DISSERTATION

MAGICIANS AND ASSISTANTS: HOW A GROUP OF HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS AND BOYS PERCEIVE THEIR GENDERED ROLES IN AND OUT OF SCHOOL

Submitted by

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WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE DISSERTATION PREPARED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY ALLISON SHORE ENTITLED MAGICIANS AND ASSISTANTS: HOW A GROUP OF HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS AND BOYS PERCEIVE THEIR GENDERED ROLES IN AND OUT OF SCHOOL BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY.

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

MAGICIANS AND ASSISTANTS: HOW A GROUP OF HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS AND BOYS PERCEIVE THEIR GENDERED ROLES IN AND OUT OF SCHOOL

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the climate of a high school campus to answer the questions: How do high school students perceive their school climate in terms of gender? How do students perceive the way power is exercised in and out of school based on gender? During the initial stage of this project, single-sex focus groups allowed students to voice opinions and reveal attitudes about school and the way they saw gender as a determining factor in their lives at school. The second phase brought the two groups together to participate in activities designed to delve further into gender-related issues in which they expressed keen interest. Feminist research theories guided the development of the study and the analysis of the data.

Students in this study recognized that the world is divided by sex, with men holding economic, political, and social power, which women infrequently share. Environmentally, female students expressed that they felt "silenced" within the school. An absence of women, women's issues, and female role models was identified and lamented by several students in both the curriculum and the classroom environment. They seemed, however, to be experiencing a

developmental struggle, a reluctance to deal with gender as related to themselves. They kept gender at an arm's length, not noticing inconsistencies or incongruities within their own lives. They saw levels of advantage and disadvantage as natural.

This study illustrated that of the many institutions that maintain an unequal distribution of power, school is one of them. Sex roles are clearly defined within the overall power structure, and taken-for-granted roles remain unquestioned by students. The roots of these power differentials remain unexplored, thus preserving the current distributions of power in society. Much more work is needed in the area of feminist research and curriculum transformation, and the extensive gender-related research and discussion that was undertaken twenty years ago has dissipated. Silencing of students and the dictating of gendered norms and roles continue to hinder the success and futures of students today.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to Lena Christine and Camille Annalee Long-Shore, who supported me as I worked long hours, left for days to escape to a "writing cabin," and carried on about feminist ideals until we were *all* blue in the face. May this work yield results of opportunity, hope, and many realized dreams for you, my darling girls.

ACKOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation is titled "Magicians and Assistants," referring to the words of one female participant who beautifully described the roles she sees men and women in this country playing: men are the magicians-- economically, politically, and socially in this country to a large degree. Women are the assistants-- allowing everything to happen *to* them and not questioning why someone would want to chop these assistants in half or throw knives at the remarkable faces. The magician not only is in charge of the show and the one making the magic happen but also the one who gets the applause and recognition. In reality, the assistant makes the magic happen, but the world sees just the magician performing the show and the assistant, a beautiful but silent sidekick standing by, allowing everything to happen *to* her.

In my world, I've been allowed to be the magician and my wonderful partner, Marc, has been the assistant. This process has brought me applause and recognition, while Marc has remained in the background, supporting me while these events are happening to him and around him, going along with my plan but actually being the one to make everything happen with his calm dedication and 'sleight of hand.' Without him, this show- *my* marathon- would be nothing. For over five years, my wonderful Marc has held my hand, wiped my tears, took care of the girls, cleaned up my messes, (hardly) complained about the quality of meals, and generally loved and adored me through this ugly process. He picked me up

and encouraged me to keep going when I wanted only to quit, and he persuaded me that it would all be worth it. That remains to be seen... but what is already evident is his wish to rediscover just a little of the magician's role. I think I can arrange it.

There are many more people who deserve thanks and applause for their support and guidance through this process. We can argue all we want about whether it takes a village to raise a child, but it certainly does take a village to write a dissertation! Thank you to...

...my parents, who love, encourage, and champion me even when my research couldn't be farther from their ideology. My mother deserves huge praise, not only because she loves and supports me unconditionally every single day. She also made several trips to Colorado, conducted focus groups with me, proofread my proposal and several drafts of this paper, transcribed every tape in record time, and read every line of this dissertation with a critical and kind eye. Besides that, she generally cheered and sustained me. She did all this while watching my children, making dinner, polishing silver I didn't even know I had, and keeping me in working order. It's unbelievable that with every passing year, I need and appreciate my mother more than ever. My father also deserves immense thanks, because without him I would not have had this fire in me to question, argue, and investigate the wrongs of the world. Through his committed (stubborn?) exterior is a man who loves his daughters absolutely, even when their politics make him

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...my sister Christine (the pretty twin, heehee), who encouraged me, listened to me, read drafts for me, and believed in me, telling me I'm brilliant even when my work clearly isn't! I think she might actually believe that I am. Who is she kidding?!

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Without all these people and so many more, I would not have been able to begin or continue or finish this work. Thank you for being a remarkable village for me.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This study explored the perceptions of a group of students at one high school about the role that gender plays in their lives inside and outside of school. Qualitative research methods were used to gather data about the school climate. First, focus groups helped answer original research questions surrounding perceptions of school climate and gender related experiences of students. New research questions were generated by the initial groups, and students participated in classroom activities designed to elicit further data about how students see power operating in their lives and in society. Feminist research theories guided the development of the study and the analysis of the data.

Background

Girls and boys across the United States experience secondary school in much different ways. Groundbreaking gender equity studies conducted following the United States Congress's 1973 passage of Title IX revealed significant gender bias in schools. Today, girls and boys continue to have divergent educational experiences in secondary schools in the United States. Both boys and girls face intimidating, often antagonistic, environments on school campuses, and that much of the aggression is gender related. This study sought to uncover the gendered dynamics of one school and to provide explanations for them in hopes of proposing solutions to the problems.

Study Design

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the climate of a high school campus in a Colorado city of approximately 135,000 people to answer the questions: How do high school students perceive their school climate in terms of gender? How do students perceive the way power is exercised in and out of school based on gender? This two-phase research project consisted of two single-sex focus groups of 10-12 students and an interactive classroom and group conversation session; researcher observation and field notes, as well as individual conversations with students, added depth to the research process during the two stages. Both phases concentrated on how students on a high school campus, defined as a school of grades ten through twelve, saw gender manifesting itself on their campus and in their lives. During the initial stage of this project, single-sex focus groups allowed students to voice opinions and reveal attitudes about school and the way they saw gender as a determining factor in their lives at school. The second phase brought the two groups together to participate in activities designed to delve further into gender-related issues in which they expressed keen interest. These methods allowed "interactive data" to emerge; participants and researchers listened to others and added to the discussion with related information, and is thus "exploratory [and] interpretive" (Wilkinson, 1999, p. 220).

This investigation intended to help reveal how male and female students felt in classes, while attending recreational and co-curricular activities, and walking through the school halls. During the initial focus groups, specific attention was paid to where students felt safe and unsafe, objectified, picked on, or invisible, and to the kinds of limitations participants felt were placed on them based on their sex. Analysis of student voices from the first phase helped construct new research questions, and the second phase of this project focused on themes of gender and power that emerged from obvious participant priorities. This research project was qualitative and relied on focus groups, unstructured interviews, classroom activities, and participant observations for data collection. This approach allowed me to inductively determine how participants understood their lives and the gendered world around them.

Theoretical Framework

Feminist theory guided the development and execution of this study, from framework to data collection and analysis. The goal of feminism, as defined by Chris Weedon (1987), is to reconstruct the "existing power relations between men and women" and rebuild society free from the damages of patriarchy (p.1). Attempting to understand the gendered constructs of girls and boys on a secondary school campus could help inform and guide policy making. Finally, in framing questions and analyzing data in a feminist study, evaluation of existing social, historical, and cultural practices and institutions took place both

individually and with participants. Focus group studies provided a way for educational research to further these feminist aims. Drawing on conversation-like groups to hear voices of many people allowed the gatherings to become "naturalistic" places where participants could "negotiate meaning," collaborate with each other and me, and finally, helped participants make sense of and explain their own experiences and viewpoints (Wilkinson, 1999, p. 235).

Critical theory informed the analysis of the data and the development of recommendations for schools to combat gender discrimination, inequities, sex-based harassment, or obstacles to optimal educational experiences that were revealed during this investigation. To examine the meanings students placed on societal issues, it was necessary to study girls and boys and how they viewed their own lives, experiences, and the structures that surround them, especially those institutions that allow the inequities to persist.

Research Questions

Given the problem and purpose of this study, the following initial research questions guided the first phase of this study:

1. How do high school students perceive their school climate in terms of gender?

2. How do students perceive the way power is exercised in and out of school based on gender?

In attempting to answer these initial research questions, single sex focus groups were employed, along with researcher observation and field notes, to collect data. Equally important to the verbal responses from both young men and young women were the unspoken behaviors and attitudes displayed in the focus group experiences as well as the before- and after-class interactions and the hallway behaviors. In addition, individual conversations with two students allowed the researcher to check accuracy of initial analysis and to delve further into issues that arose during group interviews. As is necessary in inductive qualitative research, the initial observations and data led to the detection of some patterns, which led to the emergence of new questions.

Emergent research questions. The interest and level of discussion around gender and power led to me to the realization that I wanted to delve further into this topic and help students more deeply explore these issues. Three follow-up activities, described in the third chapter, were developed and implemented a week after the initial conversations with students to seek answers to the emergent sub-questions. These questions were as follows:

3. What are student understandings and views of women in positions of political power and the men who may support them?
4. What are students' perceptions and understandings of how societal roles and power differentials of women and men are portrayed through the media?

5. What is the level of student awareness and understanding of the differences in earning potential and pay equity based on gender?

Significance of the Study

Climate studies reveal significant concerns about how students perceive schools and the barriers and supports embedded in their structures. By designing climate studies that allow researchers to better understand students' impressions of educational settings, changes in teacher behavior and institutional practices could help lead to higher student achievement and more satisfaction with schools at all levels. Campus climate inquiries illustrate substantial differences in the perceptions of educational institutions, policies, and behaviors which can lead to high attrition rates, low grades, and disparate opportunities among students. Using results from well designed studies could bring about momentous changes in teacher behavior, institutional policies and practices, and eventually, in student accomplishments and satisfaction with schools at all levels.

This study was significant in that a comprehensive study of gender issues at one high school campus, using a focus group format to hear a variety of voices, has not been done in this geographic area. I discovered how girls and boys felt about their school experiences and was able to better understand gender relations and their impacts on girls' and boys' lives at and away from school. In attempting to see how gender is perceived, I discovered some underlying themes that contribute to positive and negative school experiences and to the silencing or alienating of

boys and girls. I exposed how one group of students makes sense of the changing power structures and provided insight that may contribute to change in the institutional policies and practices that reproduce the imbalanced composition of power in the United States today.

Definitions of Terms for Purposes of this Study

To better understand the purposes of this study, it is helpful to have working definitions of commonly used terms. *Campus climate* can be defined as "behaviors...ranging from subtle to cumulative to dramatic that can influence whether an individual feels personally safe, listened to, valued, and treated fairly and with respect. It consists of policies and practices, attitudes and beliefs, behaviors and activities of all the people who make up the campus" (Campus Climate Network Group, 2002). *Feminism* is a doctrine of equal rights for women and the ideology of social transformation aiming to create a world for women beyond simple social equality, and the organized movement to attain them. (Humm, 1990). *Feminist methodology* refers to the study of the application of techniques and processes used in the research process that strive to accomplish the goals of feminism (Fonow & Cook, 1991). *Gender* refers to socially constructed, culturally shaped group of attributes and behaviors give to the male or female, (Humm, 1990), while *sex* refers to the physical anatomy of a person (Code, 2000). *Perception* is the act of observing, recognizing, comprehending, and becoming aware through sight, hearing, touch, taste, or smell (Agnes, 2004). *Power*

relations can be defined as how people or groups of people exert the ability to control, influence, sway, or force others to act or think (Agnes, 2004). *Sexual harassment* is "any unwelcome requests for sexual favors, unwelcome advances, and any other verbal or non-verbal conduct of a sexual nature," either when a person in a power position makes decisions that are based on compliance by another person, or when the behavior of anyone makes an environment hostile, intimidating, or offensive (Sexual Assault Response Services of Southern Maine, 2006). To *silence* a person is to cause him or her to be silent or to repress someone (Agnes, 2004).

Delimitations and Assumptions

Delimitations of this study included time constraints, location of campuses, sample criteria that limited selection of focus group participants, and access to participants. Research was limited to one semester, therefore providing a snapshot of school climate at one site. Site selection relied on the desire of school officials to openly discuss gender issues on campus and their willingness to participate in the study. Participants were students wishing to discuss gender issues on campus, recruited from one psychology class by teacher recommendation; they were volunteers and were not randomly selected. Therefore, generalizability to other populations and settings, including those with a more diverse population, is limited. Assumptions of the researcher include the following: 1) that responses gathered from participants reflected an overall, but limited, assessment of gender

issues at one school; and 2) that there were issues of inequality, risk, or alienation that exist at the selected site. These issues include gender and sexual harassment, perceived lack of personal physical safety on campus, a visually hostile environment, absence of women in curricula at the school, unequal behavioral expectations and subsequent student consequences and punishments, and sex-based discrimination. Assumptions were based on former observations of this school and others in this and other school districts.

Researcher's Perspective and Role

A researcher brings biases and assumptions to any project, and it is necessary to identify and record these beliefs; feminist research demands such reflexivity. My perspective as the principal researcher for this project is that gender plays a primary role in determining treatment in and out of school, that sex roles in this country are clearly defined and adhered to throughout life, and that this stratification has negative effects on boys and men, and disastrous effects on girls and women. I believe that boys and girls are subject to unfair expectations and receive unjustifiably different education experiences. I believe that strict adherence to gender roles can negatively impact men and boys as well as girls and women. Furthermore, I believe that schools reinforce and reproduce sexual inequalities through teacher treatment of students, institutional policies and practices, and curriculum. I believe that schools are carefully created

institutions that replicate inequality, and that this structure serves to maintain the current power structure in this country.

My role in this study was that of observer, moderator, student, and teacher. I have worked in the building where the study took place for two years, although with limited direct student contact. For five years I have taught in a teacher preparation program which held a professional development school in this building. Our university classes met at the high school so that instruction was integrated with practice. Because of the location of our courses, I have spent two years observing students and talking with administrators at this site. During that time, I noticed patterns of disrespectful language among girls and boys in the halls and the persistent lack of women's contributions, issues, and voices in curricula. I also observed obvious signs of sexism, such as a prom advertisement poster showing a female student whose dress was slit very high up her leg, with the tagline, "It's ok to show a little leg." Another time a group of girls described a coach heard degrading his male athletes, "Ok, ladies, if you're going to run like that, it's going to be more for you!" During the study I served as primary moderator of focus groups, interviewer of individual students, and teacher of specifically designed, research-focused lessons. I remained on site for the duration of the study and for a month following the last research group. As a student and instructor at the university, I am aware of many examples of overt harassment of women faculty, lack of support and promotion of untenured women professors

who question the status quo, questionable behaviors by male faculty, and covert silencing of women during meetings and forums. I wanted to immerse myself in a high school's culture to learn more about the gendered dynamics of these students' lives and to begin to formulate ways to enact change.

Organization of Remaining Chapters

Following this introduction, this paper will provide a comprehensive review of the literature in several key areas: campus climate studies, with a focus on gender issues; focus group research methodology; and feminist research philosophy and methodology. The third chapter will focus on the methodology underpinning the study and the methods used during data collection. Next, a thorough analysis of the study will be included in the fourth chapter, followed by recommendations for policy and practice changes as stated by, and inferred from, participants in the final chapter.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter will present a review of literature that guided the development, implementation, and analysis of this research project. First, a summary of school climate studies will provide a background for how the project was visualized and created. Then a review of focus group research will offer an argument for the use of this type of research methodology for hearing about school climate and its gendered components. Next, an analysis of feminist theory and the principles guiding feminist research will offer a methodological framework for how the study was developed, how research questions were asked, and how data were collected and analyzed. A synthesis of focus groups methods as a way to advance feminist research goals will be provided, after which the influence of narrative research will be discussed briefly.

School Climate Studies

Introduction

Universities and secondary schools across the United States have assessed campus and school climate to determine what different groups of people perceive as educational barriers and support, in hopes of improving student retention and graduation rates while enhancing the overall school experience. Several climate studies reveal substantial concerns regarding student perceptions of educational institutions, policies, and behaviors that directly relate to attrition rates, grades, and disparate opportunities among students. One recent study (Rankin & Reason,

2005), for example, found that students of color and women students reported significantly higher incidents of harassment than white male students. Another study (Kuperminc, Leadbeater, Emmons, & Blatt, 1997) found that students who perceived their school climate as better reported fewer stressful events and higher academic self-concept and self-worth. A third indicated that perceptions of school climate were a significant predictor of GPA (Buckley, Storino, & Sebastiani, 2003).

Girls and boys across the United States experience secondary school in much different ways. Groundbreaking gender equity studies conducted following the 1973 passage of Title IX revealed significant gender bias in schools. Girls and boys received different treatment from teachers (Sadker & Sadker, 1986; 1994), were questioned using distinct strategies that biased one above the other (Flynn & Chambers, 1994; Hillman & Davenport, 1978; Kahle, 1990; Sadker, 1984), and were subject to separate behavioral expectations and punishments (American Association of University Women, 1998; Chapman, 2002; Grayson & Martin, 1984). In addition, girls and boys were represented in substantially different numbers and ways in textbooks (Girls Count, 1992; Sadker & Sadker, 1994), received disparate funding for sports teams and programs, and showed considerable discrepancies on major math tests (Becker, 1990; Fair Test Examiner, 1989; Hallinan & Sorenson, 1987; U.S. Department of Education, 1992).

