Susan until after the fact, the school board members and the superintendent subsequently held closed meetings and decided to allow the student to return to school. From that point on Susan reports, many other clandestine meetings were held from which she was excluded.

As the situation progressed, it became clear to Susan that the move was on to oust her from her position, and that the move was led by the superintendent. Too late, she
recalled a warning given her about the man from a colleague who knew him: “you need to be careful because you are strong and he doesn’t like that...I’m telling you he is a good old boy and he doesn’t like women like you.” Susan dismissed the warning at the time, but in the end her colleague was right. Susan said she read the situation as “he had to take care of me in negative sense...squish me, bring me down, put me down to my face...from that point it turned into a war, that’s what it felt like.”

Diane was retiring from her position as a teacher of health and physical education and as head of her department. Since she was the only female in the department, she and the principal had agreed it was in the best interest of the faculty and students to fill her position with a female. However, Diane learned from a colleague that the principal had reneged on his agreement, and hired a man who could also coach football. Diane confronted the principal but to no avail. She felt so strongly that he was not acting in the best interests of students or faculty by his discriminatory hiring of a male that she challenged the issue by taking her complaint to the school board.

Factors that Enable or Constrain Educators’ Action

The next section of this chapter presents findings for the second research question, which asked the participants to identify what enabled or constrained their actions when confronting sexist incidents in schools. Analysis of their responses revealed three factors which influenced their action: 1) Ideological Beliefs; 2) Politics of Patriarchy; and 3) Personal Characteristics. The following sections present a discussion of each category and the themes embedded within them. In this discussion, the term “school(s)” is used to refer to the school system, the power structure, which operates to maintain the sexist status quo, and includes individuals who hold positions of power
within the structure. Table 4 presents a summary of factors that enabled and/or constrained action.

**Ideological Beliefs**

Results revealed stereotypical beliefs and attitudes about gender and gender roles permeated the school environment and functioned to maintain the sexist status-quo.

Table 4

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Analysis of the critical incidents discussed by participants revealed nothing ideological operating within the culture of the school that enabled the negotiation of feminist interests. However, results revealed three main ideological beliefs which inhibit action or block action altogether when negotiating feminist interests in schools: 1) gender is a “non-issue,” 2) “it’s not the schools responsibility,” 3) a “blame the victim” mentality. Eight of the ten participants discussed one or more ideological beliefs.
Gender is a “Non-Issue”

The first of these, gender is a “non-issue,” was discussed by five of the ten participants either in terms of failure of the school to even acknowledge gender issues, or when made an issue, to ignore, trivialize, or dismiss it. Jane’s recollection illustrates the pervasiveness of the belief. Reflecting on her days as a teacher and school counselor, she talked about how sexism was never brought up among faculty, even though they are aware of incidents that happened in school everyday, “the general things that happened in the halls, guys putting their hands all over girls,” as well as verbal and non-verbal behaviors of a sexual nature directed at them. As she said,

Faculty never talked about that, never dealt with it... there was never any general discussion about these kinds of things going on...its always easier to ignore the problem than deal with it.

Gender is not an issue. There is a subtle acquiescence that this is just the way it is, get over it; a subtle acquiescence that women really are property that can be handled however you please. And it is very subtle, nobody would ever admit that.

It is the proverbial “elephant in the living room” that everyone knows is there, but no one talks about and is, therefore, probably the most formidable block to the negotiation of feminist interests. As Jane succinctly put it, “It’s hard trying to get people to look at an issue seriously that, right now, isn’t an issue [to them].” Just because no one talks about the elephant does not mean the weight and magnitude of its influence is not felt, however. The girls at Jane’s school certainly felt it. When she was a school counselor girls would come to her with complaints of sexual harassment, whereas they
would not go to the administrators, having rightly figured out they were on their own when dealing with sexism at school. This only makes sense, she says because “if you have a system that’s not going to give credence to it, why would you?”

When one courageous soul breaks silence and dares to say, “look everybody, there’s an elephant in the living room!” a variety of reactions are provoked. For example, very worried about the frequency of sexual harassment in her school, Sally approached her principal with a proposal for faculty training, having already contacted a noted speaker on the topic who agreed to come pro-bono. She believed she would get a favorable response from him because they had a good working relationship and she was perceived as being truly invested in the welfare of the school and the students. When pressed for a commitment for approval, the principal told her to go ahead with plans to have the speaker come, but each time she proposed specifics about a date and time, the principal always found excuses to postpone the decision. As Sally said, the more persistent we were, the more excuses he found until the year ran out...the things we thought were important that were affecting our students directly were being put on the back burner; it was just was a non-issue...just one more thing to tack on.

In this case, however, the issue of sexual harassment of students was never tacked on to anything. The school year ended and that was that. Sally’s efforts were effectively foiled by the principal’s evasion of the issue.

Diane’s encounter with the belief that gender is not an issue was more direct, coming in the form of dismissal of both herself as a person and the issues she raised, when she confronted her principal for reneging on his agreement to hire a female in her
position once she retired. As the school year progressed, Diane became a bit curious about why the interview process had not begun, but she dismissed the question with various rationales, certain that the process would begin soon. When this was not forthcoming and it was already April of the school year, Diane asked the principal directly when they would begin interviewing for her position. Pretending surprise that she did not know, she was told a male had already been hired to fill the position. Later that day Diane told him she was very disturbed about the situation, to which he responded, “Well, you know I had to have some football coaches” as if this were a self-explanatory, even obvious reason for his action. Diane held her ground, redirecting his attention to the needs of her department:

Really, that’s not the point...we already have five men in the department, we serve co-ed classes. ROTC is also housed in that facility and there are three men upstairs, and you’re telling me that you are going to have nine men in that facility in a co-ed situation with no female at all?!

The principal matter-of-factly answered, “Well, I can’t worry about gender, I’ve got coaching positions to fill.” Astonished but undaunted, Diane reiterated the many potential problems with the situation, saying it was certainly not in the best interest of female students, but neither was it in the best interest of the male faculty members, pointing out that he, however, did not have to worry about that for himself since he had two female secretaries in his office. “Apparently,” she said “I hit a nerve and the conversation was over.” She and the issue she raised were summarily dismissed.
Lastly, that the systemic belief that gender is a non-issue serves to block the negotiation of feminist interests is seen in the incident of the sexual harassment of Carolyn by the superintendent of her school system. After considering her options, she decided that to bring a complaint of sexual harassment against the superintendent before the school board would be fruitless because “I knew they would say ‘that’s your problem, he was just joking’...and that they would do nothing about his employment...they would just ride it out for the sake of tranquility and the status quo.” The three incidents presented illustrate how attempts to negotiate feminist interests were effectively thwarted by the systemic belief that gender is not an issue, it simply does not matter.

It Isn’t the Schools’ Responsibility

Four of ten participants reported that negotiation of feminist interests was blocked by the school’s rejection of responsibility for dealing with the problem of sexism at school. Sally and Beth were blocked in their efforts to negotiate on behalf of individual students, and teachers vigorously tried to block the implementation of a childcare program for high school girls proposed by Michelle.

Sally recounted that during and after the tribunal of the high school girl accused of engaging in sexual activity at school, the principal, and then later the superintendent, both defaulted to this position. The first time was during the tribunal when the student, upset and crying, turned to the principal/prosecutor and said “you know, Mr. [Principal] I’ve gone to your office and told you that he wouldn’t leave me alone, and he would never let me break up with him.” Seizing the opportunity, Sally asked the girl what happened when she appealed to him for help. The girl answered “Nothing... he said this
is something that you have to deal with, with your family, this isn’t the school’s responsibility.”

On her last day as a teacher for that school system, Sally went to the superintendent about the case because, “it had just been eating and eating at me.” She told him that the girl had been certainly sexually harassed and probably battered by the boy, and that in her opinion, the girl felt so victimized and traumatized that she could not begin to explain the situation to the tribunal members. He coldly responded “it’s not the school’s responsibility, the community has to do something.” Sally protested that in this particular case she did not think these people knew how to “do something” about it or necessarily that they should do something about it. Nor did they, as she put it, “have the sophistication or the knowledge base, they don’t have any resources for figuring it out.” Unmoved, she said, “he just thanked me for my time.”

Similarly, Beth’s efforts to advocate on behalf of the girl impregnated by her father were met with complacency and blocked by the denial that the school had any responsibility to intervene. Her concern was dismissed with the rationale that if the school tried to “end all the bad behaviors at all those houses that would be a full time job, it’s not our job to go in and fix it.”

Even as superintendent, however, Michelle’s efforts were opposed with the same rationale. The proposal for the child-care program for high school girls was met with vigorous opposition, Michelle said “especially [by] the female teachers, they were just totally opposed to it, probably some of the most political opposition came from the teachers themselves.” She encountered what she called a “scarlet letter” mentality, with the provision of a child-care services viewed as “a reward for someone who had done
something they perceived as being wrong” and certainly not something the school was responsible for providing. Although the program was implemented, the sentiment about it and opposition to it did not change, and the perception that the girls were given a showcase for their babies never waned. When Michelle left her position as superintendent, the program was dissolved.

The belief that “it isn’t the schools’ responsibility” to deal with sexism is the equivalent of having the door slammed in your face. There is a startling finality to it. Then comes the inevitable demoralizing effect, granted perhaps to varying degrees, but nonetheless present and an influence to be dealt with if negotiation continues. With authoritative shut-down, the stakes have, in effect, been raised.

**Blame the Victim**

The third ideological belief, that the victim is the responsible party, emerged in three forms: 1) as a sentiment expressed directly toward the victim, that is, holding her responsible for the incident, 2) the victims’ fear of being blamed if she reported the incident, and 3) as an attitude one should anticipate when negotiating feminist interests in schools. Holding the girl responsible for the incident in which she was the victim is illustrated by comments of Sally, Michelle and Stephanie.

When Sally talked about the tribunal she recalled the superintendent saying “if she [the girl] really didn’t want to do it, then she shouldn’t have been there,” naming the sentiment “the idea of blaming the victim.” One member of the tribunal panel commented that if the girl had a problem she should have said something, clearly placing the burden on the girl. But, Sally argued, she did say something and nothing was done about it. “And they said, ‘well, you should have said it louder, and you should have said
it to more people.’ Well...[I say] she’s a child.” Sally went away from that incident and from the school system failing to break through the deeply entrenched belief that the girl was ultimately responsible not only for her own behavior, but for the behavior of the young man as well.

Opposition to the implementation of the childcare program at a high school also illustrates how girls are blamed. While it can be asserted that not every high school girl who had a baby was necessarily a victim, it can be just as easily and more vigorously argued that many of them were indeed victims. The reaction of teachers, community and clergy reflects the “blame the victim” mentality in their assessment that the girls had gotten themselves into trouble and now they would have to live with it; they had done something wrong and they should be punished for it. “The more interesting thing,” Michelle said, “is that there was never any discussion about the male responsibility in the situation. It was a harsh reality that women were treated differently than men in the reality of unwed parenthood.”

Strikingly similar to the previous scenario, Stephanie encountered a bitter reaction from a group of teachers opposed to a shower to be given at the school for the pregnant middle school girl. She was told to do so was sending a message to other teenagers that it was alright to be promiscuous. As Stephanie said, “she was being labeled for something they saw she did wrong; they weren’t even looking at her anymore, this smart and outgoing child.” To her dismay she never heard any animosity toward the young man who fathered the child, “where he was, was he going to support her; none of that came up about him...it was all about what she did...she was singled out.” Tension surrounding this incident grew more intense and some of the teachers threatened to write
letters to the school board and behaved in other ways intimidating to Stephanie. At the same time the girl was feeling even more the spectacle and grew increasingly uncomfortable at school. Consequently, Stephanie and her supporters held the shower at the home of another student and soon thereafter, the girl transferred to another school.

Another expression of “blame the victim” emerged as fear of being blamed when Kim recalled her reaction to the proposition for sex by her male colleague. Kim talked about being flooded with emotions (mostly fear) and of not really knowing what to do first, who to tell if anyone, realizing that she would likely be blamed in the scenario. She told no one at first, not even her women friends with whom she car-pooled every day, keeping everything inside and to herself, something uncharacteristic of her. As she put it, “the real scary part was to go home and tell my husband, I was afraid that he would somehow blame me.” And when thinking about telling her principal, who was a male and a friend of the man who propositioned her, she said “what did occur to me was that he would take Harry’s side and somehow blame me for it.” Her instincts were right in the latter concern, because when she told the principal he said “that somehow I should have gotten the message, and that I shouldn’t be so shocked.” In this one comment Kim was blamed both for her failure to anticipate the proposition and for the proposition itself. In other words, not only should she have seen it coming, she should have been able to avoid it altogether.

The “blame the victim” theme was described in yet another form by Jane who recognized it as a force to be reckoned with when dealing with the incident of sexual battery. As she said:
I don’t know why it is, but the first thing people want to say is “Well, what did those girls do to make this happen”...it always amazed me that the first person that they wanted to look at was the female, what had she done to set this up, had she provoked it in some fashion.

By her choice of actions, however, Jane turned the attention to the behavior of the boys, where it rightfully should have been, and hopefully provoked the question, “why did the boys batter the girls?”

**Politics of Patriarchy**

Analysis of the women’s critical incidents revealed that politics matter in the negotiation of feminist interests in schools. Two key political realities that influenced the negotiation of feminist interests emerged from analysis of the data were 1) the patriarchal social organization of schools and 2) control of the negotiation process by individuals in positions of power.

**Patriarchal Social Organization of Schools**

Schools are patriarchal institutions within which females occupy a status subordinate to males. Practically speaking, this means that the male and his experience is privileged by the system while the female and her experience is ignored, trivialized or dismissed. Thus, women acting on behalf of women and girls are doubly handicapped, first by being female themselves and, second, by raising issues pertaining to the interests of females to a power structure that assigns little or no value to either.

Patriarchy permeates the school culture creating conditions hostile to the interests of women and girls. The three ideological beliefs identified in the previous section are all
expressions of the patriarchal ideology underlying the culture of schools and illustrate
some of the socio/political conditions women face in the negotiation of feminist interests.

Other messages are more subtle, even unspoken, prohibitions against challenging the
status quo. These conditions in which women educators work directly influence the
degree to which they act and many times determines whether or not they act at all. For
example, Beth talked about her uneasy awareness of the school atmosphere saying:

There are peculiar, hard to explain feelings in a school that I don’t
think exist in other work places...I knew that somehow my school
had put these real tight boundaries around me as to what I was
allowed to do— I never was really clear as to what they were, I
just always sensed them. So whenever I spoke up I always felt
like I was going outside those boundaries and I was going to be
punished for it.

Beth also talked about the stress she felt being the “lone voice” who brought up
the problem of sexism saying she was made fun of and perceived as overreacting and
trying to stir up trouble. In faculty meetings, for example, when she brought up the issue
of sexism she said faculty would roll their eyes as if to say “...yeah, just teach and shut-
up about all these social [problems].” The stress in her voice could be heard when she added:

You just don’t know how much longer you can go to work
feeling that no one supports you. Instead of going to bed
at night knowing that I had helped that girl, I went to sleep
wondering if I was going to have a job the next day.
Jane explained that constraint is also felt also because schools do not want things, as she put it “handled in the way they ought to be handled” because doing so would call attention to the school and signal there might be something amiss. She says “boards and superintendents don’t want the outside to know that schools have problems...they want it to look like a placid little place where everybody is settled in doing their multiplication tables.” This is hardly a political climate receptive to activism. Furthermore, she adds, although she was in the position of principal, she still felt the stress of potential backlash from adversaries, whom she identified as parents, teachers, all the way to the superintendent and school board. She spoke particularly of those in power positions over her and of the ever present uncertainty of their support, saying,

when you make a decision at the local [school] level, you can never be absolutely sure that your superintendent or board will back you up...you never know who’s jerking their chain...you never know where they are with their own agenda.

The uncertainty of support from colleagues or supervisors, intimidation, aggression, and the personal vulnerability arising from of these (all basically safety issues) are symptomatic of the patriarchal social structure of schools. The descriptions of Jane, Beth, and Susan help us to understand these conditions of the workplace, the political climate, in which women attempt to negotiate feminist interests and the constraining effect exerted on their behavior.

**Political Process**

Five of the ten participants discussed the second political influence on negotiation of feminist interests: the breakdown of the negotiation process once the issue was
brought to the table, disabling their efforts to see the issue through to its best end. Most often the breakdown was due to sabotage of the process by those in power positions, the principal, superintendent and the school board in collusion, through such practices as withholding information, denying open discussion or deliberation, controlling the outcome by prescribing limited options or abandoning established school policy and/or procedure altogether. In each of the following three scenarios a male occupied the position of power.

In her role as a tribunal member, Sally’s actions were constrained by the prescription of options, the withholding of information and the denial of the opportunity for open discussion and deliberation. To further contaminate the situation, the principal to whom the girl went for help prior to the incident was the “prosecutor” of the case. Needless to say, he had interests at stake in the outcome. As it was, Sally found herself being expected to render a decision that would have lasting effects on the life of a young girl, yet not given all the information necessary to evaluate the situation fairly, justly, and denied the right to ask for it. There was no way for her to find more about circumstances surrounding the incident, nor was she allowed to discuss with other panel members circumstances leading up to the incident, or the role the school personnel in protecting the girl and in possibly preventing the incident.

Rather, the tribunal members were allowed to consider only whether or not the girl was indeed in the locker room with her underwear down around her feet, and whether or not she had engaged in some type of sexual activity. Sally recalls “we were told this is what we are trying her on, and they did not give us a chance to deliberate.” She projected, however, that if they had been allowed to “go off into a room somewhere
and sit and talk for a while” the outcome would have been more just. Instead, Sally said, “it was just so unhealthy and non-productive.”

In Diane’s case, the principal withheld the information that he had hired someone to fill her position in hopes she would not learn of it until after the board had approved the position. As she said,

It was very obvious that they were trying to keep it away from me because they knew I would pursue it...and so if they could just get it past the board meeting without my knowing, then nothing could be done about it. So they were very hush, hush about it.

Although finding out only two days before the board meeting what the principal had done did not stop Diane from acting, the withholding of information was effective, placing her at a disadvantage due to limited time to react.

Susan found herself in a similar situation with limited time to act to protect herself from discriminatory behavior of her superintendent. The appeal of a decision to suspend a student is a process that normally takes weeks to complete, but in this incident, the process occurred over a period of five days. The superintendent, along with the school board in collusion with the family of the girl who had been suspended and, as Susan put it “a few other sheep,” held closed meetings to marshal support against Susan, withheld and distorted information about her personally as well as about suspension itself, and altogether abandoned school policy and procedures in his effort to advance his own agenda. While Susan had a great deal of support from a number of parents and some
faculty members, it was unequal to the task of successfully negating the superintendent’s tactics, aided by “snipers in the school,” as Susan called them.

**Personal Characteristics**

Analysis of the critical incidents revealed three personal characteristics that influenced the negotiation of feminist interests: 1) a moral imperative to act, 2) political awareness, and 3) personal credibility.

**Moral Imperative**

Every participant spoke in some fashion about being driven to act by a moral imperative, a belief that they had to act in a given situation regardless of risk or cost, they simply could not let the situation go and do nothing about it. The following comments made by Jane, Carolyn, Diane, Stephanie and Margaret are characteristic and therefore representative of the moral imperative felt by all participants.

Moral imperative is perhaps most clearly and emphatically communicated in Jane’s words: “The point to me was that I had a group of people to protect and I was going to do it one way or the other.” Expounding further, Jane talked about having done “what I should have done” in dealing with the very serious problem of the sexual battery of girls. After all, she said, “it’s more than being tardy to class and chewing gum and throwing paper airplanes; this was a serious offense and I’m going to deal with it seriously.” Jane felt strongly that she should validate the girls for reporting the incident and she wanted to send a strong message that boys cannot batter girls in school with impunity, that there would most assuredly be serious consequences. Carolyn’s motive was equally clear when she reported to her principal being physically battered by the
assistant principal. When asked what went through her mind in deciding to confront the problem she said:

I felt that there was just no choice, for the sake of other women who had to deal with him. They shouldn’t have to put up with that...It was the right thing to do, it was the moral thing to do, for the big picture. I didn’t even hesitate.

When Diane learned that her principal’s discriminatory hiring of yet another male to an existing all-male department she could think of nothing else but to make sure this did not happen. She became focused only on doing something to stop it. As she said, I went and talked to a colleague of mine and said this cannot happen, so I’m going to do what I have to do... I was just trying to do what was right...I was on a mission and I’m going to do what I can.

Similarly, Stephanie spoke of a having a “mission” when discussing the discrimination against the pregnant middle-school girl, saying It was my job to be the advocate for the child and that is what I’m always going to do, and they [the teachers] knew that...I told them I am here to support her. I knew my heart, and I knew what I was about and what my mission was.