Today, girls and boys continue to have divergent educational experiences in secondary schools in the United States. Both in academic research and popular literature, stories of inequality and unfriendly conditions in high schools are plentiful. Girls still lag in S.A.T. test results, particularly in math where their average scores are thirty-four points lower than boys (College Board Report, 2003). Girls take fewer advanced classes in math, science, and technology, (American Association of University Women Educational Foundation, 1998) and see few women in positions of leadership at all academic levels (Gardiner, Enomoto, & Grogan, 2001). Boys, too, face their own set of problems at school. Compared with girls, they are less likely to graduate from high school or attend higher educational institutions and are suspended from school in larger numbers (Goldin, Katz, & Kuziemko, 2006; Stoops, 2004). Boys also receive lower grades (Downey & Vogt Yuan, 2005) and are more highly represented in special education classes (Oswald, Best, Coutinho, & Nagle, 2003). They are victims of crimes at school-- often violent crimes-- at an alarming rate: in one study, seventeen percent of boys reported they had been in fights at school and twelve percent reported being threatened or hurt with a weapon at school (DeVoe, Peter, Noonan, Snyder, & Baum, 2005). In a recent nationwide study, over half of boys reported being victims of physical assault (Finkelhor, Ormrod, Turner, & Hamby, 2005).

It is clear that both boys and girls face intimidating, often antagonistic, environments on school campuses, and that much of the aggression is gender related. Documentation of sexual harassment, at both the secondary and college levels affecting men and women, persists. A national study of university students revealed that the problem is pervasive and alarming: over 80% of female students and 70% of male students report experiencing some form of sexual harassment in school (American Association of University Women, 2001). An earlier study reported that 56% of women and 51% of men had experienced gender harassment on college campuses (Shepela & Levesque, 1998).

Students at junior and senior high schools face similar problems. In several national studies, approximately 80% of girls and 75% of boys stated that they have been targets of sexual harassment at school (Berson, Berson, & Ferron, 2001; Stein, 1995; 1999). Adolescents in one of the studies described "being touched, grabbed, or pinched in a sexual way," and many said they wished they could leave school as a result of the harassment (Stein, 1999, p. 213). In addition, a U.S. Department of Education national study on school violence (2005) reported that from 1999 to 2003, six violent crimes occurred per 1000 secondary school students (p. iii), and 71% of public schools reported at least one violent crime on the school campus (p. v). Students who felt unsafe on secondary school campuses were not alone; social workers, eighty-one percent of whom are female, also reported sexual harassment and fear of violence at school (Astor & Behre, 1997).

Personal narratives revealed even more insidious and damaging atmospheres in schools today. Stories include accounts of threats, beatings, and rape that led to failing grades, eating disorders, dropping out of school, and "self-hatred, depression, isolation, and thoughts of suicide" (Human Rights Watch, 2001, p. 4). Students who identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual were at even greater risk of being hurt at school: in one study, more than fifty percent of students reported being victims of verbal assault and eleven percent of physical assault (D'Augelli, Pilkington, & Hershberger, 2002). In another, one-third of gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered students reported harassment while at school (Rankin, 2003). Hostility and assault associated with gender and sex is a problem of great consequence and must be addressed by measuring school climate perceptions and making policy decisions based on findings.

Defining School Climate

While *school climate* can be defined in almost as many ways as there are campuses, most studies investigating schools' social atmospheres have looked at student and faculty perceptions of institutions' physical structures; demographics; attitudes, interactions, and relationships; and general feelings about the sites. Rankin and Reason's (2005) analysis of race, gender, and harassment described *climate* as "the current perceptions and attitudes of faculty, staff, and students" (p. 48). Another study defined it as the "quality and frequency of interpersonal interactions" (Loukas, Suzuki, & Horton, 2006, p.491). Other authors refer to

equally unquantifiable characteristics of schools when referring to climate, such as general behaviors and attitudes of students and staff in the school (Harris Interactive and Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network [GLSEN], 2005), "the feel" of a school (Best Practices, 2004), or an "ephemeral...elusive force" discernible to most who walk in the doors (Deal & Peterson, 1999, p.2).

While climate does consist of these imprecise feelings that students and staff have about a building or campus, other researchers have defined school climate by quantifying certain events, such as bullying (Naylor, Cowie, Cosin, de Bettencourt, & Lemme, 2006; Yoneyama & Rigby, 2006), sexual harassment and gender violence (American Association of University Women, 2001, 2004; Human Rights Watch, 2001; Stein, 1995), or acts of violence on school grounds (Buckley, et al., 2003; DeVoe, et al., 2005). Examining climate of an educational institution requires exploring the "current perceptions, attitudes, and expectations... [of] specific sections or parts" of the school (Bauer, 1998). These differing definitions indicate the broad range of factors that contribute to a school's overall climate.

Critical Components

However a researcher chooses to define school climate, there are many critical components of educational environments which researchers have identified as important features that impact learning and attitudes toward school. Most researchers agree that relationships among, and behaviors of, students and personnel make up significant elements of school climate (Buckley, et al., 2003;

Kuperminc, et al., 1997; Strange & Banning, 2001). Connections that impacted school climate perceptions included interactions among students, both positive and negative; communication between students and adults, which was seen as either encouraging and constructive or lacking enthusiasm and judgmental; and relationships among adults that transmitted to students what teachers and administrators thought about their own buildings.

Student relationships, and their corresponding attitudes and behavior, greatly influence how students feel about the climate of their schools. Of the many studies conducted recently that measure climate or try to gauge the impact of climate perceptions, two themes regarding student relationships have emerged: 1) race plays a part in perceptions of climate; and 2) violence and the threat of aggression greatly impact how students behave, perform academically, and feel about their schools.

Differing perceptions and race. One recent study examined race and its impact on school climate perceptions (Rankin & Reason, 2005). Researchers sought to investigate whether students from different racial groups experienced university campus climates differently. They did so by surveying 15,356 students from ten geographically diverse campuses-- two private and eight public colleges-- across the United States to understand how students experienced their environment and if it was related to their race and ethnicity. Researchers examined personal experiences, including encountering and witnessing race-based

harassment; student perceptions of campus climate, and how students felt about institutional actions "to improve racial climate on campus" (p. 55). The study explored whether demographic differences among students were associated with different perceptions of school climate. Significant differences were found in much of the data. For example, students of color and women students reported significantly higher incidents of harassment, defined as "any offensive, hostile, or intimidating conduct that interferes unreasonably with one's ability to work or learn" (p.50). White male students experienced considerably less harassment on campus than other groups; significantly greater proportion of students of color viewed the academic climate as "racist," "hostile," and "disrespectful," and felt less accepted, as compared to white students (p.52). These differences led researchers to conclude "students of color experience college campuses quite differently than White students do" (p. 57) [capitalization theirs].

Aggression. Another study investigated school climate by examining incidents of aggression and was reported at the Annual Conference of the American Psychological Association in 2003 (Buckley, et al.). These researchers surveyed seventh grade students in a California school district. The purpose was "1) to explore the relationship among perceptions of school climate, victimization, and academic achievement in middle school students, and 2) to examine possible differences in perceptions of school climate across gender and ethnicity" (p. 3). The instrument was an existing survey, the California School Climate and Safety

Survey, which measured student victimization and student perceptions of their school in three areas: 1) how well the school is "kept," 2) how supportive the adults at the school were, and 3) how safe students felt at school. The study revealed several significant gender and racial differences among participants. Boys' grade point averages were significantly lower than girls', and Latino boys had the lowest averages. Boys, especially Latino boys, were influenced more strongly by both supportive adults in the building and positive relationships with other students (p. 4). In addition, researchers found that perceptions of school climate and violence directly impacted grade point averages, with boys showing a larger association between positive school climate perceptions and higher averages: "for students overall, perceptions of school climate was a significant predictor of GPA" (p. 5).

Campus climate studies illustrate substantial differences in the perceptions of educational institutions, policies, and behaviors which can lead to high attrition rates, low grades, and disparate opportunities among students. Using results from well designed studies could bring about momentous changes in teacher behavior, institutional policies and practices, and eventually, in student accomplishments and satisfaction with schools at all levels.

School safety. While most early campus climate studies focused on college and university campuses, many recent studies have investigated student perceptions of secondary school climates. In "Perceived school climate and

difficulties in the social adjustment of middle school students" (Kuperminc, et al., 1997), researchers investigated how school climate influenced middle school students' social adjustment. They examined how differences in perceptions of school climate could explain variance in student behavioral problems and emotional distress by assessing grade point averages and exposure to stressful events. Participants were 499 sixth and seventh grade students attending a large urban middle school. Data were collected over two days "as part of a longitudinal study of gender-linked vulnerabilities for depression and problem behavior;" researchers investigated "externalizing problems," or behavioral problems, and "internalizing problems," or emotional problems (p. 78). Researchers tried to explain gender differences in perceived school climate and its relationship to academic self-concept and performance, among other variables. They found that students who perceived the school climate as better reported fewer stressful events and that more positive perceptions of school climate are associated with fewer externalizing and internalizing problems for boys and girls. They reported that "boys' perceptions of school climate were negatively correlated with externalizing problems," and that, girls who had better perceptions of their school climate reported higher self-worth (p. 80). From this study and others, it is clear that sex and gender make a difference in school climate perceptions.

Several climate studies reveal significant concerns about how students perceive schools and the barriers and supports embedded in their structures. The

behavior of all personnel greatly impacts these feelings and therefore student behavior. By designing climate studies that would allow researchers to better understand students' impressions of educational settings, changes in teacher behavior and institutional practices could help lead to higher student achievement and more student satisfaction with schools at all levels.

Focus Group Research

Introduction

Of the many qualitative research methods available to researchers, focus group inquiry best fits the purposes of the study, which are to explore and describe the perceptions of female and male students at one high school on their perceptions of how gender functions in their school. I sought to learn what students thought about a number of issues related to being young women and men within a school climate, what their experiences of school and their perceptions of the climate there were, and to make visible the common structural gendered conditions in which they are educated. The research goal was to identify the critical elements of their culture and to identify the impact of a school's climate on them, and how these perceptions enhanced or threatened their educational experiences.

Defining Focus Group Research

Focus group research gathers small clusters of people and asks them to discuss a topic chosen by the researcher, who then analyzes individual

participant's words as well as the interactions among group members. First used in 1926 to test a "social distance scale" (Bogardus), focus group research was developed further as a research tool to determine the reaction of the American public to wartime propaganda (Merton, Fiske & Kendall, 1956), to investigate people's feelings about movies, and later as a technique for investigating health issues (de Koning & Martin, 1996; Madriz, 1998; Morgan, 1998; O'Brien, 1993). Often, data from groups helped researchers develop focused questionnaires or evaluate programs (Morgan, 1998). Marketing researchers and social scientists who originally applied the method believed that by allowing participants to "jointly produce accounts about proposed topics in a socially organized situation," rich information for analysis would emerge (Smithson, 2000, p. 105). The valuable difference between this type of research and other individual research techniques is that the communication among group members provides equally valuable information as the individual participants' words. It is a method of research in which the groups themselves, and not the individuals, "are the main unit of analysis" (Smithson, 2000, p. 105). Together, group members explore their attitudes toward, opinions about, and insight into specific aspects of daily life. Focus groups, therefore, can be defined as "a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher" (Morgan, 1998, p.23).

Rubin and Rubin (1995) place focus group research in the category of "cultural interviews;" appropriate investigations for which to choose this method are ones that "focus on the norms, values, understandings, and taken-for-granted rules of behavior of a group or society" (p. 28). Kitzinger (1999) notes that the method is especially effective when asking about people's "experiences and points of view" (p. 299) and can reveal "(sub)cultural values or group norms" (p. 300). While participants disclose personal viewpoints, researchers identify common themes and beliefs.

Morgan (1993) concurs that focus groups produce high quality data regarding "cultural patterns" with participants whose views and experiences vary considerably (p.25). Therefore, focus groups are suitable for exploring the lives of adolescent girls and boys within a school culture-- the ideal place to examine how teenagers think and feel about certain issues. Many adolescents are motivated to make and keep social connections; students often crave a connectedness to peers above those with parents or teachers (Woolfolk, 2001; Eggen & Kauchak, 1994). Group research, then, could make it easier for younger participants to delve into their perceptions and feelings "in ways that would be less easily accessible in a one-on-one interview" (Kitzinger, 1995, p. 299; Wong, et al., 2005). A researcher who has used the method with teenagers found that interviews with groups of students "made it possible to tap into the wide array of ideas and information that emerged as the teens interacted with one another" (Steele, 1999, p. 332).

Unlike other qualitative research methods, such as narrative research which explores the words and lives of individuals, and ethnography, in which others seek to understand essential elements of particular cases, focus group studies rely on communication among group members to produce "interactive data;" participants speak among themselves, creating a synergy that allows new ideas and opinions to be explored, challenged, and formed (Hydén & Bülow 2003; Kitzinger, 1994; Kitzinger, 1995; Wong, et al., 2005). Both participants and researchers benefit from this interaction. As group members answer questions and form ideas, others think about these values and shape their own opinions and beliefs about the topic and then are able to articulate them in a deeper way. In the process, the group "builds on and utilises the interaction" of the assembly (Hydén & Bülow, 2003, p.308).

In one study (Wong, et al, 2005), participants themselves recognized that the group process allowed them to explore ideas with and reveal their opinions to each other. The result of these interactions is "more fully articulated accounts... a rich, co-constructed narrative," replete with valuable insights and wisdom (Överlien, Aronsson & Hydén 2005, p. 339). The interaction with other research participants "encourages a greater variety of communication," leaving investigators with profoundly rich data. Participants question and challenge each other, explore ideas together, help each other clarify, and often make it easier to

be clear about what they're saying because they must make their thoughts clear to each other.

Many researchers and participants have found that challenges or confrontations among focus group participants improved and elevated the discussion (Kitzinger, 1995; Tiggemann, Gardiner, & Slater, 2000; Wong, et al., 2005). Kitzinger (1995) felt that disagreements during the group process enhanced rather than inhibited openness and disclosure; arguments between group members sometimes provide the richest data. When co-respondents challenge ideas and opinions, it may force a participant to add additional information, better articulate viewpoints, and more clearly express beliefs. When disputes occur in focus group discussions, participants "may explore areas where they disagree [and] this offers the researcher unique possibility of understanding how views are expressed, constructed and defended" (Överlien, Aronsson & Hydén 2005, p. 339). In addition, focus group disagreements can "help to forge a human connection" among the participants.

It is perhaps because of the rich benefits to participants that researchers are able to gather such abundant data from focus group research. The researcher studies not only the voices of individual group members but also analyzes the group's interactions with each other. When a study examines the communication, contact, and emerging relations among participants, the interface among the group members allows investigators to employ "interactive data as part

of the research," examining how individual identities impact other participants' perceptions of issues and ideas (Kitzinger, 1994, p. 104). When researchers scrutinize the communication among participants, they are able "to learn more about how attitudes and opinions are created and sustained through interaction with others" (Hydén & Bülow 2003, p.306-7). Furthermore, participants' reflective thinking and interaction decreases the tendency for the researcher to speculate on or presume "that she knows 'the meaning' of any particular anecdote or account'" (Kitzinger, 1994, p.113). Instead, the researcher pulls meaning from communication among group members.

Advantages

Pre-existing groups. Another benefit for both researcher and participants in a focus group study lies in the possibility of using pre-existing groups of people with whom to focus conversation. In their research on teacher and social worker burnout, Hydén and Bülow (2003) recognized that when group members share "some general social features or experiences," or whose circumstances coincide, they are often likely to discuss issues more freely since they have common understandings. Similarly, a study conducted by the AIDS Media Research Project (1993) employed focus group work with patients infected with HIV who already knew each other "through living, working, or socialising together;" researchers believed that these participants who "naturally discuss" issues found

answering questions easier than if they had been surrounded by strangers (Kitzigner, 1994, p. 105).

In addition, an exploration of young women's views of sexuality and sexual politics that employed focus groups consisting of girls living together in a detention home (Överlien, et al., 2005) revealed a "rich, co-constructed narrative about sexual assault" that may not have emerged without the supportive atmosphere already in place (p. 339). The researchers in the previously mentioned studies found that not only did ease of discussion occur among members who knew each other in other contexts, but also that the participants were able to fill in for each other when they forgot specific items and supported each other when memories became difficult to relate. For the group members, the "shared culture" helped build a comfortable environment and encouraged honest, thorough discussion of difficult ideas. (Kitzinger, 1994, p. 108). The use of pre-existing groups- members who share traits or experiences- "encourages participants to express, clarify, or even to develop perspectives" (Kitzinger, 1994, 112).

Embarrassing or hard to reach information. The focus group research method may also help respondents open up more, providing a safe place to either express embarrassing information, convey difficult experiences, or even to remain silent (Merton, Fiske, & Kendall, 1990; Gilmore, DeLamater & Wagstaff, 1996; Hydén & Bülow, 2003; Kitzinger, 1994; Överlien, et al., 2005; Tiggemann,

Gardiner,& Slater, 2000). The group process can be "non-threatening and even beneficial" to participants, creating a sense of wellbeing, encouraging and reassuring timid or insecure members (Tiggemann, Gardiner, & Slater, 2000, p. 647). Because the interviews are not one-on-one, if an individual wishes to refrain from answering a question, she may do so without drawing attention to herself. The open format may "reduce pressures on each participant to respond to every question, making the interview more enjoyable" (Wong, et al., 2005, p. 380). In addition, a group discussing awkward or uncomfortable topics, or nonstandard and unpopular feelings or opinions, may encourage a feeling of safety "because the less inhibited members of the group 'break the ice' for shyer participants [and] help each other to overcome embarrassment" (Kitzinger, 1994, p. 111).

Focus groups participants may find the process less intimidating than individual interviews, since members may express similar beliefs, have had experiences, or provide support for each other (Madriz, 2000). Group interviews often help "difficult-to-reach [or] high-apprehensives" to communicate because of the comfort of being in a group, many of whom may express similar beliefs and experiences (Kitzinger, 1994, p.112). When participants believe that their ideas violate socially acceptable thinking or deviate from commonly held cultural norms, focus groups can help minimize fear of expressing these perceived abnormalities. When a bold group member opens up, a "release of inhibitions"

follows, and participants give "progressively more personalized responses" to researcher questions (Merton, et al., 1990, p. 143). Kitzinger (1994) notes that this method can ease discussion of taboo topics, and that "group work is invaluable in enabling people to articulate experiences in ways which break away from the clichés of dominant cultural constructions" of the researcher (or perceived to be those of the researcher)" (p. 112).

Participants set the priorities. One of the most advantageous features of focus group research is that it encourages participants to introduce and consider the topics they find most important, instead of simply following the researcher's agenda (DuBois, Lockerd, Reach, & Parra, 2003; Kitzinger, 1994; Tiggemann, et al., 2000). A way for "eliciting issues which participants think are relevant," focus groups allow members' voices to be at the center of the research and the analysis (Smithson, 2000, p. 106). Student voices in this study will be the primary data and help the researcher construct further research questions. Instead of adhering to a list of items deemed important to adult researchers, "group work ensures that priority is given to the respondents' hierarchy of importance....their language and concepts, their frameworks for understanding the world" (Kitzinger, 1994, p. 108). Expressions, language, tone, body language, and interaction among the girls and boys all will be part of the information collected. Data emerges as a conversation among friends, "in [participants'] own language," deterring researchers from

misinterpreting or being confused by experiences described by students (Tiggemann, et al., 2000, p. 645).

Disadvantages

As with any research technique, the use of focus group inquiry encompasses difficulties that must be addressed before an investigation can begin. Since its relatively recent adoption as a social science research method, the use of focus groups has been perceived as lacking depth; compared with narrative analysis, group investigations are not intimate meetings of two people, do not delve deeply into a person's life story, and do not take place for long periods of time (Överlien, et al., 2005, p. 333). Researchers who use this method extensively, however, have found that instead of producing shallow findings, this technique can help people "articulate their motivations, fears, attitudes, and opinions...[and] be more explicit about their own views" because they are considering their ideas and deliberating their words carefully (Morgan, 1993, p. 17). Morgan's observed that this "cuing phenomenon" allows participants to "naturally weave a story," leaving the researcher with a wealth of data (1993, p. 59). A second possible weakness of the focus group method is, depending on their size and makeup, groups can seem "unruly" or lacking in focus. However, many researchers who employ the method feel that the seemingly "undisciplined" outbursts are not "obstructive" but full of rich data to analyze and appreciate (Kitzigner, 1994, p.109).

Morgan and Kreuger (1993) caution against three common occurrences in focus group research: compliance, identification, and internalization (p. 55-57). "Compliance" is described as the tendency of participants to say what they think the researcher wants to hear; setting up a comfortable and safe research environment, deep probes for meaning, and careful checks for understanding can help researchers identify and ease these inclinations. Similarly, "identification" illustrates members' susceptibility to agreeing with others in the group instead of stating unpopular ideas or sharing outlying experiences, the "desire for cohesion preempt[ing] their critical examination" of their thoughts. "Internalization" refers to the inclination of participants who respond to certain questions following several other members to "echo" their statements instead of forming their own thoughts. Asking participants to write down or draw thoughts before and after focus group sessions can help lessen these tendencies.

Other shortcomings of the technique include the possibility of disagreements among participants, of group members dominating talking time, or a tendency for groups to try to reach consensus on certain topics (Merton et al., 1990; Kitzinger, 1994; Smithson, 2000). While dissension within groups may hinder further discussion of certain topics, disagreements also could help participants form their ideas and assert them more clearly. When individual members begin to dominate group discussions, research moderators must carefully monitor discussions, seamlessly break off conversations irrelevant to the

investigation, and redirect the dialogue to match research goals. Also, researchers must pay careful attention to the members who may be silenced, as "the group may censor any deviation from group standards... inhibiting people from talking about certain things" (Kitzinger, 1994, p.110). While researchers may fear their groups could produce "conformity," Morgan & Krueger insist that moderators take time to create an "open and permissive atmosphere" and make it clear to participants that the goal of the research is not reaching consensus but "finding out as much as possible about participants' experiences and feelings" (Morgan & Krueger, 1993, p. 7).

Feminist Research

Simply stated, feminism is a "movement to end sexist oppression" (hooks, 1984, p. 17; hooks, 2000, p. 1). Of course, the theory grounding feminism is more complex than this definition allows; to restrict the meaning of feminism in such a way would imply that simple answers to uncomplicated societal problems exist. Feminist theory is a complex set of ethics and values, a shared perspective, a social movement, a political standpoint, an academic discipline, and a theory. As a set of ethics and values, feminism involves a desire for women to have political, economic, and social equality with men. As a social movement, it demands that women and men actively fight for women's rights. As a political standpoint, feminism requires an examination of sexism, how it is embedded in policy, and how it functions to oppress women, while also investigating how class, race,

sexual identity, and ability status intersect with gender oppression (Collins, 1991; Crabtree & Sapp, 2003; hooks, 2000). As an academic discipline, it requires students to scrutinize the social construction of gender to identify the "fundamental processes of patriarchal power in shaping...our world (Code, 2000, p. 451). As theory, feminism seeks to "describe and explain women's situations and experiences," to analyze how power relations affect women both in the public sphere-in society, politics, and economics, and in the private sphere- at home (p. 195).

Characteristics of Feminist Research

While a single, definitive explanation of feminism is impossible to determine, several characteristics of feminist theory can be identified to design research that meets the intents and purposes. Feminist theory must first and foremost "position gender concerns as central to culture and power" (Crabtree & Sapp, 2003, p. 131). It is important to recognize that gender refers not only-- and sometimes not at all-- to biological reproductive capacities of people. Rather, *gender* refers to "sexuality and reproduction; sexual difference, embodiment, the social construction of male, female, intersexual, other; masculinity and femininity; ideas, discourses, practices, subjectivities and social relationships" (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 5). In other words, it represents not only people's bodies but also how they present themselves and what meanings society places on these presentations. The body is both a functioning, sometimes reproducing, set of

organs *and* "a surface on which social law, morality and values are inscribed" (Grosz, 1993, p. 196). So, feminist theory demands that we look at how society has defined *woman* and *man, femininity* and *masculinity,* and to deconstruct these dichotomies into concepts that, instead of positioning women as "other" and therefore as less than and/or oppressed by men, allow women to stand on their own (Elam, 1994). For these and other reasons, feminist researchers fall into every gender category.

Principles of Feminist Research

In designing research based on feminist theory, the following tenets must be embraced. Specifically, feminist research must 1) aim to end the subordination and oppression of women; 2) critique society, culture, and customs that contribute to placing men in a dominant role over women; 3) involve participants in the entire design and explain the situations of both researchers and participants; and finally, 4) not violate feminist principles and ethics.

Research that is committed to women. First, research must have as a goal to support women, to produce understanding of a situation *for* women. The aim of many feminist researchers is to empower women by uncovering details of experience and actions to understand the world from their point of view or to transform an oppressive social structure, and to assure women's participation in, rather their exclusion from, research. Feminist research projects must have as a goal the advancement of women's economic, political, and social power (Harding,

1987, p. 244). According to Tierney (1994), feminist research "is meant to be transformative" (p. 99); a critical postmodernism research lens states that it is the responsibility of scholars to enable women research participants to begin making changes in their own lives and lead the way for systemic reconstruction that eliminates power inequalities in the broader context.

Feminist research is meant to be "consciousness-raising," to identify and spotlight ideas of patriarchal tyranny for research participants and other consumers of research (Sherwin, 1988, p. 27). To bring awareness of sexism and its lasting effects on women, men, and children in society, feminist researchers ask questions that get at the roots of disparities in power structures throughout political, economic and social systems. An investigation based on these theories hopes to be "emancipatory," with its goal the "eventual end of social and economic conditions that oppress women" (Acker, Barry & Esseveld, 1991, p. 134). Transformation of some part of society-- the economic system, political structures and practices, even perhaps personal relationships-- is the most imperative goal of feminist research. It is not to say that researchers are supposed to manipulate situations for participants or "fix" circumstances for them; instead, feminist research aims to open doors that allow women and men to "challenge the often unseen andocentric or masculine biases" embedded in our culture (Tickner, 2003, p. 7). This attempt to understand power relations and how they affect the lives of women and those around them is the main emphasis of feminist research; inquiry

must be "built and analyzed in a way that can be used by women to change whatever oppressive conditions they face" (p. 14).

Research that critiques society and culture. Next, feminist analysis must provide an interpretation and critique of cultural customs and norms, considering the patriarchal institutions and policies that exit in and dominate today's culture. Researchers need to look at the relationships between men and women within society and recognize that even the language we use has social, political, and historical meanings, "embedded within a set of social relations" (Acker, Barry, & Esseveld, 1983, p. 135). Specifically, feminist research calls for an investigation into "relationships of power in culture" that serve to maintain women's status which is often burdened with political and economic inequality, harassment, and violence (Crabtree & Sapp, 2003, p. 132; hooks, 2003). Acknowledging that women's personal experiences are situated within a forceful social system that allows disparities to persist and analyzing the roots of these injustices are necessary components of research that aims for social change. Politically guided research can produce results and knowledge that are less partial than supposedly value-neutral research, because it examines closely the biases of researcher and the patriarchal institutions in which experiences are embedded (Harding, 1993).

Furthermore, feminist theories dictate investigating and analyzing other forms of oppression that work in unison with sexism, such as racism, classism, and homophobia. Research situations must be analyzed by looking at the multiple

dimensions of oppression based on class, culture, race, and sexual orientation and how these "interlocking oppressions" work to silence, devalue, and even tyrannize women (Collins, 1986, p. 35). Examining the "historical and material conditions" influencing the lives of the participants allows us to see how social systems influence individuals and their realities (Collins, 1986, p. 36). Instead of assuming that all women experience life in a similar way and face similar forms of oppression, feminists acknowledge that factors such as class, sexual identity, and disability status often keep women apart, further exacerbating problems by weakening goals and movements (hooks, 2000; 2003). Feminism recognizes that women have no essential nature. By understanding differences among women, and analyzing how they are linked to "various forms of domination, subordination, hierarchy, and exploitation," deeper understandings of present conditions and necessary changes become possible (Crabtree & Sapp, 2003, p. 132).

Research that is collective. Another criterion of feminist research is that it be dialogic, interactive, and reflexive. Researchers are obliged to encourage participants to be full partners in research, to join forces at all levels and points of the research process. Collaboration should begin even before the formal study commences; inviting members of a group being studied to ask questions that become research questions and focal points will lead to the deepest discoveries. Likewise, the collection and analysis of data, and the shaping and dissemination of

knowledge produced, must be done in collaboration with participants. This "aim at cooperative solutions" will help all participants- subjects and investigators alike- to realize the transformational goals feminist research encompasses (Sherwin, 1988, p. 30). This means "treating the researcher and the subjects of knowledge as embodied and visible," equals in the pursuit of knowledge and the understanding of women's experiences (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 51). In doing so, we admit that "how the researcher feels about given events, situations, and personalities" affects interpretations of all data, and that this careful scrutiny leads to deeper analysis and understandings (Stanley & Wise, 1991, p. 268). Making a researcher's standpoint clear at every step of the process leads to "strong objectivity" and more compelling findings (Harding, 1993).

The researcher must be involved deeply in the inquiry process of any feminist study. Investigations must begin with "reflexivity," a self-examination at all stages of the research process (Fonow & Cook, 1991; Harding, 1987; Harding, 1993; Stanley & Wise, 1991; Tickner, 2003). Such self-analysis must be considered when designing projects, choosing participants, asking questions, and most importantly, when interpreting data. Analyzing our own circumstances before conducting research and acknowledging the effects of these experiences on the outcome of the study will allow the findings to be understood more deeply in context. The researcher beliefs and behaviors must become "part of the empirical evidence" that stems from the inquiry (Harding, 1993, p. 9). Participants of

knowledge are placed "on the same critical, causal plane" as the researchers and receivers of findings (Harding, 1993, p. 244). If using interviews within the research design, they should be a reciprocal conversation that allows researcher and participant to "develop a relationship...resembling a friendship or sisterhood," instead of a question-and-answer session (Bloom, 1998, p. 26).

The presence of an "involved investigator" demands careful examination into researcher suitability for the research setting and compatibility with the participant; this "interpersonal and reciprocal relationship" becomes an important part of the research discoveries (Tierney, 1994, p. 102-3). Furthermore, an essential element of feminist research is the establishment of trust, which leads to richer data and greater understanding. The researcher must constantly consider her own beliefs, assumptions, and behaviors at all stages of the research process, and analyze her own biases as they emerge and resurface. One important goal of this continual reflection is to examine the reasons for conducting the study and attempting to speak for others, being careful that published discoveries do not perpetuate the oppression the study seeks to redress. Remaining personally and ethically accountable and responsible to participants is imperative in feminist research.

Research that respects feminist principles. The last tenet of feminist research is that it not violate feminist principles and ethics. There are many barriers to conducting solid, reliable, and ethical feminist research whose results

also lead to changes in repressive social arrangements. While many hurdles such as funding and approval of feminist research projects exist, many of the obstacles concern ethics in conducting research. Feminist inquiry can never be coercive, alienating, invasive, or exploitative of participants at any stage of the project (Kirsch, 1999, p. 26). Instead, it should strive to be "cooperative, collective work" that benefits participants and women as well as researchers (Sherwin, 1988, p. 29). Recognizing that the research process requires participants to spend time and emotional energy on a project that likely benefits the researcher as much as or more than themselves, we must be vigilant in our requests and in our analysis. Loyalty must be to participants first, women- in particular marginalized groups of women- second, and the research community last. In other words, researchers must work hard to "understand reality from the perspective of the people that experience it," not to speak for people without capturing the meanings they intended (Acker, Barry, & Esseveld, 1991, p. 1983). Listening to the meaning participants make of their experiences, and checking continually with them to ascertain the correct meanings, is crucial.

Any assumption that investigators can "judge... the adequacy" of data or "discover" knowledge is false (Grosz, 1993, p. 191). Misinterpreting the words of participants or badly represented data could lead to further marginalization of participants, reinforcement of negative stereotypes of groups of people, and of course, emotional devastation of participants (Kirsch, 1999). Searching for "the

truth" that can be generalized to whole groups of women is impossible; feminist research recognizes that each person's set of circumstances is unique and does not allow one to speak for another. Remaining accountable to the research community, the feminist community, and to participants is a substantial hurdle that must be successfully cleared.

Another considerable difficulty feminist researchers encounter throughout the research process involves gaining access to groups and the opportunities to misrepresent them that arise throughout the research process. If a researcher aims to transform a social structure that oppresses women by looking at a marginalized group, she must be vigilant in her analysis so that it does not "violate their reality" (Acker, Barry, & Esseveld, 1983, p. 142). In seeking to understand participants and speak for them in an effort to transform a systemic inequity, many researchers seek to know a group "from within." This closeness attained through this kind of research must be genuine; "disingenuous friendships," "false intimacy," and "deceptive egalitarian relationships" could lead to further alienation and subordination of participants or groups they represent (Kirsch, 1999, p.26). Research studies that incorporate hearing participants speak in situations where they have assurances of trust and authenticity allow researchers to "know [participants] empathically [and]...lessen the threat of our differences" (Rodriguez, 2002, p. 4, 34). Ethical considerations such as these can help break down the barriers to trustworthy research.

Focus Group Research and Feminist Principles

While not often used as a feminist method of inquiry, focus group research has potential to advance its critical and emancipatory aims. Both the process of conducting focus group research, and the findings resulting from the research, can be feminist in nature and further the goals of feminism.

The process. Focus groups can be employed as feminist research by paying close attention to the process of designing the investigation and conducting the conversations. These group discussions are a "more integrative, experiential approach to research" than surveys, behavioral observations, and even individual interviews (Madriz, 2000, p. 838). Because participants are talking to each other as much as to the researcher, the experience is an active one, with group members questioning each other, clarifying ideas, and making meaning together. This dialogic process allows the research to be interactive and collaborative, aims of feminist research. The dialogue among participants in focus groups is often lively, a process that can encourage "environments in which participants feel open to telling their stories" (Madriz, 2000, p. 847). Collective research may also be a vehicle for consciousness-raising. The process itself may allow participants to "express themselves in their own terms," thus encouraging them to make changes in their lives or the world around them (Hurtes, 2002, p. 110).

If the participants of focus groups are members of a preexisting group, the process is even more naturalistic, allowing the researcher to "tap into the usual modes of communication" in a way that makes subjects comfortable and lessens the distress of sharing ideas and experiences with complete strangers (Wilkinson, 1999, p. 224). Feminist focus group moderators have found that group members "express themselves in their own terms," allowing authentic, dependable data to surface (Hurtes, 2002, p. 111). In these cooperative conversations, the participants are equals in the research process.

The tenet of reducing the power differential between the researcher and the researched can also be realized using focus groups to collect data. While the investigator designs the project and often uses a general interview guide when organizing group dialogue, the participants themselves steer the path of the conversations, sometimes in directions not previously conceived. The researcher, then, gains access to "opinions, viewpoints, attitudes, and experiences" that provide rich data for analysis, not stifled answers to questions without meaning for participants (Madriz, 2000, p. 840). This process "shift[s] the balance of power" from researcher to the group, a central intention of research guided by feminist critical theory (Wilkinson, 1999, p. 230). Feminist researchers recognize the importance of this reduction of the "self-other distancing" that plagues all research; with carefully planned but loosely adhered-to standards for dialogue, focus groups can achieve this balance (Madriz, 2000, p. 840).