Lastly, Margaret said that in her role as a principal for twenty-five years there have been, as she put it “things I could let go, and there are things that I can’t let go,” and for her sexism is something she cannot “let go” or tolerate, because to do so would be a compromise of her values. As an educator she says, one has to make choices from an ethical center, calling her motive for acting “a real ethical value.”
The moral imperative to act was found to be the most powerful enabler of action for women in the negotiation of feminist interests, transcending the enemy in any guise it appeared, their own psychological and emotional discomfort, and even fear, in their respective pursuits of social justice. None of the participants questioned whether or not to act; for them it was simply the right thing to do, not only for themselves, but for the welfare of other women or girls as well.

**Political Awareness**

The second personal characteristic exerting influence on the negotiation of feminist interests was that of political awareness. Political awareness is first of all, being cognizant of the fact that politics matter, to realize that we do not live on a neutral stage, but rather in a world of conflicting, and therefore competing, interests and values amid asymmetrical power relations. Political awareness involves the ability to assess a situation within its context, that is, to “read” a situation or “size it up” relative to who the stakeholders are, what interests are at stake, the risks involved, and to calculate your opponent’s capacity to act (Cervero & Wilson, 1996).

Almost always one’s level of political awareness will determine the degree of success or failure and as such, potentially functions as enabler or constraint in the negotiation of feminist interests. The more politically aware one is, the more likely she will be successful while the less politically aware will likely fail. Both scenarios were found in this study, although of the ten participants, only two, Jane and Michelle, exhibited a level of political awareness that enabled them to engage the negotiation process and see it through to a satisfying conclusion. Of the remaining eight, six fell short of their aim, unsuspecting and caught off guard or lacking essential knowledge and skills.
Michelle’s implementation of a childcare program for high school girls illustrates political astuteness in several ways. First, Michelle took into consideration that the school was located in what she described as “a very conservative community...a somewhat ‘white flight’ community” intolerant of anyone who is different the community norm, and pregnant high-school girls certainly were not the “norm.” Second, Michelle took into consideration the conservative national political climate of 1990's, broadly speaking, as well as the conservative educational policy looming large at both the national and state levels. Michelle explained “you have to put this into perspective...we were dealing with a lot of the radical rights problems...a lot of things were going on in the country and in the community,” which she knew would influence the reception of the proposed program. Having read the political context and gauged the political climate as very conservative, she anticipated opposition to the childcare program, but she admits, she underestimated the emotional intensity arising on moral and religious grounds.

Political awareness is again exhibited in Michelle’s realization that she would need the support of the school board and community, as she said “sustainability of innovation is quite difficult unless there is a broad based support system for it.” Knowing the nature of her opposition she realized the entities from whom she needed support would not necessarily care about the girls and how the program would benefit them individually, or their children for that matter. As a professional man in the community said to her “Now why are you worried about those students? Students like my children are the ones that are going to be running this world.” Rather than debate the issue, Michelle linked rationale for the program to what they did care about — the high school
dropout rate which made the school “look bad” and the economic welfare of the county. By doing so, she gave the school board and community groups reasons to support the program independent from any benefits that might accrue to the girls personally. In effect, she gave to them a way of saying to anyone who might challenge their support “yes, but...we support the program for these reasons, not to help the girls.” To further persuade the school board and community Michelle said:

we did a lot of up-front work with the board and specific organizations and community groups that were supportive of something innovative... so it wasn’t like we dumped it in everybody’s lap...there were some preliminary political connections that were made.

Michelle’s political astuteness was demonstrated further in her recognition and acceptance of the fact that she would not be able to convince her opponents of the value of the program and in her skill with managing the emotional reaction of her opponents. As she said “I wasn’t going to change their minds and they weren’t going to change mine,” having learned that “arguing with people wasn’t the answer.” Instead, she put her energy into gaining support from as many sources as possible and kept “repeating the focus of why we were doing it and the message of why it was important.” Granted, the power ascribed by her position as superintendent enabled her efforts, but a without knowledge and skill, positional power is limited.

In the second scenario, political awareness is first exhibited in Jane’s reaction to the sexual battery offense as a criminal act and therefore a legal violation, enabling her to treat the incident with the seriousness it deserved. Jane acted swiftly and surely, knowing she had a legal right, as well as the responsibility to do so. Political awareness is
exhibited again in Jane’s decision to have the school’s teacher of the Drug Awareness Resistance Education (D.A.R.E) program contact the police. She did so knowing “she would probably be able to get something done immediately, before I could. So when she called and said I have a serious issue here, nobody said I’ll see you after lunch.” And, she added, she felt the D.A.R.E. officer would “add credence to it, to tell you the truth,” intimating the frequency at which crimes against girls and women are not taken seriously.

A third demonstration of political awareness is seen in Jane’s realization that she did not have to inform parents of the incident before she took action, since the incident was a legal violation, not just the breaking of a school rule or policy. Waiting to contact parents after the police arrived removed a potentially major impediment to her effectiveness and provided protection from parental retaliation. As she explained:

So many times, before you can do anything you have to have parents involved...but this was not a situation where I felt like I needed to call in six parents and have them screaming and yelling and upsetting the school...I was able to go ahead and call the police so that was my damage control. There are only so many threats they are going to make towards you with the police standing there.

Jane recalls that she could have handled the situation with less seriousness, and that the uproar from it would have been less, as well as easier on her emotionally. However, once again demonstrating political astuteness, she seized the opportunity to advance feminist interests by sending the message loudly and clearly that such outrageous behavior would not be tolerated, explaining:
When they see their peers put in a police car and taken
from the school, you don’t have to say anything else...you don’t
have to get on the intercom, you don’t have to say a word...
they got it.

Michelle and Jane were knowledgeable and informed, “sized up” the situation
accurately, anticipated and identified the opposition and responded accordingly to protect
and advance feminist interests. On the other hand, Susan and Kim were both blindsided
due to lack of political awareness, of failure to realize that politics matter.

Susan sums up her experience of falling prey to lack of political awareness as
being “like a Semi that you didn’t know was coming at you and just flattened you in a
moment.” Shocked by the aggression against her and feeling victimized she scrambled to
make sense of the reality that her world was falling apart around her. As she said “I just
couldn’t believe this was happening.” After all, she was doing a good job, she followed
school policy and procedure, and played by the rules. Nonetheless, political naivete’
took her down.

Susan’s lack of political awareness was first seen in the dismissal of her
colleagues’ warning to be on guard with the superintendent, because, as she put it “he
doesn’t like women like you,” a decision Susan later regretted. Similarly, although
cognizant of personal and professional interconnections among her opponents, she failed
to recognize how she could be harmed by these alliances. “It was trouble,” Susan said,
“and I didn’t know that.” She went on to say that she did not have “much savvy about the
politics in that community, the relatives, the superintendent and what was going on.” She
recalled thinking that even though there had been rumblings of discontent early on, being
naive and a first year principal, she thought “OK, we can get beyond this,” but clearly, she added, “the grudge never left.” Prior to this incident, Susan had believed that people in education, people who devoted their lives to working with children, were “good people” who would do nothing to intentionally harm another person, adult or child, with words or deed, “I believed that with all my soul,” she said, “but I don’t believe that anymore.”

Kim, too, learned after the fact to be more politically alert after being propositioned for sex by a male colleague. She recalls how the man, much older than her twenty-one years, took her “under his wings” which she perceived to be a mentoring relationship. Although he had come by her classroom almost every day, she failed to read the situation as one of risk for her. However, she said, “looking back he probably had been warming up to me intimately every day and I didn’t realize it. I think he was giving me messages and I was too naive to notice.” Although the principal listened to her complaint, the issue was never dealt with “officially.” Kim had no idea what, if anything, the principal ever said to the perpetrator, it was simply not spoken of again. The experience left its mark, however, because she remembers very clearly to this day his tone of voice when he intimated she should have seen it coming.

Susan and Kim assured their own powerlessness by failing to acknowledge those in power. Unsuspecting and caught off guard they were struck first, like a blow to the back of the head, leaving them stunned and struggling to regain their senses. The experiences of Michelle, Jane, Susan and Kim illustrate how political awareness is truly key to successful negotiation of feminist interests, and that without it efforts to confront sexism in schools are easily thwarted.
Personal Credibility

Seven of ten participants said they felt their efforts were enabled by being well regarded and respected by most colleagues, having good rapport with their supervisor(s), as being seen as a person who could be counted upon, and one genuinely invested in their work and in the interests of students. This characteristic was considered more influential than total years of experience or number of years at any one school, job role, affiliation with professional organizations, personality or age, although each of these were mentioned as enabling factors.

Sally, for example, was chosen by her peers as grade level leader despite having been at the school for only one year, primarily she says, because she had good rapport with colleagues, who perceived her as capable and competent, and because, she said somewhat begrudgingly, age, meaning she was experienced at life and teaching. Sally also felt she had good rapport with the principal who perceived her as diplomatic and “he knew I wouldn’t bring up issues unless I cared about it and felt like it was needed.” Sally also served on the SACS committee and steering committee for dealing with academic and social issues, was Teacher of the Year two consecutive years, and was a semi-finalist for the state Teacher of the Year program.

Similarly, Diane enjoyed good rapport with colleagues who knew she could be counted on to be the standard bearer should one be needed, and to take action should the situation call for it. Over the thirty-two years teaching in the same school system, Diane had earned a reputation for being fair, just and direct, characteristics which served her well when it came time for her to act and she felt that her personal credibility figured prominently in her successful efforts to secure a female for the position she was vacating.
Although Carolyn had years of experience and tenure in her favor, she nonetheless cited good rapport with the principal as the primary enabling factor when she made a formal complaint about the assistant principal hoisting her across his shoulder. There was never a question in her mind about whether or not to inform him because she felt he had high regard for her and would believe her in the matter, and that their history of working together had been one of mutual respect.

Personal credibility was cited as an enabling factor by lesser experienced educators as well. For example, Kim, as a first year teacher and new to the school system, identified good rapport with colleagues and with the principal as factors she counted on when she dealt with being sexually harassed. She says she and the principal “a very good relationship...a trusting relationship” but added that she also enjoyed good relationships with everyone. As she put it “I think the ‘like-ability’ factors were in my favor.” In Kim’s estimation, personal credibility was the greatest form of power she had at that time, not positional power, not years of experience or age, and not political connections.

Being new to the school system, Stephanie cited personal credibility as the one advantage she felt she had in approaching the principal about being discriminated against by being required to wear a skirt while in the building. Unlike other participants, however, she assessed her credibility with the principal would derive from their shared religious affiliation, that he would possibly perceive her as more credible than someone from outside that frame of reference, and consequently be more likely to respond favorably to her argument.
While personal credibility was shown to be an enabler in the negotiation of feminist interests, the more significant revelation is that it was actually of little consequence for most participants. It may have gotten their foot in the door, but the only other purpose it served was to lower the volume of the door slamming shut after their concerns were voiced. So it was for Sally, Beth, Kim, Stephanie, Susan and in one incident, Carolyn. It must be remembered that patriarchy stands guard at that door, and much more than personal credibility will be needed to not only wedge your way through it, but to close it behind you once the negotiation of feminist interests is engaged.