The findings. Focus group findings also have the potential to advance feminist research principles. Listening to students becomes "a vehicle" for describing lives and "capturing" their essential opinions and experiences (Madriz, 2000, p. 842). When participants are given the opportunity to talk about their lives and their experiences, they become more aware of their situations and the societal limits placed on them. Hearing from adolescents in groups turns a "data gathering technique" into a "consciousness-raising process" when the results broaden understanding of situations and lead to social change (Madriz, 2000, p. 839). In reporting the findings from these group conversations, voices of groups who often are not listened to are heard, and a more thorough understanding of circumstances and conditions is possible. Presenting the details of adolescents' lives and beliefs could impact policies and procedure so that schools can make progress toward reducing the harmful climate and destructive practices that place limits on boys and girls.

Narrative Influences

While this investigation is not a narrative study, aspects of narrative research will guide the analysis of the data collected in this study. Narrative research allows people to be heard, especially "persons who strive for a new and different world" (Rodriguez, 2002, p. 1). Compelling narratives encourage, enable, and empower people to act to change systems. "People link their stories with their ethics;" listening to people's stories allows the researcher to uncover

underlying attitudes and forces them to analyze the social and political environment in which the participants live (Josselson, 2003, p. 49). The emergent nature of this type of research allows questions to flow "from what the respondents narrate" and from the mutual discussion between participant and researcher (Bloom, 1998, p. 20). Narrative interviews are "engaged, interactive and open-ended," a dialogue that is reciprocal and interesting to both researcher and narrator, emphasizing the issues the narrator finds critical (Bloom, 1998, p. 17-18). Using focus groups will not diminish the interactive nature but instead enhance it. Thematic analysis of this type of inquiry allows the researcher to see participants' interpretations of their own lives, how they define and classify experiences for themselves, and how they perceive persistent societal attitudes for themselves, thus allowing the investigator to identify themes and patterns that emerge.

Summary and Organization of Remaining Chapters

This chapter summarized existing research that guided the development of this study. The following chapter will explain the methodology of the study, describing the two phases of the project and how data were collected and analyzed. The fourth chapter will provide a thorough analysis of the study, while the final chapter will offer recommendations for policy and practice changes as state by, and inferred from, participants.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the climate of a high school campus in a Colorado city of approximately 135,000 people to answer the questions: How do high school students perceive their school climate in terms of gender? How do students perceive the way power is exercised in and out of school based on gender? This two-phase research project consisted of two single-sex focus groups of 10-12 students and an interactive classroom and group conversation session; researcher observation and field notes, as well as individual conversations with students, added depth to the research process during the two stages. Both phases concentrated on how students on a high school campus, defined as a school of grades ten through twelve, saw gender manifesting itself on their campus. This investigation intended to help reveal how male and female students felt in classes, while attending recreational and extracurricular activities, and walking through the school halls. During the initial focus groups, specific attention was paid to where students felt safe and unsafe, objectified, picked on, or invisible, and to the kinds of limitations participants felt were placed on them based on their sex. Analysis of student voices from the first phase helped construct new research questions, and the second phase of this project focused on themes of gender and power that emerged from obvious participant priorities.

Research Questions

Initial Research Questions

Given the problem and purpose of this study, the following initial research questions guided the first phase of this study:

1. How do high school students perceive their school climate in terms of gender?

2. How do students perceive the way power is exercised in and out of school based on gender?

In attempting to answer these initial research questions, single sex focus groups were employed, along with researcher observation and field notes, to collect data. Equally important to the verbal responses from both young men and young women were the unspoken behaviors and attitudes displayed in the focus group experiences as well as the before- and after-class interactions and the hallway behaviors. In addition, individual conversations with two students allowed the researcher to check accuracy of initial analysis and to delve further into issues that arose during group interviews. As is necessary in inductive qualitative research, the initial observations and data led to the detection of some patterns, which led to the emergence of new questions.

Emergent Research Questions

The interest and level of discussion around gender and power led to me to the realization that I wanted to delve further into this topic and help students

more deeply explore these issues. Three follow up activities, explained in depth later in this chapter, were developed and implemented a week after the initial conversations with students to seek answers to the emergent sub-questions. These questions were as follows:

3. What are student understandings and views of women in positions of political power and the men who may support them?
4. What are students' perceptions and understandings of how societal roles and power differentials of women and men are portrayed through the media?
5. What is the level of student awareness and understanding of the differences in earning potential and pay equity based on gender?

Design and Paradigm

Research Design

The first stage of this study consisted of two focus groups, each approximately ninety minutes long. The groups were held with single-sex groups of approximately ten to twelve students each. Focus groups began with a short survey for students to complete, which included demographic information and a few questions to help students begin to think about the research goals. An interview guide had been developed and was loosely followed; since this type of research is inductive, each session began with broad questions that were narrowed down as the researcher detected patterns in responses. Careful attention was paid

to asking the same or similar questions to both groups so that the responses of boys and girls could be compared. However, since research participants guide the direction of the research the two separate focus groups concentrated on different topics. All groups were moderated and audio-taped by two researchers, the principal researcher and two assistants, each of whom received approximately two hours of training in recording data and the methodology employed in the study. The primary researcher transcribed, coded, and analyzed the data from initial single-sex focus groups, after which follow-up focus activity groups and individual interviews were conducted to explore issues that arose during the first discussion groups and between sessions. The second phase asked students from both single-sex focus groups to participate in classroom activities designed to elicit more conversation about ideas and themes that emerged during the initial discussions. In addition, individual conversations with two students allowed the researcher to check accuracy of initial analysis and to delve further into issues that arose during group interviews.

To ensure credibility and enhance the rigor of this study, I made use of several techniques throughout the collection and analysis of the data. First, I employed triangulation, looking at multiple sources of data such individual conversations with students and audiotaped participation in directed group activities to augment focus group discussions. By combining several forms of data collection, triangulation can help researchers be more sure that their

interpretations of participants' words closely match what they intended. Connecting participants' words with actual observations of the students helped me focus in on emergent themes and choose sub questions for the following group activities; the findings from the initial group discussions led to the development of activities for group processing. In addition, I used member checks to ensure that my interpretations show the meanings the participants have constructed themselves. Conducting a second group with the same participants helped me zero in on important ideas and check with the students to make sure I'd captured their ideas correctly. Individual follow-up interviews allowed me to probe for issues that require exclusive listening or personal attention. These conversations were not planned, taped, or transcribed and therefore not part of the write-up of the study. They merely helped me to be sure that my interpretations of participants' words were correct.

Research Paradigm

This study attempted to understand how students constructed gender at school, how they perceived their school climate and aspects that threatened and enhanced their experiences there. I wanted to hear their voices and understand their perceptions in the natural setting, to become familiar with the many complex aspects of school climate that are related to gender. A qualitative study attempts to understand and report the perceptions and perspectives of participants and to understand their complex worlds and experiences. The focus groups and

activity session created opportunities for conversations that allowed the gatherings to become "naturalistic" places where participants could "negotiate meaning," collaborate with each other and me, and finally, make sense of and explain their own experiences and viewpoints (Wilkinson, 1999, p. 235). Individual interviews were meant to enhance the group interviews, were unscheduled, and took place immediately following the classes.

Focus Group Research

Of the many qualitative research methods available to researchers, focus group inquiry best fit the purposes of the study, which were to explore and analyze the views of female and male students about how gender functions in their high school. I attempted to learn what students were thinking about a number of issues related to being young women and men within a school climate, what their experiences of school and their perceptions of the climate were, and how to make visible the common structural gendered conditions in which they were educated. I employed methods that helped to reveal the critical elements of their culture and to identify the impact of a school's climate on the students, and how these perceptions enhanced or threatened their educational experiences. This type of inductive research allows the researcher to become the primary instrument for data collection and analysis; thick, rich descriptions of students' attitudes, viewpoints, and behaviors emerged through interviews, group conversations, and written work. To ensure rich, deep data emerges from group

interviews, a thorough interview guide with dozens of open-ended, thoughtful questions was created. Questions that probed deeply into participants' thoughts and encouraged them to more carefully examine their ideas were included. These questions, paired with a strong research mission that was carefully communicated to students, helped focus the interviews.

Simply put, focus group research gathers small clusters of people and asks them to discuss a topic chosen by the researcher, who then analyzes individual participant's words as well as the interactions among group members. First used in 1926 to test a "social distance scale," focus group research was developed further as a research tool to determine the reaction of the American public to wartime propaganda (Bogardus; Merton, Fiske, & Kendall, 1956), to investigate people's feelings about movies (Shively, 1992), and later as a technique for investigating health issues (Aronson, Wallis, O'Campo, Whitehead, & Schafer, 2007; Crowe, 2003; Morgan, 1996; Short, Mills, & Rosenthal, 2006). Often, data from groups helped researchers develop focused questionnaires or evaluate programs (Morgan, 1996). Marketing researchers and social scientists who originally applied the method believed that by allowing participants to "jointly produce accounts about proposed topics in a socially organized situation," rich information for analysis would emerge (Smithson, 2000, p. 105). The valuable difference between this type of research and other individual research techniques is that the communication among group members provides equally valuable

information as the individual participants' words. It is a method of research in which the groups themselves, and only not the individuals, "are the main unit of analysis" (Smithson, 2000, p. 105). Together, group members explore their attitudes toward, opinions about, and insight into specific aspects of daily life. Focus groups, therefore, can be defined as "a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher" (Morgan, 1996, p.23).

Rubin and Rubin (1995) place focus group research in the category of "cultural interviews;" appropriate investigations for which to choose this method are ones that "focus on the norms, values, understandings, and taken-for-granted rules of behavior of a group or society" (p. 28). Kitzinger (1999) notes that the method is especially effective when asking about people's "experiences and points of view" (p. 299) and how they can reveal "(sub)cultural values or group norms" (p. 300). While participants disclose personal viewpoints, researchers identify common themes and beliefs. Morgan (1993) concurs that focus groups produce high quality data regarding "cultural patterns" with participants whose views and experiences vary considerably (p.25). Therefore, focus groups are suitable for exploring the lives of adolescent girls and boys within a school culture-- the ideal place to examine how teenagers think and feel about certain issues. Many adolescents are motivated to make and keep social connections; students often crave a connectedness to peers above those with parents or teachers (Eggen &

Kauchak, 1994; Woolfolk, 2001). Group research, then, could make it easier for younger participants to delve into their perceptions and feelings "in ways that would be less easily accessible in a one-on-one interview" (Kitzinger, 1995, p. 299; Wong, et al, 2005). A researcher who has used the method with teenagers found that interviews with groups of students "made it possible to tap into the wide array of ideas and information that emerged as the teens interacted with one another" (Steele, 1999, p. 332).

Rationale for Use of Focus Groups

Unlike other qualitative research methods, such as narrative research which explores the words and lives of individuals, and ethnography, in which others seek to understand essential elements of particular cases, focus group studies rely on two data sets: individual words and the communication among group members; together they produce "interactive data" where participants speak among themselves, creating a synergy that allows new ideas and opinions to be explored, challenged, and formed (Hydén & Bülow, 2003; Kitzinger, 1994; 1995; Wong, et al, 2005). Both participants and researchers benefit from this interaction. As group members answer questions and form ideas, others think about these values and shape their own opinions and beliefs about the topic and then are able to articulate them in a deeper way. In the process, the group "builds on and utilises [sic] the interaction" of the assembly (Hydén & Bülow, 2003, p. 308). In one study (Wong, et al, 2005), participants themselves recognized that the group

process allowed them to explore ideas with and reveal their opinions to each other. The result of these interactions is "more fully articulated accounts... a rich, co-constructed narrative," replete with valuable insights and wisdom (Överlien, Aronsson, & Hydén 2005, p. 339). The interaction with other participants "encourages a greater variety of communication," leaving investigators with profoundly rich data. Participants question and challenge each other, explore ideas together, help each other clarify opinions, and often make it easier to be clear about what they're saying because they must make their thoughts clear to each other.

Many researchers and participants have found that challenges or confrontations among focus group participants improved and elevated the discussion (Kitzinger, 1995; Tiggemann, Gardiner, & Slater, 2000; Wong, et al, 2005). Kitzinger (1995) felt that disagreements during the group process enhanced rather than inhibited openness and disclosure; arguments between group members sometimes provided the richest data. When co-respondents challenge ideas and opinions, it may force a participant to add additional information, better articulate viewpoints, and more clearly express beliefs. When disputes occur in focus group discussions, participants "may explore areas where they disagree [and] this offers the researcher unique possibility of understanding how views are expressed, constructed and defended" (Överlien, Aronsson, &

Hydén, 2005, p. 339). In addition, focus group disagreements can "help to forge a human connection" among the participants.

It is perhaps because of the rich benefits to participants that researchers are able to gather such abundant data from focus group research. The researcher studies not only the voices of individual group members but also analyzes the group's interactions with each other. When a study examines the communication, contact, and emerging relations among participants, the interface among the group members allows investigators to employ "interactive data as part of the research," examining how individual identities impact other participants' perceptions of issues and ideas (Kitzinger, 1994, p. 104). When researchers scrutinize the communication among participants, they are able "to learn more about how attitudes and opinions are created and sustained through interaction with others" (Hydén & Bülow 2003, p. 306-7). Furthermore, this participant reflective thinking and interaction decreases the tendency for the researcher to speculate on or presume "that she knows 'the meaning' of any particular anecdote or account'" (Kitzinger, 1994, p.113).

Site Selection Rationale and Access

Site selection relied on the desire of school officials to openly discuss gender issues on campus, and their willingness to participate in the study; the site was not randomly selected. Upon learning of my desire to conduct this investigation, the principal of a high school requested that the study be conducted

at the school where she works. She fit the criteria of wanting to discuss gender issues at school and a willingness to have the study conducted in her building. The school is one of four comprehensive high schools in a city of approximately 135,000 people; school enrollment is 1000 students, and the district enrollment is approximately 24,500 students; nearly 80% of students in the school district label themselves "white." Participants were students wishing to discuss gender issues on campus, recruited from one psychology class; they were volunteers and were not randomly selected. The students in the psychology class from which students were drawn were mostly white students who identified themselves as college bound. The majority of them were juniors in high school, while one was a sophomore, and three were seniors. Parental permission was required for students who are not yet eighteen years old. Human Research Subjects Committee provided guidelines for, reviewed the purposes and methods of, and granted permission for the study. Focus groups were held on the high school campus during school hours. Individual interviews took place at school immediately following the class, and were unscheduled and not recorded and transcribed; field notes taken immediately afterwards serve as documentation of the conversations.

Data Collection and Analysis

Instrumentation and Data Collection Procedures

Focus groups began with a short survey for students to complete, which included demographic information and a detailed description of the research

process. Each group interview began with an activity to help frame the study and to encourage open discussion. The activity included watching and discussing a movie and music video clip, a student-led analysis of visual examples from around the school or another school, an exploration of magazines students commonly buy, and other activities that sparked interest in the topic of the construction of gender. An interview guide was developed and loosely followed; since this type of research is inductive, each session began with broad questions and was narrowed down as the researcher detected patterns in responses. Careful attention was paid to asking the same or similar questions to both groups so that the responses of boys and girls could be compared. All focus groups were moderated by two researchers, the principal researcher and an assistant, and audiotaped. The primary researcher transcribed, coded, and analyzed the data, after which follow-up focus groups or individual interviews were conducted to explore issues that arose during the first discussion groups and between sessions. A final transcription was done, group interviews coded, and the data analyzed using theories of narrative research and feminist critical theory. Findings were reported and made available to the site.

For the second stage of this research project, students participated in activities designed to revisit some themes that emerged from the preliminary focus groups and to elicit more conversation about them. While the first round of focus groups was purely conversational, the second round was conducted with

both conversation and activity, more of cooperative learning activities. This second research segment consisted of a large group with a combination of boys and girls from the group of original participants; during this session, the students participated in several activities that concentrated on ideas that had come up in the first round of discussions. During the class, the students were tape recorded in their groups, and their end products were collected and analyzed. The researcher and assistant also listened to the group conversations, provided guidance about how to complete tasks, and observed behavior in each group. The class was divided into three groups of students who were allowed to choose the activity of most interest, with only one requirement: each group had to have at least one male and one female. The groups resulted in the following configurations:

The first group consisted of four girls and six boys; they were given a collection of advertisements from popular magazines and asked to discuss them and answer the following six questions about the group of pictures:

1. What product is each picture advertising (sometimes you'll have no idea- say that as well)? At what audience is each directed? How can you tell? What is the ad really trying to sell?
2. Make a list of the roles that women do, according to these ads from popular advertising. Then, make a list of the roles men do, according to these ads.

3. What do these ads have to say about gender? What gendered norms are reinforced by these ads?
4. Compare the advertisements of males with those of females. What similarities and/or differences do you note in male and female ads?
5. What types of products are women associated with, and why do you think it's like this? What types of products are men associated with, and why do you think it's like this? What are the main differences?
6. Why are women often seen as naggers in American society? What are the social, political and sexual roots of such an assumption about females?

Ten advertisements showed "women at work" and were intended to represent jobs women do both in the home and in the professional, paid workforce: bathing and feeding children, cleaning, working at a computer, and conducting a meeting. A group of five pictures showed violence against women as part of the advertising: red eye makeup, lipstick, and clothing on "bleeding" or "dead" women and women with hands tied behind their backs. Two ads presented young girls in sexual positions; in one, two girls approximately five years old show their underwear as they provocatively bend over a log fence. Three advertisements for different products represented women as too talkative and three showed men as stupid or lazy. Four photographs depicted men in

subservient or cruel positions: tied to a chair, being stepped on with a high-heeled leg, naked and being "walked" on a leash.

A second group of students was asked to imagine what a spouse's role might be if a woman is elected to the Presidency of the United States in the next election. They then read biographies of first ladies to summarize the roles the women played and their contributions to history, and to compare the roles with ones they imagine a future "First Gentleman" might play. Four girls and four boys participated in this group. The questions this group of students answered were:

1. Imagine that a woman is elected to the Presidency of the United States in the next election. What do you see as a man's role as spouse to the President? What do you imagine him doing? Saying? Working on? Focusing on?
2. Read the biographies of these First Ladies. Underline the roles the women played and the contributions they made to history. Summarize a few of the historic roles First Ladies have played.
3. Compare these roles with the ones you imagine a "First Gentleman" might play. How are they similar and different?

The third group examined salaries of men and women by educational attainment and job category, to analyze government and industry proposals for

closing the wage gap, and to rank and defend suggestions in order of which would have the greatest impact, and finally to choose one proposal to turn into law. The proposals the four girls and one boy who completed this task could choose from included:

Policy A: Raise the minimum wage for all

Policy B: Increase maternity leave entitlements

Policy C: Make paternity leave for men the same as for women

Policy D: Provide free childcare for all

Policy E: Force large companies to offer onsite childcare facilities

Policy F: Encourage women into better-paid types of work through high school and university counseling and better exposure to career opportunities

Policy G: Raise the pay of public sector workers, where many women work (teachers, nurses, etc.)

Policy H: Limit working hours for all workers

Policy I: Create a government policy of your own you feel would have a big impact

During these group activities, students were engaged in the activities and in discussion surrounding the issues. The unmistakable hesitation within the original girls' focus group disappeared, and female group leaders emerged in each group. The communication within the groups was focused on the topics and the

students listened to and learned from others in the groups. A final transcription and detailed coded was done for the group activity groups, group and individual interviews were coded, and the data analyzed using theories of narrative research and feminist critical theory.

Additional data were collected from individual interviews conducted with students immediately following both the first stage focus groups and the second phase activities. Two individual students voluntarily remained after class to talk about issues that interested them or brought up concerns for them. These conversations were not audiotaped or transcribed; the principal researcher wrote notes about the conversations afterwards. These conversations were not part of the write-up of the study.

A third form of data collection was the participants' writing, in the form of classroom activities answers and short reactions to them. These writings supplemented the voices of students and helped narrow topics for further research and analysis and helped alleviate concerns about students who were hesitant to bring up topics and to catch other ideas missed in the groups.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis was ongoing, occurring before the focus groups met, during the focus groups, between the initial and follow-up group interviews and individual interviews, and after data had been collected. Early analysis allowed the researcher to organize questions, begin to understand the research site, and

find and explore gaps in the interview guide. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest four strategies for early analysis that should be employed: the use of a contact summary sheet, initial coding, pattern coding, and memoing. A contact summary sheet containing main issues and interesting annotations was developed after the site had been selected and initial observations had been made. Initial coding of observational data included "provisional" descriptive codes; this "start list" encouraged the researcher "to tie research questions or conceptual interests directly to the data" (p. 65). Patterns and themes that emerged during the focus groups were explored and "pattern codes" developed in an effort to group observations into sets of data that could be analyzed more easily. Memoing allowed the researcher to "tie together different pieces of data" and see big ideas as they emerged, while making final analysis easier and more manageable.

Theories of feminism, narrative research and critical theory guided the analysis of the data collected in this study. In designing research based on feminist theory, these tenets had to be embraced. Specifically, feminist research must 1) aim to end the subordination and oppression of women; 2) critique society, culture, and customs that contribute to placing men in a dominant role over women; 3) involve participants in the entire design and explain the situations of both researchers and participants; and finally, 4) not violate feminist principles and ethics. Feminist analysis must provide an interpretation and critique of American cultural customs and norms, considering the patriarchal institutions and

policies that exit in and dominate today's culture in this country. Researchers need to look at the relationships between men and women within society and recognize that even the language we use has social, political, and historical meanings, "embedded within a set of social relations" (Acker, Barry, & Esseveld, 1983, p. 135). Specifically, feminist research calls for an investigation into "relationships of power in culture" that serve to maintain women's status which is often burdened with political and economic inequality, harassment, and violence (Crabtree & Sapp, 2003, p. 132; hooks, 2003). Acknowledging that women's personal experiences are situated within a forceful social system that allows disparities to persist and analyzing the roots of these injustices are necessary components of research that aims for social change. Politically guided research can produce results and knowledge that are less partial than supposedly value-neutral research, because it examines closely the biases of researcher and the patriarchal institutions in which experiences are embedded (Harding, 1993).

Narrative research allows people to be heard, especially "persons who strive for a new and different world" (Rodriguez, 2002, p. 1). Compelling narratives encourage, enable, and empower people to act to change systems, allowing for a critical analysis of the investigation. "People link their stories with their ethics;" listening to people's stories allows the researcher to uncover underlying attitudes and forces them to analyze the social and political environment in which the participants live (Josselson, 2003, p. 49). Thematic

analysis of this type of inquiry allows the researcher to see participants' interpretations of their own lives and social positions, how they define and classify experiences for themselves, and how they perceive persistent societal attitudes for themselves, thus allowing the investigator to identify themes and patterns that emerge. The emergent nature of this type of research allows questions to flow "from what the respondents narrate" and from the mutual discussion between participant and researcher (Bloom, 1998, p. 20). Narrative interviews are "engaged, interactive and open-ended," a dialogue that is reciprocal and interesting to both researcher and narrator, emphasizing the issues the narrator finds critical (Bloom, 1998, p. 17-18). Using focus groups did not diminish the interactive nature but enhanced it. Thematic analysis of this type of inquiry allowed the researcher to see participants' interpretations of their own lives, how they defined and classified experiences for themselves, and how they perceived persistent societal attitudes for themselves, thus allowing the investigator to identify themes and patterns that emerged.

Treatment, Organization, and Fidelity of Methods

To ensure credibility and enhance the rigor of this study, I made use of several techniques throughout the collection and analysis of the data. First, I employed triangulation, looking at multiple sources of data such as classroom activity responses and individual interviews, to augment focus group discussions. Connecting participants' words with actual observations helped me focus in on

emergent themes and choose sub questions for the ensuing groups activities; findings from the initial group discussions led to the development of activities for group processing. In addition, I used member checks to ensure that my interpretations showed the meanings the participants had constructed themselves. In follow-up focus groups and individual interviews, I restated the participants' words, interpreted them based on my understandings, and then asked the students if my explanations fit their intentions. Conducting a second focus group with the same participants helped me zero in on important ideas and check with the students to make sure I had captured their ideas correctly.

Summary and Organization of Remaining Chapters

This chapter described the methodology of this study. First, a detailed description of the research design was provided, including a rationale for the use of focus groups to collect data. Next, the reasoning for site and participant selection gave valuable information about the location and students who took part in the study. Data collection procedures were described, and changes in the original research plan and questions were explained. Data analysis techniques were explained to provide a background for the following chapter, which will describe the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter will summarize the findings of this study and examine themes that emerged while conducting and analyzing the focus and activity groups employed as research. First, a review of the study will include a description of the site and district, followed by a description of the participants. A review of the original research questions and research questions that emerged during the project is provided next. The results are organized by addressing these five questions and synthesizing student voices into these themes. The chapter concludes with an organizing analogy which is introduced to provide a framework for understanding gender differences in society as perceived by the students and as a foundation for the discussion to be found in the fifth chapter.

Review of the Study

Site and District Description

The school where this study took place, East Point High School, is one of four comprehensive high schools in a city of approximately 135,000 people. The district enrollment is approximately 22,500 students, and there are 45 schools in the district. Almost 80% of students in the school district and in this school label themselves "White," while approximately 15% label themselves "Hispanic." Nearly 25% of district elementary students participate in the federal free and reduced-price lunch program. Sixty-five percent of district graduates enroll in higher education immediately following graduation; 82% enroll within three

years of high school graduation. Within district administration, 71% of secondary (junior and senior high school) principals are men, and 29% are women, while 75% of the teachers are women. There is one public university and a community college in the city.

East Point High School is the newest high school in this northern Colorado school district, opened in 2004 for students in tenth and eleventh grades and expanded in 2005 for seniors, with a current enrollment of approximately 1000 students. When this study took place, the school had been open for nearly three school years, with one graduating class of seniors having graduated and one a month from graduation. A committee of students, teachers, administrators, and parents had convened to determine school colors and mascot and give input about establishing a positive climate. The considerations from students were the central deciding factors in these decisions. Hours were devoted to creating a positive climate and forward-thinking culture at East Point High School.

The school operates with a smaller learning community, or "school-within-a-school" philosophy, meaning that the school is divided into three smaller wings and students into three distinct groups. These groups of students share locker space, teachers, counselors, and administrators, but all students at the school use common areas for physical education, lunch, and school events. The school building is designed to have an open and inviting feel, with common areas for students to socialize, computer areas that are available for students to use

during lunch and open periods, low lockers to increase a sense of openness, and outdoor areas where students can gather. These groups work in teams that consist of teachers from each content area and randomly divided students. Teachers meet monthly with their teams as well as with teachers in content departments and those with common courses. Teachers also have voluntary but scheduled times to meet with other teachers about students who are not achieving academically or socially.

The hope of school administrators was to establish a climate of closeness for smaller groups of students while still offering a substantial number of courses and other opportunities that accompany a larger school. Every sophomore who enters the school is placed in an "advisory" class, and they remain with the same group of students and the same teacher, barring retirement or job termination, for the three years they attend East Point High School. Before the school year begins and students transfer from junior to senior high school, sophomores are invited to attend a "lock-in," an evening event intended to foster a sense of community and cooperative spirit, as well as provide for academic and social support throughout the students' attendance of high school. The students receive schedules for the coming year, tour the building, meet teachers and other students, and begin the team- and culture-building activities that continue throughout the years in this advisory class. As part of the coursework for the class, every member of the sophomore class must attend meetings of at least three different extracurricular

student activity groups and write about their experiences. The administrators and teachers clearly are committed to ensuring that no student at East Point High School is invisible.

Participant Descriptions

Participants in this study were students wishing to discuss gender issues on campus, recruited from one psychology class; they were volunteers and were not randomly selected. The students in the psychology class from which students were drawn were mostly white students who identified themselves as college bound. The majority of them were juniors in high school, while one was a sophomore, and three were seniors. Their age range was 15 to 18 years.

During the first phase of this study, the single sex focus group meetings, differences between the girls and the boys in the class emerged immediately. Every student in the class had agreed to participate in the research by discussing issues pertinent to the study as a group. In addition, they agreed to keep detailed personal journals about ideas and experiences that would strengthen their group discussions. Acknowledging that being a part of this study may present their first exposure to specific gender issues, the participants found that journaling enhanced their readiness for discussions and added clarity to their thoughts. The most notable immediate observation was that the girls were hesitant to talk. They seemed to censor their thoughts for the first hour, unwilling to give much insight into their observations. They seemed wary of trusting a stranger to listen to their

views and experiences. They seemed cautious of having the "wrong" interpretation of their own thoughts. The boys seemed interested in both the process and the topics discussed. In contrast to the group of girls, they opened up immediately and did not seem concerned about how their words might be perceived by an outsider.

The most striking quality the girls displayed was their drive for conformity. This feature is in line with the fact that many teenage girls' self confidence is strongly tied to their physical appearance, body image, and impression upon others. They clearly took cues from each other. No one seemed to stand out as a leader in this rush to conformity, and no one squelched what another girl said, but it was clear that they did not want to stray from the ideas of the group. The group was encouraging as a whole and praised each other when similar observations were made. There was little or no animosity that might arise from a group pondering new ideas.

While the girls' method of listening to and supporting each other didn't provide an opportunity for a leader to emerge, or for a wide range of emotions to surface, it did allow for deep discussion on issues and topics. The girls were able to delve deeply into their thought processes, and after time and more encouragement, they did become more vocal, moving at their own pace to come to conclusions.

In great distinction, the boys were outspoken and talkative from the first question and throughout the original focus group. They censored very little, used foul language without hesitation, and generally made much more noise than the girls. They also delved deeply into few topics and changed subjects and directions quickly. They showed no disrespect for the moderators or each other, and they showed little need to conform to the group or individuals' ideas. As is typical of teen boys, they showed an unwillingness to relax their guard in reluctance to display fear, confusion or sadness. To show compassion or empathy, they are at risk of being attacked.

Research Questions

Initial research questions. The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the climate of a high school campus in a Colorado city. Given the problem and purpose of this study, the following initial research questions guided the first phase of this study:

1. How do high school students perceive their school climate in terms of gender?

2. How do students perceive the way power is exercised in school based on gender?

In attempting to answer these initial research questions, single sex focus groups were employed, along with researcher observation and field notes, to collect data. Equally important to the verbal responses from both young men and

young women were the unspoken behaviors and attitudes displayed in the focus group experiences as well as the before- and after- class interactions and the hallway behaviors. In addition, individual conversations with two students allowed the researcher to check accuracy of initial analysis and to delve further into issues that arose during group interviews. As per the methodology outlined and as is necessary in inductive qualitative research, the initial observations and data led to the detection of some patterns, which led to the emergence of new research questions.

Emergent research questions. The interest and level of discussion around gender and power during the initial single-sex focus groups led to me to the realization that I wanted to delve further into this topic and help students more deeply explore these issues, and new research questions emerged. Three follow up activities were developed and implemented a week after the initial conversations with students to seek answers to the emergent sub-questions. These questions were as follows:

3. What are student understandings and views of women in positions of political power and the men who may support them?
4. What are students' perceptions and understandings of how societal roles and power differentials of women and men are portrayed through the media?
5. What is the level of student awareness and understanding of the

differences in earning potential and pay equity based on gender?

The next section of this chapter will attempt to answer each of these questions and follow up with a framework for understanding these findings.

Research Findings

The findings here are organized around the five research questions and will be addressed accordingly.

How Students Perceive their School Climate in Terms of Gender

Initially, this study sought to examine how a group of high school students perceived their school climate in terms of gender. Single-sex focus groups explored how students felt about their school's climate and perceptions of how they saw gender manifesting itself on campus. The conversations with students revealed their attitudes toward school and how girls and boys experience school in different ways. These initial focus group conversations opened the discussion to larger societal issues. Follow-up group activities with both girls and boys exposed deep-seated beliefs about gender and power and how these students perceived the gendered roles of adults in the United States. Synthesis of recent literature revealed that the critical components most educational researchers include in school climate are attitudes toward school; behaviors, interactions, and relationships among staff and students; and classroom environment. Results will be organized according to the themes:

1) Attitudes toward school: *"They do homework and we don't."*
2) Behaviors: *"You just agree or you don't say anything."*
3) Interactions with teachers: *"Girls have it better."*
4) Sexual harassment: *"I'm not cute anymore- I'm a slut."*
5) Aggression: *"Shooting, swearing, and being a guy."*
6) Environment: *"I feel invisible here."*
7) How Students Perceive the Exercise of Power in Society: *"Men Deserve It"*
8) Student Understanding and Views of Women in Politics: *"Like a Chick Ever is Going to Drop a Nuke"*
9) Student Perceptions of Power Differentials as Portrayed through the Media: *"Magicians and Assistants, That's How It Is"*

Attitudes toward school: "They do homework and we don't." In most cases, students in this study did not feel that gender was a factor in their lives at school. As one might expect of high school students through late April and May, indifference toward school was the most predominant attitude presented. Both boys and girls expressed boredom at school. "It's not really making you eager to learn," one girl stated. A boy said, "We just want to get it behind us," a sentiment that received many nods and comments of "That's right." Another female group member argued that, "School kinda wastes our time cuz we learn stuff we don't really need to know;" the feeling was echoed by a male participant who stated, "There's no incentive to remember stuff, so why do it?"

While many study participants could not name how gender surfaces at school, when pressed to name differences in how girls and boys perceive and experience school, distinctions emerged. A difference in attitudes toward school was displayed as the young women described their approach to classes. They

expressed both a desire to succeed in school and their "better efforts" to do so, saying that girls are "more serious," that they "try to learn the stuff they teach us" and "study more and harder." Young women in this study indicated that they are anxious about doing well in school and bothered when they don't get good grades or high test scores. "Girls are more nervous about it," one said. Boys agreed that girls try harder in school, worry more about their success, and are rewarded with better grades. One male participant stated, "Girls pay attention [and] have better attitudes." Others said, "They work harder," "They do homework, and we don't," and that "All they do is study." Still others mentioned that girls "worry about stuff too much," "worry about things all week," and that "they panic" about school work and tests. According to these students, this nervousness and worry affected only the girls at this school.

The young men and women agreed that while girls try harder and stress more about achieving high grades in school, it's often boys who perform better on tests. A female participant stated,

> There are some guys in my classes who don't pay any attention, they don't take notes, they don't do any homework, they never study, and yet they make Bs and As. Then there are girls who sit there in class, focused so hard, taking lots of notes on everything, and then get Ds and Fs on their tests.

This feeling resonated with the boys, one of whom said, "We don't worry about tests; guys just say, 'oh, it's due tomorrow. I have till tomorrow morning to study for it.'" Another agreed, saying, "I haven't studied for a test since 6th grade and I

usually pass them and I'm happy." Still another remembered that "I forgot my SAT and my dad reminded me that I had to leave for my SAT test that morning." He stated that even though, or perhaps because, he hadn't prepared for the exam, his score was higher than he needed. When I informed the group members that boys indeed do score higher on standardized tests and asked both girls and boys why they thought this inconsistency existed, most chalked it up to the stress associated with test-taking. Boys said, "Girls freak out on tests" and "They panic, so they fail." Girls admitted that they indeed agonize over major tests, saying, "We don't do so well on tests because we worry so much." Not one participant seemed to consider that test bias may exist, or that test-taking strategies and studying approaches might favor boys because of the ways that they are socialized to compete. This inconsistency was the first of many I noticed during the initial phase of this study.

Focus group data revealed another difference in attitudes girls and boys had about secondary school and higher education. Girls in this study viewed high school as a means to their next educational step which, for the majority of this particular population, would be a university or college setting. "I think [school's] preparing us for college, which will prepare us for a career," one young woman said. One participant disagreed, saying, "I don't think high school prepares you for life," but overall, the sentiment among girls was that school was more than a hoop to jump through or a waste of time. When discussing college, girls largely

expressed that higher education would help them discover suitable careers and become prepared for them. They were unable, however, to suggest what these suitable careers might be. Not a single girl wrote or spoke of a specific job she'd like to do in the future. When I asked the boys if they knew what careers the girls at their school considered, one said, "They're going to be mothers." Many nods accompanied this comment.