The remaining three participants who identified personal credibility as an enabling factor also possessed positional power (principal and superintendent), or longevity with one system tantamount to positional power. These three women were the more successful in their efforts. Two of these three participants were the most politically aware. In addition to the moral imperative felt by all participants, those who were most successful in the negotiation of feminist interests were politically astute, possessed personal credibility and had positional power.

Strategies Used in the Negotiation of Feminist Interests

The third research question, ‘What strategies are used in negotiation of feminist interests?’ is most directly related to bridging the theoretical and the practical. This section of the chapter discusses the specific actions in which participants engaged and also actions they did not engage, but in retrospect see would have been effective. There is great value in mistakes, as long as we learn from them. As Evangelista (1996) says “a strong strategy comes out of experience. Having done the right thing and the wrong
thing, you are in a position to make choices.” Discussion now turns to what the participants did, right or wrong, and to hopefully learn from their experiences.

In keeping with the concept of there being an enemy at the gate, the strategies have been categorized as offensive, defensive and proactive as a way of understanding how the women engaged the negotiation of feminist interests. The categories are differentiated by function and levels of visibility. The defensive strategies are largely preparatory in nature and typically not publically visible. Offensive strategies are reactive and publically visible, although the scope of visibility may vary. For example, the scope of visibility in the case of Carolyn confronting being thrown over the shoulder of the assistant principal was limited because only a few people were aware of the incident or of her action. On the other hand, the scope of visibility in Diane’s case was broader, because the incident expanded from an in-house, school issue to the more public arena of the school board. The third category, proactive strategies, are those initiated by the participant and are highly visible because their intent is to attract attention to, and create interest in, the issue of sexism in schools.

The following section presents a discussion of the three categories along a continuum of visibility from the least visible defensive strategies, to the more visible offensive strategies and finally the most visible pro-active strategies. This is not to suggest, however, a linear conceptualization of the engagement of the strategies. Quite the contrary, multiple strategies may be engaged at any one time, as is illustrated by the participants’ descriptions of their actions. A summary of the strategies used in negotiation of feminist interests is found in Table 5.
Defensive Strategies

Defensive strategies were largely preparatory in nature and included information gathering, formal and informal education, and analysis of outcomes to improve strategic planning. Three defensive strategies were identified.

Table 5

Strategies Used In Negotiation of Feminist Interests

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<td>Voice One’s Anti-Sexist Position</td>
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Prepare Well Prior to Engagement

Eight of ten participants spoke about the importance of preparing well, of doing one’s homework, prior to engaging in negotiation of feminist interests in schools, either from the point of having done it, or from the point of retrospect and realizing the folly in failing to prepare well. Discussion of this strategy included identifying stakeholders and interests (who the players are, what role do they play, and what do they have at stake), anticipating a range of reactions along with concrete plans for effectively dealing with
them, being informed of one’s legal rights, and being circumspect, that is, taking into consideration the larger political climate of the community in deciding on courses of action.

Prior to Michelle making the proposal for the childcare program she did a great deal of research and hands-on learning about such programs. Her preparation included consulting with the school counselor who had experience implementing a childcare program in another county, one which had “shown a lot of success.” Michelle also visited two child-care programs, one that the counselor had helped implement and another in the same state, and learned that through the help of the program, most of the girls did indeed graduate. Michelle then enlisted the help of “really strong subject area coordinators” to assist with curriculum building, planning a flexible course of study to allow students to “catch-up” from being away from traditional schooling, and for planning study groups and after-school tutorials. Before the idea was actually proposed to the school board and community, a solid understanding of how such a program would actually function and its potential benefits had already been established. Furthermore, Michelle took into account the conservative political climate of the community as she projected making the proposal, knowing there would be opposition.

Sally also turned to education and the gathering of information to better equip for dealing with sexism in schools. Sometime after the tribunal incident, Sally took a course in school law and learned that any teacher can report any crime, and now, if an incident arose, she would inform the local authorities, despite the school’s opposition. She has found this to be very liberating, an example of “knowledge is power” perhaps. No longer would she try to make sense of a situation in which there was not full disclosure of
information around the incident, she said, and if it were not forthcoming, she would consult with key school personnel and community agencies as appropriate.

Analysis of failed attempts, or of less than desirable outcomes for what went wrong and what could be done differently was integral to preparation for engagement. Susan, for example, having been the target of sexual discrimination, could speak authentically about the importance of identifying stakeholders and interests, saying “I learned it’s a political arena, that it’s one that is unpredictable, that it changes with the wind...” and that to survive intact requires an awareness of that reality. Now, she says, “I listen for clues that could be political answers, responses, ideas... just trying to be very aware of what’s political.”

Beth’s reflection on failed attempts led her to the conclusion that she needed to think through the situations and not only identify what went wrong, but also to have in mind what she could do differently next time saying,

Well, thinking of this now, I think what I need to do is kind of reverse the situation in my head and decide what I’m going to do when it happens the next time, I’ve never taken time to do that...I need to decide right now a good way to enter the situation when this happens.

Continuing, she expressed the complexity of, as she put it, “entering the situation when it happens,” aware that she would have to deal with her own emotions, the reaction of the teacher she confronts, and the welfare of the student all at the same time. The best plan, she said was to “figure it out while I’m not surrounded by stress so when the time comes I’ll know how to better handle the situation...better equipped, less emotional.”
Sally, too, said in retrospect that she would do things very differently, beginning with voting against expulsion:

I didn’t vote my heart...I should have voted against it... I realize now that I should have not... I think I should have breached whatever protocol and been an advocate for her. Even though I felt I was speaking up and taking a risk...I really wasn’t taking a strong enough risk. I should have taken a bigger risk.

One of the most important things she has learned from this incident is to think of herself in terms broader than her role as a teacher, that she is also a citizen of a community, and as a citizen alone she has a right and a responsibility to report a crime. As she says, “I’ve learned that I don’t have to depend on the school to be the “mechanism of activism anymore.”

The foregoing comments from participants clearly illustrate that “doing one’s homework” and being as prepared as possible many times means the difference between success and failure in the negotiation of feminist interests in schools.

**Distance for Protection of Self or Interests**

The second defensive strategy was distance, that is, to retreat for purposes of self-protection and/or regrouping for the next advance. Kim and Carolyn both distanced themselves from the individuals who acted against them. In Kim’s case, although she informed the principal of being sexually harassed, the incident was never dealt with in a manner that allowed her to have a sense of closure. The principal took no initiative to inform her of what he did or did not say to the perpetrator. Rather, she was left to deal
with the aftermath on her own. Her primary strategy for doing this was to distance herself from the man, as she said plainly “I really just distanced myself as much as possible.”

Similarly, when Carolyn had no one to whom to take her complaint of sexual harassment against the superintendent, her strategy was to distance. There was no way she could find to address the situation, so she said “if I simply avoided his presence, I wouldn’t have to deal with it; if he came into a meeting where I was I would just move away.” While she was not willing to tolerate his behavior, the only strategy she had was to distance, even to the point of changing jobs, which she eventually did.

Mental Balance

The third defensive strategy was maintaining mental balance, a calm, unemotional outlook toward actions taking place that includes knowing your bottom line and being resolved to endure and persist. This is not to suggest that emotions are not deeply felt, but rather that one’s emotions are harnessed and managed. Knowing your bottom line means knowing unequivocally what is negotiable and what is not. When you are in touch with your bottom line, many superfluous issues and distractions fall by the wayside, allowing a clearer, sharper focus on what matters to you. Michelle and Diane engaged this strategy most clearly.

Michelle’s bottom line with the childcare program was that it was something that would benefit students, a way out of poverty and ignorance, and for many it was the opportunity of a lifetime. Michelle put it simply, “if it was best for the students, we were going to do it.” She realized early on, however, that she could not reason with the opponents because their reaction was so deeply emotional. As she said, “You can’t rationalize with people who are coming from an emotional direction, there is just no way
to deal with it, so it became a process of listening and honoring their opinions, then closing the door and doing what was right for the children.”

When asked how she dealt with the intensity of emotion from opponents, Michelle admitted, “It’s easy to personalize; you want to lash out at people, but I’ve learned not to do that...you can’t have a temper.” Continuing, she explained that she just kept repeating the focus of why the program was being proposed and the message of why it was important: “I really practiced trying to keep the message clear, predictable, focused and the purpose of the path.” Maintaining focus, Michelle says, usually kept the situation manageable so that at least communication was not stopped altogether. She concluded, “they knew what to expect from me; I was very predictable. Nobody ever went away happy, but we went away with the consensus that we had a focus.” The rumblings, as she put it, continued well after the implementation of the program, but Michelle stayed the same course, resisting being drawn in on an emotional level, and thus managed to keep a sense of mental balance.

Diane also talked about the importance of “not getting personal” when negotiating feminist interests, of making plain to all involved that it is the issue that matters. To her it was straight-forward, “He was taking one stand and I was taking another...he was doing what he needed to do and I was doing what I needed to do...I made it very clear that this was not personal, but I’m going to do what I have to do.” Consequently, she enacted her own agenda with missionary zeal, successfully bringing to a halt the principal’s attempt to advance his own interests.

Margaret demonstrated a cool detachment in her confrontation of the coach’s discriminatory remarks about female wrestling assistants when she said:
There are some things that are up for discussion and some that are not. Things that are demeaning to people are not things we are going to talk about, [then] decide whether we are going to do them or not. We’re just not going to do it.

She went on to explain that she views her behavior in this scenario as a leadership issue and not a confrontation of the coach on a personal level.

A corollary of mental balance identified was the importance of attending to one’s emotional well-being. Psychological and emotional stress associated with challenging the sexist status quo of schools was mentioned in some fashion by very participant. Seeking support and counsel from trusted colleagues, affiliating with professional organizations and having a mentor were some of the strategies mentioned. For example, Carolyn and Kim talked with colleagues, friends, and spouses to help them sort out their feelings and discuss how to handle their respective incidents. Susan did likewise, and also consulted a professional organization for legal advice.

**Offensive Strategies**

Offensive strategies are those which are reactive in nature, that is, an incident occurs and in reaction, a strategy is engaged. Because of their reactionary nature they are also visible although the scope of visibility may vary. Results revealed the following three offensive strategies used in negotiation of feminist interests.