Young men, on the other hand, gave both high school and further education little more than an obligatory nod as they described all of their educational experiences as more of a "means to an end" or a "hoop" that they needed to pass through in order to get on to their "real lives," which meant lucrative salaries and successful careers. "A lot of boys think school is a waste of time," remarked one girl, to which most of the other participants agreed. Boys concurred that their thoughts on the purposes of school were less positive than most of the girls around them. "Girls pay attention, but we don't," "School's not preparing us," and, "We just want to get it behind us" were the most common sentiments expressed by the boys in this study. They felt that both the content of their classes and the process of attending school wasted their time and energy. The young men mentioned that some classes "might be teaching me a good work ethic, but not much else;" "I do not need to know half this stuff;" and "You just remember stuff for the test, and then you forget about it." One concluded, "School is garbage."

Unlike the young women in this study, most of the male participants were able to voice their career plans. These job plans included construction management, practicing law and medicine, and "anything to do with science." The boys in this study defined themselves based on a long-term vision. They focused on career and life beyond their education. When asked about the future, none mentioned college even though, determined through later probing, most of the boys were planning to go to college. High school and college seemed to be necessary hoops to jump through, and they seemed to think that, aside from a paper signifying a degree, they already possessed what they need to be successful in the world of work. The girls defined themselves in the here and now, noting that school was important and that their next steps were college. When asked about career options and choices, none had an answer. Most laughed and said they had no idea. It was illuminating to observe that they did not view their hard work and effort in high school as a bridge to their ideal future. In fact, envisioning their lives as successful women had not occurred to them.

Behaviors: "You just agree or you don't say anything." During these focus groups, differences between the girls and the boys in the class emerged immediately. While every student in the class agreed to participate in the research by discussing issues in a group, the girls were, at first, shy and hesitant to talk. They appeared to censor their thoughts for the first hour, and seemed to be wary of trusting a stranger to listen to their thoughts and experiences. During the

focus group process, girls displayed a strong sense of conformity. They seemed eager to please me, as the researcher, hoping to get the "right answer" and be considered as model students meeting the high expectations of a visitor to the school. In contrast, the boys were exceedingly more lively in their interactions and unafraid of using more "rough" and callous language. They seemed less worried about impressing me or meeting my expectations.

The young women often agreed with each other, at times even exhibiting "identification," or the tendency to agree with others in the group instead of stating unpopular ideas or sharing outlying experiences and thoughts. One girl suggested that she quiets down when she disagrees with a group:

> You think the majority of the group will be like your thinking. Like if I'm in a group of guys, you think maybe your opinion won't matter. You just don't want to argue and end up feeling stupid, so you just agree or you don't say anything.

I also saw examples of "internalization," which refers to the inclination of participants to "echo" others' statements instead of forming their own thoughts. When asked for clarification on a question about women in school content, several girls acquiesced to believing that "teachers try," and "schools do their best;" one girl said, "I was going to say the same thing she just said. She just said what I was going to say." The boys, however, opened up immediately, seemed interested in both the process and the topics, and did not seem concerned about how their words might be perceived by an outsider. Since the boys' group met

two days after the girls', it is possible that they had heard about the research and felt more prepared or excited to discuss the pending issues. However, even in classes where I presented information to the entire group, boys were more talkative, asked more clarifying questions about the research and researcher, and laughed at a few examples of educational research findings I pointed out.

The most striking behavior the girls exhibited during the initial focus groups was that they appeared to strive for conformity. While their listening to each other allowed for deep discussion on issues and topics, they clearly took cues from each other and answered in ways that didn't contradict other opinions, occasionally seeming to hold back an opinion that may have offended or challenge other participants. No one seemed to stand out as a leader of this rush to conformity, and no one squelched what another girl said, but it was clear that they did not want to stray from the ideas of the group. The boys were outspoken and talkative from the first question and throughout the original focus group, often disagreeing with each other in a lighthearted way. They censored very little, used bad language without hesitation, and generally made much more noise than the girls. They also delved deeply into few topics and changed subjects and directions quickly, unlike the girls who stayed with one topic until interest seemed depleted. These young men showed no disrespect for the moderators or each other, and they showed little need to conform to the group or individuals' ideas.

Interactions with teachers: "Girls have it better." Girls in this study acknowledged that girls and boys are treated differently in classrooms. Both groups recognized that teachers perceive that girls work harder and have a greater potential to be successful at school. It became clear that, at this school, taken-for-granted rules of behavior for girls included completing school- and home- work, listening in class and following instructions, and earning good grades. "I think teachers like girls better than boys. Girls pay attention and stuff," one girl admitted. Another concurred,

> I actually think that in schools, girls are taken more seriously because statistics show that in high school and college, girls score better in classes and have a higher GPA. It's the old stereotypical thing that guys are always goofing around more like class clowns and aren't as serious as most girls are.

Several boys believed that because of these behaviors girls "have it pretty easy at school," and "Girls have it better."

One young woman described a class in which both teacher and students acquiesced to one group of boys' bad behavior, "The guys got too out-of-control with what they wanted to do, there wasn't much else to do but what they wanted." Other participants expressed that, in their opinions, boys are held to different behavioral expectations, such as being allowed to yell out in class or turn in assignments late, without penalty. Boys conveyed that girls seem to receive preferential treatment and better grades simply because of their behavior, not their actual performance on assignments. No one questioned the deeper meaning

of these contradictory expectations. No one wondered if they relegated girls to taking a back seat to men and boys to believing that breaking rules was acceptable. Boys largely believed that while girls may try harder to succeed in school, part of their success depends on "cheating" and "getting away with everything." One described a situation where a girl relied on her teacher-pleasing behavior to ensure good grades: "I know a girl who has a 4.0 and she is the dumbest." Several boys in this study perceived girls as "sneaky," stating that they "do stuff and hide it," such as copying homework and using cell phones to cheat. Adults may be tempted to read this behavior as unfair to boys, which it clearly is. However, another question surfaces: are we hurting girls as well with this treatment, holding them to a different standard of behavior which includes silence and pleasing and allowing them to believe that women get by in the world by cheating, not by intelligence?

Sexual harassment: "I'm not cute anymore- I'm a slut." There was a tangible reluctance to acknowledge a culture of sexual harassment, and participants seemed ignorant of its meaning and impact. When asked about sexual harassment at their school, the girls first asked for clarification of its definition. After allowing comments from the group, which included correct definitions, I gave a legal definition that specified that sexual harassment is unwanted and sexual in nature. Several girls said, "No, I don't see that here," "I don't hear about it," and "Nope, not at school." However, immediately following those comments,

another participant stated, "I've seen guys grab girls in the hallway. Then they just turn around and look and then just walk away." Another described, "Well, I was like stalked like a lion. Boys were, like, looking at me and I was going 'eeewww,' like I don't want that."

Another participant illustrated the destructive results of this type of behavior in a story she told to the group:

> And I came to school one day and I was all confident wearing a cute little mini-skirt *(lots of giggles)* and I walked up to my locker and a guy rubs against me and says, 'I bet you... I want to know how many guys look up your skirt by the end of the day. I bet you won't even have enough fingers to count.' And the rest of the day, I felt completely self-conscious because I'm not cute anymore—I'm a slut.

The girls expressed a reluctance to report such situations or to call young men on this behavior. They provided three different reasons for not doing so. First, they did not want to be alienated from the group: "Being made fun of probably is a factor; we don't want people to talk bad." Another participant cited this reason for not reporting sexual harassment: "Maybe if they don't tell, it'll go away." A third believed that silence was the best way to keep it from happening to them as individuals: "To our faces, we're respected. But we don't know what happens when we're not around."

When asked about how people in the school respond to these situations, one young woman said, "There's not much girls feel they can do when that happens. They just blow it off. I don't think it's so much of harassment, but it

makes you feel bad about yourself and makes you feel awkward." When asked who "they" were, girls responded that "they" could be boys, other girls, teachers, or administrators at school.

Aggression: "Shooting, swearing, and being a guy." The young men in this study did not express any thoughts on sexual harassment or acknowledge that it happens at East Point High, but they did speak about violence and aggression in their lives. The school has few fights each year, the principal reporting only one fight during the 2006-07 school year; boys in this study also could recall only one major fight that occurred at school during the year. When asked about how violence and aggression operate at school, one boy opened up to say, "We don't really see that here; it's not the way it is," to which another participant agreed,

> We don't go around eradicating people everyday. Guys don't go around looking for fights, but when the opportunity presents itself...you know, someone will talk shit, and then before you know it, you're pushing, yelling, I don't know... it doesn't happen much.

As the conversation turned to larger society and violence, boys acknowledged that it does indeed impact them, but not always in the negative way one might expect. Several boys saw a constructive purpose for fighting. "It's easier than talking," one young man said. Another concurred, saying. "You don't really have to think about what you want to say. Just follow through and then you feel better." Many of these students felt that for boys and men, aggression is normal:

> I think a lot of the violence for us is a tangible way for us to deal with our problems. With guys, it's over and that pretty much solves it. We don't

> think about it again. Like my two best friends, we fought when we were in junior high, and now we're friends. It's no big deal.

Fighting is a way for boys to solve issues with other boys, because "it allows it just to be over," without permanently harming the relationship.

When asked about the roots of these behaviors, these participants were savvy about the strong societal foundation of aggressiveness. "Guys are taught to be tough since they're born," one said, while others agreed, saying, "Yeah, it's like that from minute one," and that "Dads don't want a sissy for a son." Others responded that they hear messages from fathers such as "'I'll give you something to cry about,'" and that the expectation to be aggressive comes from "parents, grandfathers, brothers, uncles, media, [and] movies." These students acknowledged the roots of violence in movies, music, and war. "All those action movies are typical of shooting, swearing, and being a guy," one boy stated. When asked about the influence of sports on the aggressive nature of American culture, two participants answered that sports have "no connection;" instead, sports were seen as a way to avoid violence because "with sports, you use more energy and it calms you down more than words." Instead of promoting violence, participants believed that playing sports allows young men to become tough while still staying within socially accepted rules of behavior:

> I think a lot of kids in sports, like I wrestle, and there's a lot about being physical like you go to cross-face someone and you break his nose. Doing stuff like that might hurt someone but still be in the rules. Stuff like

> breaking fingers and stuff. You kinda just tape it up and keep going... you break something and you keep going.

Clearly, the rules of engagement are different for boys and girls. The issues of aggressiveness in boys are seen as a societal norm, and the line is quite thin between "normal" aggression and violent behavior. These unspoken cultural values make navigating tricky for both girls and boys.

Environment: "I feel invisible here." A theme of silencing of women and girls emerged as I spoke with the groups, and this topic resonated throughout the study. First, both male and female participants in this study noted the absence of women in curriculum and classroom environment. Both felt that women are omitted from the curriculum and wanted changes in this area. As the first focus group began, the girls were given a trivia game about women in history and society. The questions included:

> Name 3 current Heads of State (President, Prime Minister) who are women.
>
> Name 3 women in history who served as Head of State.
>
> In 2005, for every dollar that a man earned in the US, how much did a woman earn? Worldwide?

Of the ten questions on the quiz, most girls could not answer more than one. "I just felt really stupid not knowing any of that stuff," one participant stated. Another agreed, "Yeah, like I'm so dumb about what women did." When

asked what they wished they had learned about, the girls said, "all of it; all of them." One participant did not want to study a unit on women in history or just a few women occasionally: "It needs to be included in everything, in all the classes." The boys knew just as little about women; comments included: "We know nothing about women," and "We ignore... are ignorant... about women's history," but felt that things "are fine like they are," and "they [teachers] do enough now; it wouldn't make much sense to do more that would make us learn something about them- we'd just forget it." Girls did not feel that they were invisible only in classroom curriculum; they seemed to feel that society at large ignores them. As stated by one young woman, "I feel invisible here." Another girl said, "It's complicated because no one really listens to me." These thoughts resonated with other participants: "Nothing represents girls- not school, not magazines, not TV." Girls continued to express this feeling of silencing throughout the study: "It's like we're not developed people. We're still trying to find ourselves, and there's nothing there to help." One young woman declared, "We are all struggling to find out... to find out where we fit...what to do."

How Students Perceive the Exercise of Power in Society: "Men Deserve It"

Deeply embedded ideas about power in society emerged as I listened to the words and ideas of the girls and boys during these initial group conversations. In the focus group of girls, participants expressed interest in the salary gap between men and women and spoke heatedly about a woman being elected President of

the United States. They appeared savvy about media images of women and the notion that they can be destructive to body images. The boys in the original focus group also were passionate in their opinions about a woman as head of state and communicated an awareness of media portrayals of men and women. While topics discussed in the separate focus groups were not identical and conversation patterns not closely comparable, similar ideas emerged from the two groups of students. The variety and scope of topics discussed, many of which wandered from the original questions and research focus, demonstrated the interests and concerns they had about gender.

Three strong contradictions between personal life and the larger societal climate emerged as I talked with the single sex groups of students. First, both girls and boys identified political power as innately male; they did not, however, perceive this belief as parallel with inequality that affects them personally. Second, while they recognized different societal roles and expectations for men and women, and admitted a power differential within United States culture, they did not concede that similar inconsistencies existed in their lives or at their school. Third, a contradiction evolved in thinking about pay differentials: while students identified experiences of unequal treatment in their own lives, they were unconcerned about inequality in men's and women's wages, even admitting that men "deserve" to earn more money for equal jobs since an air of respect and authority accompanies them. The guided group discussions generated a rich

understanding of participants' experiences and beliefs about gender. This wisdom and the students' interests guided the development of new research questions. These single sex focus groups helped determine the research sub-questions, and I quickly realized from focus group findings that I wanted to more deeply explore the issues of power that were revealed from initial conversations with the students. These findings led me to develop activities to further explore issues of power in ways that students could relate to their lives and the world around them.

Student Understanding and Views of Women in Politics: "Like a Chick Ever is Going to Drop a Nuke"

Towards the end of the initial girls' focus group, and almost as an afterthought as the conversation wrapped up, the question was posed to participants, "Do you think this country is ready for a woman President?" The animated responses from nearly every participant revealed not only a desire to discuss this issue, but also an attempt by the girls to understand power relations and how they did indeed interpret gender and power disparities. When the questions was asked to the boys' focus group, the reaction was similar; their lively, spirited responses to the question told me that students wanted to pursue this issue in depth. This realization resonated for me, and as I reviewed the data, I began to see that for the students in this study, gender concerns were not close at hand; instead, they perceived that issues of gender exist for other people.

The subject of women political leaders was raised in both single-sex focus groups, and discussion was enhanced to a new level as reactions were strong from both groups. Every girl responded initially without hesitation that indeed, they believe this country is ready for a woman as President; however, as the discussion continued they began to recognize problems about public perception and reality of a woman becoming President. One young woman said, "We answered really fast, but really, I don't know... It'd be cool, but I'm not sure if it's really what I have in mind when I think of the President." Another girl admitted that "when I think of a pastor or preacher, or the President, I think of a man and not a woman." When pressed about the reasons behind their answers, one girl said that people simply resist change:

> I think we don't have a woman President because we don't want to get out of the routine and change something. We like to stay in our comfort zone, and men always have been President. I think that people want most things to stay the same all over, That seems more... I don't know... powered. Powerful?

Another agreed, "That's what we're used to." They also questioned a woman's ability to conduct war:

> Like if there were a bomb and the country was at war, a woman would just make people feel bad with their words, not by fighting. That's what we do... Well, I guess you can't make a *country* feel bad, but you know, she could say things to make others mad and then not really know what to do.

With this statement, a major stereotype was revealed; girls and women use words deftly to hurt others and to gain power. Other girls did disagree, stating "If a

woman wanted to be a legit president, she'd be a legit president... she wouldn't sit around and talk crap about the other countries." The idea of a female President became more complex as the participants discussed it in depth.

Boys in this study were less enthusiastic about the idea of a woman President of the United States. When asked if the country is ready, first responses included, "No, I don't think so," "No, way," "Well, maybe," and "Maybe in another election." When pushed to explain their answers, the young men responded with thoughts such as "Women aren't brave enough" and "Women don't act, they just talk too much." The most revealing statement came from a participant who said, "Well, a woman in charge is different than a guy in charge... to everyone." The biggest doubts the boys raised also concerned a woman's ability to react in a war situation. "But what if we need to drop a nuke? We know that she'll never make that decision" one said, while another agreed, "Like a chick ever is going to drop a nuke- nope! No way!" It was also viewed that "Our position as a world power would be compromised" if we were to have a woman as president, that other countries would "laugh at us even more than they are now." They wholeheartedly agreed with my statement that "You want anybody who will carry a big stick, right?" Their reply: "Yea, and that should be a guy."

Both groups of students strongly reacted when specific female leaders were mentioned; Hillary Clinton and Condoleezza Rice provoked passionate, mostly negative, replies from the girls and boys. Boys described both Hillary Clinton and

Condoleezza Rice as "too manly," "really men" and "way too masculine," while the girls reiterated that these women were not likely to do much but talk about problems, instead of solve them. One male student questioned the ability of Clinton to manage the country after what he referred to as poor decisions; "There you have someone who makes all these decisions and gives all these speeches and does all this major work for all these people... and then she takes on the role of... cheated wife." According to one boy, a strong husband, who would be guiding her decisions along the way, would be the only way that a woman could potentially be successful in the role of President.

These comments and this level of interest in the topic of women political leaders led to the development of an activity that addressed student understandings and views of women in positions of political power and the men who may support them. I wanted, then, to explore student understandings and views of women in positions of political power and the men who may support them. Following the single-sex focus groups, I gathered the boys and girls for a classroom activity session where they participated in carefully designed assignments I felt would allow student opinions and ideas to surface. A small group of students was asked to imagine what a spouse's role might be if a woman is elected to the Presidency of the United States in the next election. They then read biographies of first ladies to summarize the roles the women played and their

contributions to history, and to compare the roles with ones they imagine a future "First Gentleman" might play.

Roles these participants imagined the husband of a female President would play included many of the ones that, historically, female spouses of Presidents have played. For example, most students wrote that they thought the "First Gentleman's" roles would include charity work, hosting events, and becoming involved in a few political issues. Significant differences were evident, however, in the amount of influence students said they believed this man would have. Many wrote that a man would be "much more involved" in political issues and "hold a significant presence in the White House." Many students believed that he would have "more say" in his wife's policies, and be "more of a publicity figure." Also, girls and boys both felt that this man would greatly influence his wife's major decisions, "have more of a say in what the president decided," much more so than they believed First Ladies to do. A girl wrote, "The 'First Gentleman' might be more involved with the technical and decision making areas;" while another mentioned that he wouldn't be as "passive" in making decisions as First Ladies had been:

> The first ladies just played it cool. They basically just chilled; they went to parties and did a lot of charity work, redecorated the houses. A First Gentleman would go to meetings, not just sit around and plan parties. He would be really involved, travel around, and make major decisions.

Another female participant recorded that historically, these women were "hosts of parties, shoppers [who] chilled on the side and let the man do the work." As during the focus groups, when students doubted a female President's willingness and ability to go to war, two participants in this activity mentioned that this husband was likely to "help his wife in some of the bigger decisions, like military decisions." Several wrote that the First Gentleman would not play the traditionally feminine roles many First Ladies played; "I don't think that a man would like to redecorate the wight [sic] house. He would just relax and play golf and go fishing and stuff like that." Remarks made by both the girls and boys indicate a clear bias in the way gender roles and stereotypes influence political thought. It was not surprising that the group that could not identify women in positions of political power was the same group that could not see a future female Head of State in their own country. This concept was completely outside their realm of experience.

Student Perceptions of Power Differentials as Portrayed through the Media: "Magicians and Assistants, That's How It Is"

One of the themes that emerged during the initial focus groups was that of power differentials students noticed in the media. "Magazines don't even represent us, not TV, nothing" one girl had mentioned. The thought resonated with other young women:

Men seem more powerful; it's what society puts out there- it's what we see.

> It's always been like that, that men are superior. Just like, women always are looked down upon, and it might not be as much now but it's still there. It's still a man's world. Women do the behind-the-scenes stuff, men are out there. Like most of our businesses hold men in higher regard than women.

As the discussion turned to how power is exposed and used in society, one participant explained:

> It's like the cliché that men throughout history had to be strong, powerful, had to be the money bringer-home people. There's a term for it, but I don't know what it is.
> *The breadwinner?*
> There you go. Yes, men have to be this breadwinner for his family. I think we're taking steps, like we're seeing a progression in women's role in society, but there still is that domination that men have to have a little more power than women and they still have to be the one who works, and women still stay at home. There are some stay-at-home Dads, but it's usually women who raise their children. That domination still exists.

Another girl expounded, telling of more subtle ways that disparage women's roles:

> We were talking about doctors being men and bosses being men, and someone was saying that it's harder for a woman to be boss because if a woman boss came in and said you were not doing well and told you to get your act together, then that person walks away. You would ask yourself, 'what did I do to *her*?' But if a man came in and said the same thing, it's been proven that you would say 'ok' and do it. And women are known to be more social and talk more and men get it across better. I don't know where that came from, but I learned this one time.

During these initial focus group sessions, many of the students had been either unable or unwilling to verbally articulate differences in gender in their own lives; it is difficult to ascertain whether this was due to a discomfort or inability to name the differences that might exist, or to the lack of awareness in the gender differences that were noticed by me (the researcher) through observations and

interactions. It was interesting, though, to hear that they were quite able and willing to acknowledge larger societal gender inequalities during the second phase of this study. These findings led me to develop an activity to help students explore the idea of how roles of men and women are portrayed through the media to indicate power differentials in American society. A group of ten girls and boys were given a collection of advertisements from popular magazines and asked to discuss the pictures, using six guiding questions. Ten advertisements showed "women at work" and were intended to represent jobs women do both in the home and in the professional, paid workforce: bathing and feeding children, cleaning, working at a computer, and conducting a meeting. A group of five pictures showed violence against women as part of the advertising: red eye makeup, lipstick, and clothing on "bleeding" or "dead" women and women with hands tied behind their backs. Two ads presented young girls in sexual positions; in one, two girls approximately five years old show their underwear as they provocatively bend over a log fence. Three advertisements for different products represented women as too talkative and three showed men as stupid or lazy. Four photographs depicted men in subservient or cruel positions: tied to a chair, being stepped on with a high-heeled leg, naked and being "walked" on a leash. The activity asked students to make a list of the roles that women and men do, according to these ads from popular advertising. Then, it asked them to analyze

what the ads had to say about gender and what gendered norms were reinforced by these ads.

After completing the activity, students reported their findings out to the class. When asked to list roles that women do, according to the ads, in writing they reported:

> They cook and clean.
> They clean, they have sex appeal.
> They do housework, have sex, and are sluts.
> Housecleaning, being moms, and being sexy.
> They do the supportive stuff around the office.
> They are whores or better off dead.

They reported men's roles to be:

> Business.
> Sophisticated.
> Strength.
> Be lazy.
> Work.

During the ensuing small group conversation, the topic shifted from the specific content of certain advertisements to the larger meaning of them:

> Well, [men] make more money even when they have less education. In general, there are a lot more strong men than strong women A lot of women find it hard dealing with independence. They think they need a man or a husband to be successful and they need all that, but men don't think that. They can be by themselves. If more women weren't like that, it would be different.

These comments led to a request for explanation from one of the boys who wanted specific examples of the power differentials in the working world. As a

large group, students discussed the gender-prescribed jobs the majority of people in the United States have:

> Women typically stay at home and cook and know how to do that for their family, but when you think about a professional chef, you think of a male.
>
> Generally the highest positions in jobs, you think of guys; you do think male as a CEO of a business, but it's usually women who raise their children.
>
> College professors are men... but I think of all elementary school teachers as women. But principals are men.
>
> The business owners are men, and women take jobs as secretaries. Even when they have better educations.
>
> Owners of businesses are men; I don't think of women as owners of businesses. When I do hear of a woman being the owner of a successful business, I'm not shocked but I don't think of it as a woman's job.

One girl perfectly encapsulated these feelings:

> Magicians and assistants, that's how it is. It sounds funny, but it's true. Men are the magicians and women are the assistants; men do the magic and women have it done to them. Men run the show, and women just help them, but in reality, the women are making everything happen, but no one sees that; they just see her disappear and everyone claps for the guy.

These eloquent words summed up these participants' views on women's roles in society and the severe restrictions of expectations and opportunities they experience in their worlds.

Student Understanding of Differences in Earning Potential and Pay Equity:

"Women Don't Ask for More Money"

The final topic that became a clear concern for participants in this study related to the perceptions these students had about pay equity between men and women. During the focus groups, both boys and girls expressed that "it's not fair" that, worldwide, women earn less than men when working in the same or comparable jobs. However, with probing, the girls hesitated to wholeheartedly disagree or express real abhorrence about this situation, with one girl suggesting that because men are more respected in this country and throughout the world, they warrant higher pay. They were able, however, to express a logical reason for the pay differential: "Women don't ask for more money; they're not aggressive or assertive enough." This idea resonated with another girl, who further explained, "We don't teach girls to do that, to ask for more money or to demand what they want."

For this reason, I designed a third activity for the classroom session so that the young men and women could further explore the issue of pay inequity and the roots of the imbalance. This group examined salaries of men and women by educational attainment and job category and analyzed government and industry proposals for closing the wage gap; they were then asked to discuss the suggestions and defend those they thought would have the greatest impact on closing the pay gap, and finally to choose one proposal to turn into law. The proposals the four girls and one boy who completed this task could choose from included policies that would increase wages and family leave benefits for all employees, provide

onsite or free childcare, and require career counseling for girls that would steer them into better-paid jobs. The group discussed all the options, often asking for clarification of a policy's purpose and questioning how its intentions would actually change conditions. They ended up deciding on an original, creative plan: to make maternity and paternity leave mandatory for both parents and paid for by employers following the birth of a baby. Students felt that when women leave work, even temporarily, to care for a newborn, she loses pay, seniority, and a certain amount of respect and professional esteem from colleagues and superiors. By making this leave mandatory and funded, male parents would also face the economic and relational discrimination that women face upon the birth of a baby, which eventually would help even out pay and allow women to be taken seriously. What is remarkable is that even when analyzing national policies and considering practices to equalize pay differentials, these students still relegated women to their traditional role: mother.

"Magicians and Assistants:" An Organizing Analogy

True to the nature of qualitative research, what began as a school climate and gender study became something else altogether. For students in this study, gender seemed to impact their thoughts on school climate and their immediate lives very little, at least on the surface. A set of ideas and core values about how these students see gendered roles and expectations surfaced through analysis of student words and behaviors.

Girls in this study recognized that the world is divided by sex, with men holding economic, political, and social power, which women infrequently share. This study is titled "Magicians and Assistants" because one participant used these words as she eloquently described the way she saw gender roles playing out in society. She compared the roles men play economically and politically to that of a magician: they perform magic- seemingly single-handedly- that astound audiences, create new tricks that they keep secret from other magicians and the public, generate awe, and receive praise and recognition from masses of people. Their jobs are public, and they are in control, not only of their own lives but also of their audiences' attention and of their assistants' safety. This participant understood that the expectations of women's roles are like those of the magician's assistant: she allows the magic to happen to her, to be done to her, while she stands by, looking gorgeous and accepting her fate. Even though this assistant often actually performs the sleight of hand that causes her to "disappear," be chopped in half, or face knives being thrown at her, she receives no credit, except for the occasional applause directed toward the stunning magician.

The young woman who put this thought into words perceived that men are the performers and women their assistants, that men receive recognition for what women often do behind the scenes. I read more into her statement. Magic exists through fantasy that magicians and their assistants create, and tricks are nothing but illusions; audiences play along, in reality knowing that no true magic

exists. Everyone understands that the performance is a manipulation of objects that occurs because our attention is drawn elsewhere. The magician holds sway over his audience, but viewers accept the magic, suspending disbelief and not questioning its reality. The political and economic power that men hold is much like this magic; we accept it as true and natural, often allowing it to remain unquestioned while our attention is drawn elsewhere. Even audiences and assistants are complicit in this act. When we do question the power (and the magic), we don't truly expect to get an answer of how it is accomplished. What would a magician be who gave away his secrets, and what would a person with authority, control and influence be if he shared power? Instead of analyzing the systemic roots behind the magical power inequities, demanding change, and working toward it, we wait for the magician to expose what is behind his magic, leaving the illusions unquestioned and unexamined.

Summary of the Chapter

This chapter summarized the findings of this study through answering the five research questions and discussing the meanings I made of student voices. Descriptions of the study locale, participants, purpose, and guiding research questions framed the chapter. An organizing analogy of "Magicians and Assistants" was created to help frame students' perceptions of gender and power differentials in our culture.

CHAPTER 5: RECOMMENDATIONS AND COMMENTARY

Summary of the Study

This study explored the perceptions of a group of students at one high school about the role gender plays in their lives at and outside of school. Qualitative research methods were used to gather data about the school climate. First, focus groups helped answer original research questions surrounding perceptions of school climate and gender-related experiences of students. Data from the initial groups generated new research questions about power and silencing, and during another group session with both girls and boys, students participated in classroom activities designed to elicit further information about how students see power operating in their lives and in society. Feminist research theories guided the development of the study and the analysis of the data. Critical theory informed the analysis of the data and the development of recommendations for schools to combat gender discrimination, inequities, sex-based harassment, and obstacles to optimal educational experiences that surfaced during this investigation.

Given the purpose of this study, the following research questions guided and emerged through this study:

1. How do high school students perceive their school climate in terms of gender?

2. How do students perceive the way power is exercised in and out of school based on gender?
3. What are student understandings and views of women in positions of political power and the men who may support them?
4. What are students' perceptions and understandings of how societal roles and power differentials of women and men are portrayed through the media?
5. What is the level of student awareness and understanding of the differences in earning potential and pay equity based on gender?

Summary and Interpretations of Major Findings

True to the nature of qualitative research, what began as a school climate and gender study became something else altogether. Initially, gender seemed to impact thoughts on school climate, and students' lives, very little. Further analysis of words and behavior allowed a set of ideas and core values about how these students see gendered roles and expectations to emerge. Some of the major findings will be re-examined and summarized here, and an organizing analogy will be provided as a framework for these findings.

Summary of Findings

School climate. School climate, in terms of attitude, behaviors, and environment, was defined differently by boys and girls in this study. Though

both male and female students expressed indifference toward school, even describing it as a "waste of time," they seemed to for different reasons. Boys seemed not to feel the need to achieve in school, as if they knew intrinsically their success was linked to who they *are* and not their accomplishments in an institution. Girls, on the other hand, seemed to feel school was their way of proving themselves, fitting into the system, and their primary means to a successful career and life. Behaviorally, girls demonstrated a sense of conformity and people-pleasing behaviors. Boys were more willing to act out, talk openly, and express individuality, both in their interactions in the school as well as in this study. Sexual harassment and violence were both behaviors that were acknowledged in the school by both girls and boys, though there was initial denial and a reluctance to name or admit these issues. Environmentally, female students expressed that they felt "silenced" within the school. An absence of women, women's issues, and female role models was identified and lamented by several students in both the curriculum and the classroom environment.

Power in society. Several contradictions became apparent as students expressed their perceptions of gender roles and power differentials in society. It was quickly acknowledged that men had disproportionate political power in our society, yet that was not seen as inequality to many of the young participants. The men with this political power were seen as having earned or deserved that power. Though other power differences and gender roles in society were acknowledged,

such as male doctors and female nurses, male bosses and female secretaries, male college professors and female secondary teachers, students did not seem able to recognize or acknowledge these same gender differences in their personal or school lives. It was as if their lives were insulated to the inequalities of the larger society. A third contradiction came in the acknowledgement that it would not be fair if they earned less for equal pay because of gender, but students seemed to think men who earned more in society must have earned, and therefore deserve, any differences in earning.

Women in politics. Participants acknowledged women do not play very many roles in politics, and students viewed this as a fault of the sex. Both male and female students did not see women as "ready" to have important roles such as that of the presidency. Some of the stated biases included: women would be more likely to talk than to act; they would be unwilling to engage in war; other countries would "laugh at us" if we had a female leader; femininity and leadership are seen as contradictory terms, as current women leaders were seen as "manly;" and to be successful a female leader would need a "good husband behind her."

Societal roles of gender. Women's roles were looked at and discussed as portrayed through the media. Women were seen as useful as determined by: cooking, cleaning, and other domestic abilities; sex appeal; the ability to be mothering; and their roles as support staff. The term "magicians and assistants" was used by one young woman to describe the roles that men and women hold in

society, with men in charge and women assisting them. These inequities in career roles and seemed to encapsulate the overall struggles of women in society.

Earning potential and pay equity. Students in this study recognized pay differentials exist and that businesses and government leaders needed to enact policies to ensure equality. Additional contradictions surfaced within this discussion. While students acknowledged that many factors contribute to wage gaps, they mentioned that a main one is that women do not ask for more money, that they do not know how to advocate for themselves economically. Also, some participants implied that women do not need to earn as much money as men since they plan to become wives and mothers, dependent on a husband's income. Even the solution that these students created assumed a prescribed role for women, mothering.

Interpretations of Findings

The personal – societal gap. The disconnect between the awareness of gender and power differences in our larger society and the inability to admit to or articulate these differences in personal lives had two distinct sides. These dimensions seemed to be a sense of "keeping it at an arm's length," not wanting to personalize something so potentially destructive to self, and a sense of "that's just how it is," a hopelessness or nonchalance, apathetically believing that if it has always been this way, then there exists no point in talking about it or trying to change it. First, students in this study distanced themselves from gendered

descriptions of their school climate. They either did not notice or ignored the gendered differences in behavior, expectations, and treatment until specifically asked about them, and even then, gave the impression of being unconcerned about any enduring effects they might have. They seemed to be experiencing a developmental struggle, a reluctance to deal with gender as related to themselves. They kept gender at an arm's length, not noticing inconsistencies or incongruities within their own lives. They saw levels of advantage and disadvantage as natural. Their words clearly revealed the belief that "gender is not related to me." The research became more about what was going on outside of school, to other people, than inside of school and to them. Gender, to them, affects other women and men, but not the individuals personally involved in this study.

Making the connection. While students did not perceive that gender imbalances affected them, they did have a strong interest in and concern about women's issues. They expressed a need to "make it real," to include women's issues in courses throughout the curriculum. Through their expressions of interest in these issues I detected a desire to not only learn about women's contributions to the world but also a chance to question deep-seated systemic practices and analyze how certain problems will affect women worldwide and might impact them in the future.

A continuum came to mind as I was looking at this disconnect, with ignorance on one end, enlightenment on the other, and knowledge and denial in

between. When I first met these students, they appeared to be ignorant of women's issues and gender=related problems, but as the study progressed, they seemed to have some knowledge of gender differences and the inequity of them in society. They seemed to be in denial, however, about the profound impact these inequities could have on them personally. The next step would need to be more direct information and knowledge to help move them along on this continuum and out of being stuck. Through school climate development, curriculum development, and staff development in schools, students might be given the opportunities to acknowledge these differences socially and personally in order to make connections and changes. These changes may lead both male and female students to better understand the personal nature of these social issues, to feel more empowered, and to more fully reach their potential.