**Calculate Timing of Action**

Five of ten participants found timing to be an important strategy, in terms of rate of response or in calculation of when to act. For Jane and Diane, timing figured prominently in the successful outcome of the situation, while for Susan, acting in a timely
manner allowed her to protect her own interests when she could not salvage the situation on a broader scale.

In the incident of sexual assault of sixth grade girls, acting swiftly allowed Jane to create conditions favorable to her aims. Her reaction was characterized by urgency to protect the victims and to dramatically emphasize the message she wanted delivered, that such behavior would not be tolerated and there would be no delay in dealing with it. When recalling the incident Jane used the word “immediately” numerous times, as in knowing that the D.A.R.E. officer would “immediately” contact the police who then “immediately” removed the boys from the school. The immediacy of action allowed Jane to accomplish that which she considered to be most important initially: removing the boys from the school in order to first protect the victims, but also remove a potential distraction to, as she said, “doing other things, like taking statements.” Timing, in this case afforded Jane more control over the situation and created conditions more favorable to her than if she had delayed.

Timing can also be an overtly offensive move, a rapid advance. Such is the case with Diane, who, in effect, put her principal on notice that “this is not the end of it” after learning he had hired a male coach instead of a female to fill her position. Having only two days to act, she realized immediately her disadvantage was time, and so she used every spare moment, from first learning of the situation until the board meeting, to advance her cause. As she said:

I didn’t have a lot of time to work with this because it happened on a Tuesday and the board meeting was on Thursday and he was going to try to get approval then...but I knew it could be done, it would
just mean some additional hours and doing some additional work,

but I knew it could be done.

Once the offense was mounted, Diane never lost momentum.

On Tuesday, whenever she was not teaching, Diane was on the telephone making appointments, first to see the principal himself, and then superintendent. After an unsuccessful meeting with the principal that afternoon and before she left the facility that evening, she wrote a letter about the matter to be given to the principal, deputy superintendent and the superintendent which she hand delivered to each party the next day, Wednesday. That same day Diane went to her appointment with the superintendent only to learn that he was out of town, but not slowing her momentum, she asked to see the deputy superintendent who did meet with her. Wednesday evening Diane was on the telephone again, this time contacting the school board members. This was actually the turning point in the incident because Diane learned that the board members, as she put it “didn’t have a clue” that she was the only female in her department and that the principal was proposing to fill her position with yet another male. Once informed, they understood the situation clearly. The next day, Thursday, Diane fortuitously saw the superintendent at her school. Making the most of the time she had left, she approached him about the situation and learned that he had not read the letter since returning from out of town. Once informed, he agreed the matter should be discussed further at the board meeting that evening. Of course Diane attended the meeting, sheparding her interests to the end. Diane attributes the favorable outcome of the board’s insisting that a female occupy the position largely to timing, as she said, “I really didn’t have time to think about it...I had to
act, given the length of time I had to work with and that had a lot to do with it [the outcome]. Clearly, a rapid advance and sustained momentum was vital to her success.

In Susan’s case the dust had not completely settled from the whirlwind appeal of her expulsion recommendation when one Monday morning while drying her hair she received a telephone call from a teacher informing her that the superintendent, school board chair and others were meeting that afternoon to discuss her, and more importantly, what to do about her. She simply could not believe it, after having accepted the school board’s ruling that the student could return to school in opposition to the initial recommendation, and trying to, as she put it, “move on” from there. Susan recalled “my gut said you should stay home and find out what you need to do from the legal perspective, and I chose to stay home.” She telephoned a professional organization to seek advice about what she should do. After hearing the scenario, a legal representative of the organization felt that she was in jeopardy of being terminated, or at least of her contract not being renewed, at the end of the school year. In light of that, she was advised to take the offense, to strike first and resign in order to protect her own interests, rather than allow the school board and superintendent to act first. Within the span of an hour one morning she said, “my whole life changed.” The next day she handed in her letter of resignation to the superintendent who in turn, threw the writing tablet he was holding down on his desk. To this day Susan does not know how to interpret his reaction, given that they have not spoken since. In this scenario, rate of response and calculating when to act was an offensive strategy that worked to Susan’s advantage. In retrospect, she wonders if perhaps she should have taken longer to consider resignation, but at the same time still feels in doing so she would have been no less at risk.
Margaret simply wasted no time in putting an end to the demeaning reference to young women as “mat maids.” Upon first hearing the coach’s reference to the girls in this manner, she said to him:

That is as demeaning as anything I have heard of, and we’re not going to put young women in this situation. I think they are being perceived as servants and people who are going to clean up after the boys...So, we can have wrestling assistants, or or give them another name, but not “mat maids.”

Confronting the situation when it occurred not only put an end to the practice immediately, but as Margaret said, it created an opportunity for people to look openly at their practices and see what is being said through those practices.

**Follow Policy/Procedure to Advance and Protect Interests**

Five participants mentioned the importance of first following established school policy and procedure in bringing the issue to the table, to use the tools you have. This strategy had less to do with having blind faith in the system than with acting in an ethical manner, it is what they were supposed to do as an employee of the school, and with eliminating the possibility that failure to do so would be used against them and undermine their efforts. This strategy includes “going through the channels” of taking the issue up with one’s immediate supervisor, be it principal, superintendent or school board, rather than circumvent that person even if opposition was expected, and keeping supervisors informed of one’s actions and otherwise informed of the situation being addressed.
Diane identified following established procedure as a key element in her successful negotiation of the position being filled by a female, linking it to personal credibility and protecting her mission. “First of all,” Diane said, “it was the right way to do things, going through procedures, the different steps, different levels” but she also realized failure to do so could jeopardize her mission. As she said, “the thing about it is, you can’t leave room for anybody to say ‘this is the proper procedure...did you do this before you did that? if not you need to go back and do it.” Explaining further, “it takes less time to do it right the first time, so that it won’t stop progress...I could not allow for a setback, I didn’t have room for a setback...I had to do everything right from the start.”

Jane, on the other hand, spoke more in political terms of following policy and procedure, saying it was important to keep her superintendent advised of what was transpiring at her school during the sexual assault incident saying “always tell your superintendent how you’ve dealt with a [situation] so he’s not blindsided by what comes to him [from other sources].”

Kim and Carolyn, also followed established procedure by taking their complaints of sexual harassment and physical assault to their immediate supervisor, the principal, who dealt with the matter at that level. Susan and Sally also engaged the strategy of following policy and procedure, and even though their interests were not advanced, neither were they compromised due to failure to follow them.

**Raise the Issue to the Highest Power**

Expanding on the previous strategy, four participants indicated that the issue raised should be taken to the person(s) or entity in the highest position of power, within the school system and/or without the system if appropriate (such as the police,
community agencies and parents) when efforts at lower levels are not successful. Beth, for example, contacted the Department of Family and Children’s Services (DFACS) in her attempt to help the girl impregnated by her father when the principal dismissed her concerns, while Jane engaged the police in the sexual assault incident, realizing that the offense superceded school rule or policy.

Similarly, Diane and Sally talked about the importance of taking issues beyond the level of first opposition. Although Diane was successful in her efforts, part of her overall strategy was to consider the possibility that the school board might approve the hiring of the male coach, despite her opposition and to realize she may have to take the issue beyond the school board. As she said, if they had not told the principal a female would be hired in her position, “I would have made it more public...saying OK, I’m going to have to take this mission a step further, and get people involved, get the community involved.” In like manner, Sally had resolved in the future, to take her concerns to the community when the school fails to respond with appropriate regard and attention to the issue of sexism. Comments from participants clearly point out the necessity for taking the issue of sexism in schools to the highest power wherever that power resides, in order to break the silence so prevalent in schools and to engage a larger audience.

**Proactive Strategies**

Proactive strategies are the most visible because by intent and design they are meant to attract attention to the issue of sexism, to make gender an issue. Analysis of the critical incidents revealed two proactive strategies that may be engaged in the negotiation of feminist interests: 1) to voice one’s anti-sexist position and 2) education of faculty,
students, and parents. Diane and Sally spoke in terms of personal activism while comments of Beth and Jane were more related to systemic and programmatic intervention.

Voice an Anti-Sexist Stance

Diane argues that the only way to get the attention of others regarding the issue of sexism in schools is to speak out, voice your position loudly and clearly. She says “to keep it to yourself is not going to help the situation...you might not make any changes right then, but at least you put the thought out there,” the tone in her voice intimating that is the least one could do. Furthermore, she says the importance of “planting that seed” as she calls it, cannot be underestimated, because its always out there just waiting to grow, and in future planning, oftentimes it emerges. Diane’s colleagues knew her position on gender and they knew the importance she placed upon it because not only did she voice it, she openly challenged behaviors that even suggested it was “not an issue.” Consequently, many times her presence was all that was needed to make gender an issue.

In a similar sentiment about taking a stand and voicing your position, Sally said that she would not again succumb to imposed prescriptions and limitations, believing she should have disregarded the “charge” given her and voted against expulsion. Furthermore, she would now actively seek information and make contacts with key people who could contribute positively, justly to a situation, disregarding the schools admonition against it.

Margaret spoke about the importance of women in leadership being a role model for girls in school, certainly in terms of voicing one’s position, but also as principal, for her to enact her anti-sexist stance by dealing with sexist incidents seriously. She says
because of her making known her position and her quick response in dealing with sexism, she finds it difficult to believe that girls would hesitate to come to her, or the assistant principals who are also women, with complaints of sexism. While she has little influence on the girls’ individual relationships with boyfriends, she says, she can do a great deal through her leadership and modeling.

In projecting what can be done to further feminist interests in schools, the simple truth in Jane’s remarks cannot be escaped. She says:

You see, we make important what we pay attention to...we teach kids all the time, what I pay attention to is important, and what I don’t pay attention to is unimportant...so talking about it [gender] gives an enormous credence to it...the fact that we are going to put this on the table, talk about it...we make it important because we make it part of our discussion, part of our awareness.

Obviously, Jane is saying that for gender to become “part of our awareness,” administrators, teachers and counselors must take the lead for setting the standard in the schools that sexist behaviors are not acceptable and that complaints will be taken seriously. She feels that within such an environment, faculty would more likely intervene because the risks associated with intervention are minimized, and students would perhaps have more confidence that their needs will be addressed appropriately.