Organizing analogy: "Magicians and Assistants." Men and women's work and purpose can be compared to those of a magician and assistant. The roles men play economically and politically are analogous to those of a magician: they perform magic- seemingly single-handedly- that astound audiences, create new tricks they keep secret from other magicians and the public, generate awe, and receive praise and recognition from masses of people. Their jobs are public, and they are in control, not only of their own lives but also of their audiences' attention and of their assistants' safety. The expectations of women's roles are like those of the magician's assistant: she allows the magic to happen to her, to be done

to her, while she stands by, looking gorgeous and accepting her fate. Even though this assistant often actually performs the sleight of hand that causes her to "disappear," be chopped in half, or face knives being thrown at her, she receives no credit, except for the occasional applause directed toward the stunning magician.

Magic exists, however, through fantasy that magicians and their assistants create, and tricks are nothing but illusions; audiences play along, in reality knowing that no true magic exists. Everyone understands the performance is a manipulation of objects that occurs because our attention is drawn elsewhere. The magician holds sway over his audience, but viewers accept the magic, suspending disbelief and not questioning its reality. The political and economic power that men hold is much like this magic; we accept it as true and natural, often allowing it to remain unquestioned while our attention is drawn elsewhere. Even audiences and assistants are complicit in this act. When we do question the power (and the magic), we don't truly expect to get an answer of how it is accomplished. Instead of analyzing the systemic roots behind the magical power inequities, demanding change, and working toward it, we wait for the magician to expose what is behind his magic, leaving the illusions unquestioned and unexamined.

Implications and Recommendations

Implications for Action

Two major changes in high school courses of study should be carried out. First, a course in gender studies should be made available to all students in public high schools in the United States, with teachers well versed in feminist thought creating the curriculum and teaching the course. Also, existing curriculum should be modified so that it stops reproducing inequalities in our culture.

Add gender studies courses to secondary school curriculum. Currently, secondary schools in the United States offer few courses focusing on gender issues and topics related to sex and gender. Colleges and universities across the world do offer women's and gender studies courses and degree programs, but often they are isolated topics not studied in the mainstream curriculum. These courses are mostly absent in secondary schools. Students are not prepared to examine sexism, racism, heterosexism, and other forms of discrimination in their own lives and abroad; they could not begin, therefore, to examine critically how these are associated with global problems. Furthermore, they are unprepared to begin to offer ways to address the effects of globalization on men, women, and children, and to begin to affect change in their own lives and internationally (Dalton & Rotundo, 2000).

Integrating gender studies into traditional high schools and colleges would allow students to begin to recognize that sex and gender is more than biological

category or outward appearances. Instead, they would realize that gender "affects a person's life chances, values, earning power, likelihood of committing or being a victim of crime, chance of being killed in battle, opportunities for education and professional advancement, and even life expectancy" (Dalton & Rotundo, 2000). As our lives become increasingly dependent on the work and knowledge of people across the world, this class could help students begin to identify systems of inequality and discrimination in their own lives and therefore be prepared to address international issues affected by sex. A gender studies class informed by feminism would also provide a framework for additional research into global awareness and could help alleviate the dire consequences of women's economic and social conditions.

Transform curricula. In addition to providing a course in gender studies at high schools across the country, findings of this study point to a need to transform traditional school curriculum. In beginning this much needed but drastic change, there are five models I propose as guides for teachers, administrators, curriculum specialists, and school professional development directors. An early leader in curriculum transformation model development, McIntosh (1983, 1990) created a blueprint to help in knowing how to make change. McIntosh suggests a complete revision of the entire liberal arts curriculum. To accomplish the transformation, teachers in every discipline first must ask, "How would the discipline need to change to reflect the fact that women are half the world's population and have

had, in one sense, half the world's experience?" (1983, p. 2). Then, the transformation should follow the guidelines presented in the five phases of curriculum revision.

Traditional liberal arts curricula follow the first phase, "Womanless History," due to a failure to include the experiences and contributions of women. This exclusion stems from the tendency of those with power, a privileged class of men in western culture, to define reality by their standards alone. The second phase, "Women in History," assumes that the current system functions well, but needs a few more women represented. It displays famous women who accomplished feats considered extraordinary "by men's standards," but does not analyze why women systematically have been excluded from history (McIntosh, 1983, p. 8). In this phase, the emphasis is on "firsts," laws, wars, fighters and winners, and on those women whose actions took them into the existing power structure, almost measuring up to "white male achievement" (McIntosh, 1990, p. 9). Teachers in this phase hold up "exceptions," which is damaging because the message is that most of the other "them-s" are not worth studying (McIntosh, 1990, p. 9).

Phase three, "Women as a Problem, Anomaly, or Absence in History," introduces the "politics of the curriculum" by studying sexism, racism, classism, struggle, violence, oppression, persecution and protest (McIntosh, 1983, p. 9; McIntosh, 1990, p. 10). It recognizes the systemic "barriers" that excluded

women; it encourages students to recognize the existence of invisible systems of power and disadvantage (McIntosh, 1983, p. 9; McIntosh, 1990, p. 10). It does not ask ordinary people about their lives; therefore, most women still are excluded and students still study the power structures as if they are legitimate. In the fourth phase, "Women as History," teachers and students begin to see all people as valid human beings. This phase examines the work of women in every culture and recognizes that it has been "unacknowledged" and "devalued" (McIntosh, 1983, p. 15). It questions whether women's role of "maintenance for the human race" is really unimportant as it seems to be in the current disciplines. It asks teachers to use the experience, voices, writings, and struggles of all people for information (McIntosh, 1983, p. 16-17; McIntosh, 1990, p. 7). It encourages us to learn from women's experiences, their values and relationships, to question the power structures in history, and to see the stories of women and people of color as "the main human story" (McIntosh, 1990, p. 7).

The last phase of curricular revision includes the experiences of all people; its perspective is circular, multicultural, and inclusive (McIntosh, 1983, pp. 20-22; McIntosh, 1990, p. 12). Teachers in this phase reject the traditional competition in school and replace it with experience-based cooperative learning (McIntosh, 1983, p. 21). It refuses to value power or knowledge by "previous norms" that "reinforce male dominance" (McIntosh, 1990, p. 3). McIntosh sees this phase as something that has not yet been reached, nor will be in any short amount of time.

Another early leader in curriculum revision, McCormick (1994) developed a model of education and curriculum revision that follows similar stages and philosophies. The first stage, the "Male-As-Norm Model," reflects both traditional curricula and society today, in which "women and people of color are devalued and disempowered" (McCormick, 1994, p. 85). The second state, the "Equal Educational Opportunity Model" parallels McIntosh's "Women in History" phase. The emphasis is on adding contributions and highlights about women and people of color to existing units as if all people are the same, ignoring barriers to true equality within the educational system (McCormick, 1994, p. 86). The third stage seeks to systemically restructure curriculum into an equitable one for both sexes. The "Nonsexist, Culturally Inclusive Model" requires teachers to use "an ethic of care" in choosing units of study, not a simple half and half rule (McCormick, 1994, p. 86). Again, the basic educational framework would be transformed completely to reflect experiences of, and to critically examine the worlds of, all excluded groups of people (McCormick, 1994, p. 87). Like McIntosh's fifth phase, it is emerging. Both models challenge existing teaching methods and simple "add and stir" philosophies that attempt to equalize curriculum delivery but do not come close.

A third model for curriculum changes that would help alleviate the silencing of women's voices, Banks and Banks' *Multicultural Education*, closely parallels McCormick's and McIntosh's models. Its five "dimensions" include

"content integration," in which students learn about groups of people who have been ignored and silenced in traditional school curriculum. The second dimension, "knowledge construction," mirrors McIntosh's third phase (Woman as a Problem, Anomaly, or Absence) and suggests that students explore the roots of "cultural assumptions" and values that look at events and situations from the perspective of white "westerners." Banks and Banks' "equity pedagogy," the third dimension, requires that teachers change their methods to better meet the academic and social needs of a diverse body of children by using varied teaching strategies that help share power in the classroom. The fourth dimension, like both McIntosh's and McCormick's models demand, requires teachers to actively confront deeply embedded prejudices in their students. The last dimension challenges school systems to analyze classroom content and policies as well as practices that privilege certain groups of people above others. This creation of an "empowering school culture and social structure" would provide all students with opportunities to "see" themselves at school, challenge power differentials, and eventually encourage students to become active in social justice activities. A complete transformation of existing power structures could follow.

In moving away from the silencing of women and girls in school and the strict pigeon holing of boys and men into aggressive roles, one of the first steps should be to integrate women's experiences into daily studies in all subjects. First, more research on women's contributions experiences and struggles, as well as

research into men who led peaceful conflict resolution movements, must be completed. Second, teachers need to have access to and be exposed to more of the research in the women's studies field. Women will continue to be added to curricula, but without further research, students and teachers will not have opportunities to analyze the systemic causes of the struggles and to investigate the roots of oppression. After teachers have full access to the research, the next step must be to help them infuse the information into their teaching.

With extensive research into the lives and histories of many marginalized and silenced groups of people, and with so many models of change in existence, some for over a quarter of a century, one would think that curriculum transformation would have been accomplished by now. However, high school curriculum remains steadfastly sexist and single-focused, achievement gaps between economically privileged students and those whose families struggle financially persist, and schools continue to reproduce inequalities between sexes and among different cultural groups of students. Schools persist in consenting to- even encouraging- "circles of exclusion from agency within the institutional order;" in other words, they sanction inequality (Smith, 2000, p. 1150). Clark (2002) recognizes that curriculum transformation is not a new idea, having been made popular in the 1990s. What has been lacking is not the *why* or the *what* to change but the *how* to change. First, teachers must focus on histories of oppression. While students will gain an understanding of the human rights

violations and forced power differentials, Clark also advocates studying about the lives of people who have been subjected to oppression, to study their daily jobs, roles, activities, rituals, and more. Next, teachers can introduce the contributions and works of people whose cultures have not held political, economic, or social power. Including this information in teacher education programs and in teacher professional development could impact even more students.

Recommendations for Further Research

Additional research must be done to address the questions this study left unanswered. This new research must position gender concerns as central to understanding how power works, and how it historically has worked to silence groups of people and make them invisible. First, a larger study that is more inclusive of students from different backgrounds, ethnicities, cultures, and sexual identities is needed to identify common beliefs and examine attitudes. This study was limited by the homogeneous population and the small number of participants. Additional participants and sites must include students of color, in different economic situations, students who attend non-traditional schools. New studies should explore gender and sexuality and how climate is perceived, and education experiences are enhanced and threatened by schools' climates.

When changes discussed above have been implemented, a thorough research study should be done to examine the effectiveness of the changes, including student achievement and school climate perceptions and components.

An intriguing piece to a new study would be to allow participants to interpret the effects of the changes on their own, how they define experiences for themselves and how they perceive social attitudes and gendered expectations with the new knowledge.

Final Thoughts and Concluding Remarks

In conducting this study and analyzing the data, I was reminded of the many institutions that maintain an unequal distribution of power, school is one of them. Sex roles are clearly defined within the overall power structure, and taken-for-granted roles remain unquestioned by students. The roots of these power differentials remain unexplored, thus preserving the current distributions of power in society. From conducting this dissertation study, I have been reminded that much more work is needed in the area of feminist research and curriculum transformation, and that the extensive gender-related research and discussion that was undertaken twenty years ago has dissipated. My hope is that changes will occur that end the silencing of students and the dictating of gendered norms and roles.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX: CONSENT FORM FOR STUDENTS

Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Colorado State University

TITLE OF STUDY: Gender Revealed: How Students Experience and Construct their Ideas of Gender at School

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS:

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CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:

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WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH? *Your psychology teacher has volunteered this class to participate in this research. In doing this research we would like to understand:*

- *how girls and boys feel about their school experiences*
- *how boys and girls relate to each other*
- *how the relationships among girls and boys, and the relationships between girls and boys, impact students' lives at school*
- *what contributes to positive and negative school experiences, and if it's different for boys and girls*
- *if and when you feel listened to, silenced or alienated, and to perhaps give ideas that may help change school the policies and practices*

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY? *Ali Shore, a doctoral student at Colorado State University, will conduct the study under the supervision of Dr. Rod Lucero, Dr. Donna Cooner, and Dr. Jim Banning.*

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY? *The purpose of this study is to explore and describe the climate of a high school campus in a Colorado city of approximately 120,000 people to answer the questions:*

- *How do students make sense of gender at a high school?*
- *What gender related aspects of the school climate do various people perceive that either threaten or enhance their educational experiences?*
- *How do boys and girls understand and make sense of their places at school in terms of gender?*

Several sets of focus groups of approximately 10-12 people will concentrate on how students on a high school campus, defined as a school of grades ten through twelve, think about gender on their campus. This study will help show how male and female students feel in classes, going to recreational and extracurricular activities, and walking through the school hall. Specific attention will be paid to where students feel safe and unsafe, objectified, picked on or invisible, and to the kinds of limits participants feel are placed on them based on their sex.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST? *This study will consist of a series of focus groups, each about ninety minutes long, depending on the flow of the discussion and student schedules. Focus groups will be conducted at Fossil Ridge High School, in the classroom where you take Psychology. They will be led by Ali Shore, the researcher asking these questions. A second adult will help with the equipment. The first round will be held with separate single-sex groups of approximately ten to twelve students. Following the first focus groups, you will be asked to keep a journal for about two weeks, if you want to. In it, I'll ask you to write about things you notice that relate to some of the themes that come up during our focus group. You may choose to write in the journal and to share what you write; it is not mandatory. The second round will consist of either single-sex groups of the same students as a follow-up to the original discussion, or if the researcher feels it is appropriate and helpful to the study, a single focus group with members of both groups of original participants will be held.*

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO? *Focus groups will begin with a short survey for you to complete, which will include information such as your name and grade and a detailed description of the research process. Each session will begin with an*

activity to help frame the study and to encourage open discussion. The activity will include watching and discussing a movie or music video clip, an exploration of magazines students commonly buy, or another type of activity to spark interest in the topic of the construction of gender. You will then be asked to answer questions about gender, being male and female, and your experiences at school that relate to gender.
Two adults will be in the classroom during the focus groups. One of them will audio-tape what you say. A follow-up focus group will be done to check accuracy and to explore issues that came up during the first discussion group and between sessions. You will also be asked to keep a journal in the weeks between focus group meetings to add to what we talk about during the groups. They may help you bring up topics or ideas you didn't have time to or were hesitant to talk about during the groups. This activity is voluntary and your grade is not affected by whether you keep a journal or share your entries. You may choose not to turn in anything at all from your journal entries.

ARE THERE REASONS WHY I SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?
There are no known reasons for you not to take part in this study.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?
It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researcher(s) have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks. There is a possible risk of you being identifiable in the write-up of this study, even though we will use fake names, change other identifying information, and report data collectively, not as individual finding. Focus groups settings can pose special problems for participants, in that confidentiality depends on other members of the group.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? *There are no known benefits to participating in this study, but we hope to provide more information on gender and how it affects you while you're in school. The findings may help to encourage support for students in the future.*

DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY? *Your participation in this research is voluntary, and your grade for any class does will not be affected by your participation in this study. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide not to participate, you'll do another activity that relates to your psychology class.*

WHAT WILL IT COST ME TO PARTICIPATE? *There is no cost for participating in this study.*

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT I GIVE?
We will keep private all research records that identify you, to the extent allowed by law.

Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write about the study to share it with other researchers, we will write about the combined information we have gathered. You will not be identified in these written materials. We may publish the results of this study; however, we will keep your name and other identifying information private.

We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information, or what that information is. For example, your name will be kept separate from your research records and these two things will be stored in different places under lock and key. You should know, however, that there are some circumstances in which we may have to show your information to other people. For example, the law may require us to show your information to a court or to tell authorities if we believe you have abused a child or have been abused, or you pose a danger to yourself or someone else.

CAN MY TAKING PART IN THE STUDY END EARLY? *If you do not come to school on the days of the focus groups, you will not be a part of this study. If the focus group coordinator determines that it is best to end focus group participation early, she may do so.*

WILL I RECEIVE ANY COMPENSATION FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?
No compensation will be provided for participation in this study.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I AM INJURED BECAUSE OF THE RESEARCH? *The Colorado Governmental Immunity Act determines and may limit Colorado State University's legal responsibility if an injury happens because of this study. Claims against the University must be filed within 180 days of the injury.*

WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS? *Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions about the study, you can contact the investigator, Ali Shore, at 970.213.9211. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact Janell Meldrem, Human Research*

Administrator at 970-491-1655. We will give you a copy of this consent form to take with you.

WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW? *Your participation in this study is greatly appreciated.*

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing 3 pages.

Please check the boxes to which you give your consent:
☐ I agree to participate in the first focus group that will meet during psychology class.
☐ I agree to keep a journal if I wish, and to turn it in if I wish.
☐ I agree to participate in the second focus group that will meet during psychology class.

_____ _____

Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study Date

_____

Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

_____ _____

Name of person providing information to participant Date

_____

Signature of Research Staff

Obtain your parent's permission only if you are under 18 years of age.

PARENTAL SIGNATURE FOR MINOR

We are asking your child to be in a research study. The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether or not your child can be in the study. Please read the form carefully. You may ask questions about the purpose of the research, what we would ask your child to do, the possible risks and benefits, your child's rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want your child to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." We will give you a copy of this form for

your records. Questions can be directed to Ali Shore at 970.213.9211 or to Dierdre Cook, principal of Fossil Ridge High School.

As parent or guardian I authorize _____ (print name) to become a participant for the described research. The nature and general purpose of the project have been satisfactorily explained to me by _____ and I am satisfied that proper precautions will be observed.

Please check the boxes to which you give your consent:

☐ I authorize my child to participate in the first focus group that will meet during his/her psychology class.

☐ I authorize my child to keep a journal if she/he wishes, and to turn it in if she/he wishes.

☐ I authorize my child to participate in the second focus group that will meet during his/her psychology class.

_____

Minor's date of birth

_____ _____

Parent/Guardian name (printed) Parent/Guardian signature

Date