**Education of Faculty, Students, and Parents**

The education of faculty, students and parents was identified as a second proactive strategy for negotiation of feminist interests. Jane commented that the education of faculty and students about sexism in schools is imperative and suggests that feminist
educators should begin by focusing intervention efforts in two directions simultaneously. First, begin with administrators, “particularly male administrators,” in making sexism an issue, as Newman (1994) says taking the issue up and into the enemy’s camp. This is particularly fitting since analysis of the critical incidents revealed the efforts of eight of ten participants were initially blocked by the person holding the administrative position above them in the organizational hierarchy. Second, Jane says to begin intervention programs at the elementary level. Most of Jane’s experience as an educator has been at the high-school level, but her experience at the elementary level has convinced her that feminist educators should focus their efforts there first, saying “That’s where it all has to happen, with teachers administrators and students, so that when they leave elementary school they know what’s acceptable and what isn’t...don’t wait until they are seventeen, deal with it when they are seven.” Continuing, Jane says that she feels that intervention programs should include boys and girls, teaching explicitly that they have a right to be respected and a responsibility to treat others with respect.

Like Jane, Margaret talked about the importance of “teaching girls how to handle things, what to say, what to do,” when sexist behaviors are directed at them, citing for example, a course on assertiveness the counselors had just begun for a group of girls at her high-school. While the program addressed a number of topics, sexism and how to deal effectively with it was one component.

Beth talked about the effectiveness of students hearing women talk about their life experiences, the choices they made and how those choices shaped and sometimes determined their life paths. To illustrate, she told of her class visiting a senior citizens center related to a unit they were studying in English class. Most of the people present
that day were women. While there, a boy asked a woman who was probably in her late seventies, “What do you think of a woman being president?” She responded “well, I guess its OK, but I don’t see how she’s going to get all her chores done and still run the country,” having no idea, Beth said, that a woman in such a position would have someone to do “the chores.” This comment alone prompted a great deal of discussion about women’s lives and women’s roles in society, “We talked for two days about that little comment she made,” Beth said. By getting a glimpse of the world through the eyes of women who lived very gender stereotypical lives opened their own eyes were opened to how gender affects us all. And, she added, hearing real life experiences of women made a much greater impression on the students that if she had presented the same information herself.

Beth expands the proactive focus to include school and community, recommending having “an outsider,” meaning someone with expertise in the area of sexism and not affiliated with the school, facilitate a gathering of teachers and parents to bring the issue to the fore. And, she quickly added, “don’t have it in the school...as long as we’re in that setting, you can be sure certain things aren’t going to get accomplished, it affects the way we think about possibilities.” Clearly, Beth is feeling the constraints of the school environment on discussion, on what transpires, even eclipsing possibilities.

Chapter Summary

Analysis of the data reveals that women educators and female students encounter sexism in the schools daily, that sexism is a very real enemy against which they must defend themselves on a number of levels, and that their experiences parallel, both in type of offense encountered and in the physical, emotional and psychological aftermath of
dealing with the offense. Results further reveal there are many dynamics operating
simultaneously to constrain or enable action during the negotiation of feminist interests
which, in turn, directly influence, and sometimes determine, the strategies and practices
used in negotiation. While the facts and the stakeholders differ in each incident, the one
commonality found is that each woman felt a moral imperative to act: something had to
be done regardless of the risk or the cost, personally or professionally, they simply had to
act. Women educators engaged defensive, offensive and pro-active strategies in the
negotiation of feminist interests in schools. Sometimes strategies were engaged singly,
sometimes in concert or in rapid succession. Strategies engaged exist along a continuum
of visibility from the least visible defensive, to the more visible offensive and then to pro-
active strategies which garner the most attention.
CHAPTER SIX
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

_Tough problems take time and you have to struggle with them._
_Myles Horton in The Long Haul_

It goes without saying that the problem of sexism in schools and the negotiation of feminist interests in patriarchal institutions is a tough problem, one for which there are no simple answers and no quick fixes. It behooves us, then, as adult educators, to commit to the long haul, keeping focused on the possibilities of what can be even as we struggle with day-to-day incidents. This study was borne primarily from my own need to know how to more effectively resist and subvert patriarchal processes operating to subordinate women and girls in schools. This chapter presents a brief summary of the study, an overview of the findings, discussion of the conclusions, and finally a section on implications of the study: what does it all mean for practice. I begin with revisiting the purpose of the study, its theoretical framework, and research questions which guided the inquiry.

Sexism in the elementary and secondary schools of America is a longstanding problem and its pernicious effects on the lives of women and girls particularly are well documented. Research clearly demonstrates an androcentric orientation and a bias which privileges the male experience as normative, creating a power differential which accords women and girls a subordinate status within the system. While a great deal to date has been learned about sexism in schools and its effects, far less is known about what is, or
can in fact be done to effectively challenge its many manifestations in day-to-day practice. The purpose, of course, is not simply so we can “hold our own” in a bout with sexism, but rather that we may intervene as purposeful, social actors in the creation of a more just and democratic school culture. Thus, many adult educators (Acker, 1994; Cervero & Wilson, 2001; Gore, 1993; Newman, 1994) are calling for the identification of specific strategies for practice, to bring substance to abstraction (Newman, 1994) so social reform may become more possible. This study sought to contribute to this body of knowledge by gaining an understanding of how women negotiate feminist interests in elementary and secondary schools. This study adopted a power relations perspective as its theoretical framework and was situated in the socio/political context of schools, responding to the call for educators to act in spheres wider than curricula and pedagogy (Acker, 1994; Cunningham, 2000; Gore, 1993; Weiler, 1988). The study was guided by three research questions:

1. What issues are raised by feminist educators?
2. What factors constrain and/or enable action?
3. What specific strategies are used in negotiation of feminist interests?

Question one focused on identification of the issues of sexism women educators face in their day-to-day practice. Participants discussed fifteen critical incidents of sexism in schools to which they were party, either as a target themselves, or acting on behalf of one or more female student(s) who were targets. In six of the incidents the participant was targeted and in nine incidents, female students were targeted. The critical incidents were represented by three categories: 1) sexual harassment; 2) battery; and 3) sexual discrimination. There were more incidents of categorical discrimination than incidents
directed at an individual target. Of the total number of incidents, three were student-to-student offenses, six were faculty-to-faculty offenses, and six incidents were faculty-to-student offenses, all of which were categorical discrimination. Of the faculty perpetrators, eight were individual males, while three were either several women teachers together, and one was an individual female teacher.

Question two focused on identification of forms of power and privilege operating within schools that enabled and/or constrained action. Three categories of factors emerged from analysis of the data: 1) ideological beliefs; 2) the politics of patriarchy; and 3) personal characteristics. Analysis of participant responses to this question revealed they found the most formidable opponent to be the system itself, and secondarily, political influences operative in schools. Being patriarchal both in ideology and in the material reality of male occupation of power positions, the system exuded stereotypically sexist beliefs and attitudes about/toward females, and the actions of those in power positions served to protect and maintain the sexist status quo. Participant responses also indicated many times the negotiation of feminist interests was derailed by the politics of patriarchy, that is, in the trivializing or dismissal of issues raised, and sabotage of the process primarily through withholding/distorting information, limiting and prescribing options, or denial of access to the process. The category of personal characteristics represents factors attributable to the individual: a moral imperative to act, level of political awareness and personal credibility. One’s moral imperative to act always served to enable action. Political awareness was found to enable action, while lack of political awareness constrained action. Personal credibility was found to enable action, but its usefulness was limited.
Question three served a dual purpose, that of expanding definition of the enemy by revealing individuals and entities who opposed negotiation of feminist interests as well as the strategies they used, and uniquely identifying specific strategies engaged by women in the negotiation process. Findings reveal that women engage defensive, offensive and proactive strategies in the negotiation of feminist interests. More defensive strategies emerged than either offensive or proactive. Analysis of participant responses suggests this may be due to their realization in hindsight that they were not adequately prepared for engagement, and underscores the importance of being as well prepared as possible prior to engagement. Offensive strategies were engaged in reaction to an incident and these scenarios constituted the majority of critical incidents. Proactive strategies were engaged in the least, but strongly recommended, again in retrospect, by five of the ten participants. Findings further indicated that strategies were engaged sometimes singly, sometimes in concert or in rapid succession as the situation warranted.

Conclusions and Discussion

Three conclusions were drawn from this study: 1) patriarchy marks the social life of schools; 2) politics matter in the negotiation of feminist interests; and 3) a repertoire of strategies are necessary for the long haul. The next section presents a discussion of each conclusion.

Patriarchy Marks the Social Life of Schools

Inglis (1997) explains that if there is even a reasonable chance for the more just redistribution of power, the forms and features of power and the way it is exercised in our lives must be laid bare. In this study, the ideology of patriarchy emerged as the dominant form of power operating to constrain the negotiation of feminist interests. Ably fulfilling
its role as defender of the status quo, patriarchy manifested in attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of individuals and entities. Harkening, however, to Newman’s (1998) admonition to avoid the tendency to identify abstract concepts as the enemy, three specific features of patriarchy were identified: denial that gender is an issue; the schools rejection of the responsibility for dealing with sexism; and a “blame the victim” mentality. Thus, through denial, rejection and blame, the system divests itself of gender issues, at least when gender is relative to female. In every scenario discussed by participants one or more of these features of patriarchy emerged to successfully halt negotiation of feminist interests. Further identifying the enemy, patriarchy is embodied in and animated by individuals and entities within the system, primarily the principal, superintendent, school board and, to a lesser extent, teachers. Most typically participants met with opposition from the individual or entity occupying a position higher in the school hierarchy than their own, and in this study, all but one of the individuals were male.

Evidence of the power of patriarchy is further seen in the striking revelation that experiences of women and girls in schools parallel, both in type of offense encountered and in the physical, emotional and psychological aftermath of dealing with the offense. As Jane said when the assistant principal laughed at her complaint about obscene sexist language written on the desk by a male student, “I felt is was a slap at me...it helped me understand how the young lady felt because, here I was an adult feeling the same way when my male counterpart acted towards it the way he did.” Practically speaking, what this tells us is that whether the female is fourteen or forty-five, she is treated the same. Whether she is superintendent, principal, teacher or student, one female is just as likely
as the other to become the target of sexism or for their concerns to be ignored, trivialized or dismissed. Nothing insulates women and girls from the effects of patriarchy. However, girls are even more vulnerable, having none of the ascribed power available to women educators, coupled with the fact that they typically receive no help when they report an offense.

Patriarchal attitudes and behaviors were seen in male and female faculty, and in community members toward the middle-school and high-school girls who became pregnant. No longer were the girls seen as individuals, many of them “good” students, but they became the target of ridicule, rejection, and even hate because they were pregnant. And why is this? Because, as Fineman (1990) explains the girls’ behavior is considered deviant from the societal norm, which says that if you are female, you should be married if having sex and becoming pregnant, but only if you are female. If you are male you can have sex and impregnate girls with no repercussions, as was seen in each scenario in this study, the male’s role and responsibility was never raised. His behavior was viewed as typical, while the girl’s behavior was viewed as atypical, for which she pays a very high price. Just as Fineman argued, regardless of progressive rhetoric about gender roles, the female is still defined in relation to the male, as will eventually the child be, pronounced “legitimate” or “illegitimate” relative to whether or not the male is legally associated with either.

Perhaps the most outrageous, almost unbelievable, example of unbridled patriarchy is found in Stephanie’s experience of being required by the principal to keep a skirt with her at all times, so that when she came to the school building from teaching P.E. class on the field she could put it on before entering. Every female P.E. teacher was
required to wear a skirt at all times when in the school building, yet the male P.E. teachers could wear their gym clothes at all times, on or off the field. Aside from this being ludicrous and plain impractical, the principal’s behavior was against the law, and although many of the faculty knew it was against the law, no one took him to task.

As many studies before it, this study adds yet another chapter in the volumes of documentation that women and girls occupy a subordinate status in schools, that their interests and general welfare of little or no concern to the system, and of the pervasiveness of sexism and its pernicious effects on the lives of females in schools (AAUW, 1993; Brody, et.al., 2000; Sadker & Sadker, 1986; Shakeshaft, 1986; Stein, 2000). Perhaps this first conclusion of the study is best summarized by the fact that the majority of sexist issues raised were categorical discrimination against women and girls perpetrated by adults, most of whom were male.

As these real life stories illustrate, patriarchy is alive and well in America’s schools. It permeates the school environment like a noxious gas, infiltrating every aspect of school life, and structures the social relationships between men and women, boys and girls. Male primacy reigns supreme, as patriarchy communicates fundamental assumptions about what is valued and what is not valued in schools (Brody, et.al., 2000; Campbell & Sanders, 1997; Ohanian, 2000; Wood, 1986). As such, when issues of sexism in school are raised women educators can at best expect conciliatory gestures from the system, or more commonly for the issue to be trivialized or dismissed altogether (Stein, 2000; Stromquist, 1990). As Stein (2000) explains, sexism in K-12 schools has become normalized as its public expression is tolerated, even expected, as Jane experienced when the assistant principal chuckled and said “boys will be boys,”
communicating not only permission to engage in sexist behaviors, but approval as well. To the system and many of individuals in positions of power within it, the welfare of women and girls is simply not a concern, and the absence of concern stems directly from the ideology of patriarchy.

**Politics Matter in Negotiation of Feminist Interests**

Results of this study support the literature that understanding power relations is indeed central to successful negotiation of feminist interests (Cervero & Wilson, 1996, 2000; Forester, 1989; Gore, 1993; Inglis, 1997; Weiler, 1988) as evidenced by the fact that seven participants approached their respective scenarios without accounting for political realities and subsequently fell very short of their aim. As a matter of fact, their efforts were effectively halted at the initial raising of the issue by the person in the position of power, most often a principal. Their first error, and one that left them wide open to defeat, was the lack of awareness in their own consciousness and in their own hearts, that a very real enemy exists. This is an important distinction from naming the enemy. Naming the enemy or defining the enemy necessitates a cognizance that there *is* an enemy, an awareness that most of these women did not have at the time they engaged the negotiation of feminist interests.

Each participant in this study felt the moral certainty, or imperative to act. It was the single most powerful enabler of their action. They were driven to intervene on behalf of themselves and other women and girls because it was the right thing to do, the moral thing to do. And, most believed personal credibility, good rapport with supervisors and positive relationships with colleagues would carry them through to a successful end.
While, as I said elsewhere, these factors got their foot in the door, they were of little usefulness in the actual negotiation of interests.

According to their discussion of the incidents, most participants assumed they would be heard and treated with respect, and that the issue raised would be given due respect. After all, they were well liked, they played by the rules, and moreover were known for their personal and professional commitment to the students and the school. Sally even said of one scenario, that in the years she had worked with the principal she approached, he had never said “no” in response to her requests, but he did when she wanted to deal with the issue of sexual harassment. Likewise, Beth had confidence that the principal she and her colleagues approached about the behavior of the “big, mean, redneck” teacher would see things their way, but he did not. Similarly, Stephanie thought her rapport with the principal and their shared religious history would facilitate her negotiation of a “rule” change about having to keep a skirt with her at all times, and again she was wrong. It was only in retrospect that the women became cognizant of the enemy, unfortunately illustrating Newman’s (1994) assertion that entering transactions with other people or groups on the assumption that enemies do not exist is self-defeating, even delusional. Unaware of an enemy, they naively assumed and expected cooperation and consequently failed.

Strategically speaking, the women were immediately placed in a defensive position. Unsuspecting and unprepared for the opposition they encountered, they either went away defeated, or for those who persisted, they found themselves in the midst of the fray trying to sort things out as they went along. Aside from their initial disbelief and/or shock in reaction to their opposition, other factors were working against them, too. Time
especially was critical to some, then there was the emotional and psychological stress, even fear job loss, and the risks associated with going “over the heads” of their opponents. As Jane said, you never know who will support you and who will not, “you never know who’s jerking their chain.” As such, they were much of their effort went into recuperating from and reacting to advances of the system. Recognition and acceptance of the reality that an enemy exists is foundational to successful negotiation of feminist interests in schools. Without realizing there is an enemy there is no possible way the many forms of opposition can be anticipated, but, as Forester (1989) argues, the ability to anticipate conflict always matters, explaining that without appreciation of structured interests, motives and organizational defensiveness, the individual may present sound and rational arguments, then go away bewildered when no one listens. And, unfortunately again, that was the outcome of most incidents discussed in this study.

Critical theorists and critical adult educators share the perspective that people are socialized across the life span to adhere to the status quo of the system.(Cunningham, 2000; Welton, 1995). The participants in this study were no exception, and despite their anti-sexist stance, approached the problem of sexism from a liberal theoretical perspective, as have many women educators. However, the outcome belies the effectiveness of the liberal approach, revealing no disruption to the system. This is largely due to the liberal camps’ social vision of equity and adherence to empowerment strategies, rather than a vision of social justice and the engagement of strategies for emancipation. Absence of a social vision of justice on the part of women educators weakens their position because the focus is limited to a here-and-now, specific incident, likely teaming with factors the system could use too render it unworthy of attention. This
was seen, for example, in comments made by administration, such as “Oh, that’s the so-and-so family, what do you expect?;” “He didn’t mean it that way, get over it;” “Those girls made the choice to get have sex, so now let them live with it;” and, “You’re overreacting, making a mountain out of a mole-hill.” Without a clear link to the big picture, the social vision, these particulars may be, and often are, difficult to defend, and contributes to the loss of direction and purpose.

Only the two participants who succeeded in their efforts, Jane and Michelle, talked explicitly about a link between the specific incident with which they were dealing and a larger social vision. Jane linked the importance of her intervention to the possible prevention of sexual battery or domestic violence when the boys were older, saying that as they got older there would be more opportunity for them to mistreat or harm girls, but having been held accountable at an early age they might think better of it. Michelle spoke in terms of giving the high school girls a “chance for life” by providing childcare services, enabling them to complete their high-school education and helping them plan for higher education, interrupting the cycle of poverty so common for “single mothers.” Linking to a social vision beyond the immediate enabled both participants to keep in touch with the “what-for” of practice, helping them to stay their course in the face of opposition. If we are clear in our own thinking that the issue is much bigger than the incident, it becomes relational to the wider systems of society opening the door for discussion of the real problem: the forms of power and privilege underlying the incident itself. Our energy is then channeled into critical analysis, resistance, challenge and subversion of existing structures of power, all of which are necessary for transformation of social life to occur (Cervero & Wilson, 2000; Inglis, 1997).
People within schools, as in other workplaces or organizations, operate with different degrees of power and have various interests at stake (Welton, 1991). When these realities are not taken into account, the outcome of interactions is left largely to chance, or as Forester (1989) would say, it is “like walking across a busy intersection with one’s eyes closed” (p. 7). While there is the possibility of coming through it unharmed, the greater likelihood is that you will be left as was Susan, feeling like a “semi” [tractor-trailer] came from nowhere and just flattened you. The unsuccessful attempts to negotiate feminist interests in schools illustrates that liberal feminist, empowerment oriented approaches are ineffective because these perspectives fail to interpret life in schools as struggles for power, and fail to deal with equality of conditions as well as opportunity. Thus, the patriarchal structure of schools is undisturbed and the status quo remains intact. To be successful in the negotiation of feminist interests, women educators must adopt a critical perspective, including a social vision that provides the “what for” of practice, and learn to think and act politically (Cervero & Wilson, 2000; Forester, 1989; Inglis, 1997; Rudy, 1999; Weiler, 1986).

A Repertoire of Strategies is Necessary for the Long Haul

Results of this study reveal that women educators engaged and/or identified three types of negotiation strategies, with each type making its own distinct contribution, and that all three are necessary for successful negotiation of feminist interests. Defensive strategies were found to be useful in preparation for engagement, for preserving and maintaining gains, and for self-protection. Offensive strategies were useful for reacting to real-time, here-and-now incidents that required immediate attention. Defensive and offensive strategies may be engaged effectively for “holding one’s own” but they do not
necessarily make a contribution to transformation of school culture. Findings support the literature on this point, illustrating the need for pro-active strategies for the long haul (Cervero & Wilson, 2000; Horton, 1990; Newman, 1994). Horton (1990), in discussing his perspective on adult education, said of educational programs, “you have to deal with things as they are now and as they ought to be at the same time. They go together, the ‘is’ and the ‘ought’” (p. 131). Similarly, women educators need to deal with what is and what ought to be at the same time, and as such, all three strategies are necessary.

Pro-active strategies are future oriented, borne of critical analysis and engaged with the intent to disrupt and subvert the sexist status quo. Participants in this study engaged proactive strategies the least, but all in retrospect agreed that proactive, even subversive strategies are necessary for advancement of feminist interests. For example, Diane’s public and vocal anti-sexist stance was well known, and most often her presence was all that was needed to make gender visible, to make it an issue worthy of attention and discussion. As Jane said, we make important that to which we give our attention, and the role of the feminist educator in patriarchal culture of schools includes making gender an issue, by putting it on the table. Other participants spoke of pro-active educational intervention, explicitly teaching about gender and sexism in schools to both faculty and students. In these illustrations the women are not reacting, but initiating action, setting the tone and defining expectations regarding behavior of others in the schools. In this way they are doing as Newman (1994) argues we should: they are bringing the struggle up to or even into other parties’ camps, initiating a more militant resistance and challenge (Walby, 1990).
Integral to the development of proactive strategies is having a social vision as discussed earlier. It is reasoned that if we know where we want to eventually arrive, finding ways to get there is made easier. Without a social vision, we can easily become mired in day-to-day incidents and never move beyond them. The social vision, then, orients us to what matters and reminds us of the purposes of our work; it is the spot on the horizon that, every day upon waking, we should locate and by which we should steer our course.

Implications for Practice and Future Research

It is in this section of the chapter that the practical question “Now What?” is addressed. Needless to say, there are no “quick-fixes” found here. The problem of sexism in schools, rooted in the tenacious and resilient ideology of patriarchy, is indeed a tough problem that is not going away. Systemic change will come only with sustained effort by feminist educators over time to confront sexist incidents as they occur, and simultaneously, to actively seek out ways to make gender visible in school, to make gender an issue. One example is that of educational programs designed for school administrators, pre-service and in-service teachers, and school counselors which are founded upon critical social and critical educational perspectives in order to expose and address patriarchy underlying gendered power relations in schools. Based upon the findings of this study, it is strategically astute to begin the intervention with administrators since they occupy positions of power within the organization, are therefore key to successful negotiation of feminist interests. In eleven of the fifteen sexist incidents discussed in this study, administrators (ten of which were male) acted to
A second implication is that political activism, individually and collectively, is a vehicle for the advancement of feminist interests. I have often heard it said that if you do not “turn on” to politics, politics will turn on you. Results of this study certainly support this argument. The importance of women educators perceiving themselves as political and social actors cannot be underestimated. Realizing our connection to a body politic beyond our role as school employee is key to successful negotiation of feminist interests and instrumental for influencing educational policy on the local and state levels, and even the national level. For example, frequent contact could be made with state representatives, and especially members of education committees, about the problem of sexism in schools. On the local level, the issue of gender and the problem of sexism in schools could be taken directly to school board members, to individual members of community organizations or by being a guest speaker at their meetings. Particularly important is involving parents in activism, perhaps through the Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) and school councils.

Recommendations for future research is identified for three areas. First, successful implementation of educational programs that challenge the socio/political foundation of schools will be a difficult task. As such, future research should include analysis of problems and obstacles encountered in the proposal and/or implementation of such programs. Second, issues of sexism raised by participants also involved issues of race and class which affected the perception and interpretation of the problem by school personnel. While this study foregrounded gender, future research could also explore ways
race and class influence the response to sexist issues in schools. Lastly, more research should be conducted to further identify specific obstacles and methods of resistance to the negotiation of feminist interests. A key source of this information is the male administrator. In most schools males educators still occupy positions of power more often than females and as such, they not only have greater interests at stake, their job role positions them strategically to constrain or block negotiation of feminist interests. In the interest of further definition of “the enemy” and of developing specific strategies for practice, interviewing male administrators about sexism in schools may reveal even more of what feminist educators are up against. The rationale being that the more a particular ideology is spelled out, the more easily it is resisted and the more obvious methods of resistance become.

A Concluding Note

I am going away from this project with the same urgency about the needs of women and girls in schools that drove me to it in the beginning, but absent the panic. At the beginning, I did not know where to turn or what to do, but now, having learned both from the research and from the ten women who shared their lives and experiences with me, I know and understand a great deal more about the “enemy,” its nature and its ways. I see very clearly that the task before feminist educators is indeed a tough one, but a worthy work, and I feel better equipped to deal effectively with its challenges. It is my hope that this research will be useful and practical for others as well.

I feel a debt of gratitude to critical adult educators who have put their life’s work into helping us understand the forces operating keep us bound and limited so that we may increasingly live more emancipated lives. Because of their work, the eyes of my
understanding have certainly been opened, and my life consequently enriched, so that I have a greater sense of direction and purpose than before beginning this work. I also grateful for their challenge to us to have something to say, to have the courage to stand for something, and to reclaim our role as moral and political agents in our lives and work because I think it calls forth the best in all of us.
REFERENCES


www.who.int/frh-whd/GandH/GHreport/gendertech.htm


www.who.int/frh-whd/GandH/GHreport/gendertech.htm


APPENDICES
Appendix A

Pilot Interview Guide and Description of the Study
Interview Guide

Our interview together will follow the general guide below and will last approximately one hour. As you reflect on the incidents you have chosen and on the background questions, you may want to make notes as recollections occur between now and the actual interview. You may wish to use these as a reference during the interview as well. Thank you for participating in this study. I look forward to our time together.

Participants Background Information

I would like us to begin the interview by talking about your career, particularly relative to your feminist interests. To get started, I will ask you to discuss the following:

• Tell me about your work in the schools: how long you have worked there, whether you are at the elementary or secondary levels, any role(s) you have in addition to your job role, such as committee member or club sponsor, and so forth.
• Since the terms “feminist” and “feminism” have different meanings for different people, I would like you to tell me, in your own words, what these terms mean to you.

Recall of Critical Incidents:

Next, I would like you to recall the critical incidents you have chosen for this interview, and to relate these in as much detail as possible. Please consider the following questions as you organize your thoughts.

• Where and when did the situation take place?
• What exactly happened? Who was there? Who said and did what?
• What specific decisions did you make with respect to this situation? What specific actions did you take? What things did you consider that lead to the particular decision(s)/action(s).
• Why do you think this incident occurred in the first place?
• What were the effects of the situation for those involved? For the setting in which you work?
• What did you want to accomplish by your actions? What do you think others wanted to accomplish?
• What advantages do you think you or others had in the situation, i.e., what did you have going for you? What did others have going for them?
• Do you think you or others were at any disadvantage, and if so, what? What was going against you/others?
• What was the outcome of the situation— how did things turn out?
• As you think back about these experiences, what would you say you learned from them....what did they teach you?
Concluding Comments

I would like to conclude the interview by branching out from these specific incidents to include discussion about your thoughts on the future of your practice in the school setting, and the evolvement of your feminist perspective. Again, to help focus the discussion, the following questions are offered.

- What would you assess you need, but perhaps do not yet have, to further a feminist agenda in your practice?
- What influences, perhaps a person or experiences (other than those already discussed), contributed to shaping your feminist perspective?
Description of the Study

Sexism in elementary schools and in the formal schooling process has been the subject of a great deal of research in education over the past twenty years. Findings evidence that girls are shortchanged by a bias which privileges the male experience as normative, creating a power differential which accords girls a subordinate status within the system. Review of the literature in this area reveals a gap between what is known about sexism in the schools, and what is in fact being done by feminist teachers, administrators, counselors and psychologists to challenge its many manifestations and interrupting power relations based on sex. This study proposes to contribute to the knowledge base in this area by exploring how feminist interests are negotiated in day-to-day practice. A deeper understanding of this phenomenon may lead to wider applicability of feminist practices, and thereby contribute to the creation of educational environments more responsive to the interests of the female student.

For the purpose of this study a “feminist” is one characterized by her activism along two lines: 1) she challenges existing sexist practices and policy, actions which may be overt or subtle, and/or 2) she seeks opportunities to inform and educate others about sexism in the schools, which may occur formally, (as in staff development), or informally (as in interaction with students, parents or other faculty). In either instance, the agenda is to contribute to altering existing power relations based on sex.

This study is qualitative in design and will employ interviewing as the primary data collection method. The interview will last approximately one hour, will be tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interview will be structured around the recollection of two critical incidents you have experienced in your practice. For the purpose of this study, a critical incident is defined as 1) a time when your efforts to enact a feminist agenda was challenged or obstructed, or 2) a time when your efforts went well and you felt you accomplished a particular aim. You may wish to make notes about the critical incidents you recall. Please feel free to bring the notes with you for the interview. In this packet you will find an interview guide which may facilitate this process.
Appendix B

Revised Interview Guide and Description of the Study
Interview Guide

Our interview together will follow the general guidelines below and will last approximately one hour. As you reflect on the incidents you have chosen and on the background questions, you may want to make notes as recollections occur between now and the actual interview. You may wish to use these as a reference during the interview as well. Thank you for your participation in this study. I look forward to our time together.

Background Information:

The interview will begin with talking about your career. To get started, I will ask you to tell me about you work, for example, how long you have worked with the schools, whether you have worked at the elementary and/or secondary levels, role(s) you may have in addition to your job role, such as club sponsor, committee, and so forth, and I will ask you to situate your current position

Recall of Critical Incidents:

Next, I would like you to recall the critical incidents you have chosen for this interview and to relate these in as much detail as possible. Please consider the following questions as you organize your thoughts.

- Where and when did the incident take place? (Rural, urban, size of school, etc., how long you had been teaching at the time, geographic location).
- What exactly happened? Who was there? Who said and did what?
- What specific decisions did you make about this situation? What kinds of things went through your mind as you were sorting out what to do?
- What specific actions did you take? Again, what kinds of things went through your mind that influenced you to make the decisions you made?
- What advantages do you think you had in the situation, that is, what did you have going for you? What advantages do you think others had going for them?
- What disadvantages do you think you had in the situation, things going against you? What about others in the situation, what was going against them?
- What was the effect of the situation for those involved? For the setting in which you worked?
- What did you want to accomplish by your action? What do you think others wanted to accomplish?
- What was the outcome of the situation? How did things turn out?
- As you think back about the incident, what would you say you learned from it? What, if anything, would you do differently?
- During the incidents, were there any documents that were part of the interaction, such as memos, editorials, letters to the Board, journal entries, etc.?
Description of the Study

Sexism in the elementary and secondary schools has been the subject of a great deal of research in education over the past twenty years. Findings evidence that girls are shortchanged by a bias which privileges the male experience as normative, creating a power differential which accords girls a subordinate status within the system. Review of the literature in this area reveals a gap between what is known about sexism in the schools and what is in fact being done to challenge its many manifestations in day-to-day practice. This study seeks to narrow this gap by gaining an understanding of how women negotiate feminist interests in elementary and secondary schools.

For the purpose of this study a “feminist” is one characterized by her advocacy along two lines: 1) she challenges sexist practice and/or policy, actions which may be overt and public or subtle and less visible, and/or 2) she seeks opportunities to inform and educate others about sexism in the schools which may occur formally, as in staff development, or informally, as in interaction with students, parents, or other faculty and staff. In either instance, her agenda clearly is to contribute to altering existing gendered power relations.

This study will employ interviewing as the primary data collection method. The interview will last approximately one hour, will be tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interview will be structured around the recollection of one or more critical incidents you have experienced in your practice. For the purpose of this study a critical incident is defined as 1) a time when your efforts were challenged or obstructed, and 2) a time when your efforts went well and you felt you accomplished a particular aim. You may wish to make notes about the critical incidents you recall, and if so, please feel free to bring the notes with you for the interview. In this packet you will find an interview guide which may facilitate the process.