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THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

**Erasing Ourselves:  
Power and Secondary Women Teachers' Professional Identity**

by

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE  
DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

GRADUATE DIVISION OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

CALGARY, ALBERTA

OCTOBER, 2001

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this research was to investigate the play of power that women teachers experience in secondary schools and the corresponding impact of power on women teachers' identities. Discourses (patterns of thought and talk) were central to this inquiry because they constructed the 'known' about both phenomena. Guided by feminist poststructural theory, I inquired into the discourses of power evident in women teachers' talk. I used fictional stories about power and women teachers to provoke the four participants' responses during focus group discussions and individual interviews. I found that participants utilized a discourse of professionalism as a discourse of power, in order to construct possibilities and impossibilities within teaching. As they negotiated gendered self-identities, women teachers were constrained and enabled by a discourse of professionalism. Women teachers employed complex practices in order to silence or erase gendered meanings which they understood as undermining a professional identity.

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank Dr. Anne Phelan for her hard work as my supervisor. She has supported me throughout my inquiry, from introducing me to feminist poststructural writers to offering me direction and encouragement when I needed it most. I have benefited greatly from her mentorship.

I would like to thank the committee members for their feedback on the thesis. I would especially like to thank Dr. Jim Field for his sincere interest in the work throughout my studies and for challenging me to 'think interpretively.'

I would like to thank my family and friends for the tremendous support that I received throughout my entire course of studies. Their unwavering faith in me reminded me that worthwhile endeavors are shared.

Lastly, I would like to thank the women teachers in my study who trusted me with their words about a very sensitive topic in education. In doing so, they have reflected back the meanings that many of us are also subjects of and subject to.



### **Dedication**

To the memory of my maternal grandmother,

Elizabeth Brennan,

(1921 – 1999)

who approached life as a mighty individual.

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## Chapter One

### The Search for the Right Questions

#### A Teaching Moment

*One spring, I decided to substitute teach in order to earn some money during a break in graduate studies. After teaching full-time for several years at the high school level, I remember my apprehension surrounding the notion of becoming a 'sub' and inheriting the 'nightmare' class at a junior high school.*

*After three weeks being 'the sub,' I arrived one morning to find that the school had been vandalized. Some students had spray-painted rude comments about the principal on the front-side of the building and had thrown rocks through several windows.*

*After thinking I had passed the 'trial by fire' phase of substitute teaching, I opened the door of my classroom and was confronted by the word BITCH spray-painted on one of the picture windows of the classroom. The letters of this horrific word not only filled the entire space of the window, but were also written backwards, making it impossible to ignore the message from within my room. As I slowly made my way over to the other windows, which have been vandalized by rocks, I noticed the smaller print that read: "Ms. Ellingson is a fucking bitch and a fucking whore." I was stunned.*

*I remember waiting uncomfortably for classes to start that day, knowing that the writer of the obscenities had to be a student in one of my classes. No one else would have known my name given my 'substitute status' at the school. I attempted to proceed through the day as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened.*

*The mess was quickly cleaned up by the custodial staff but despite the erasure, Justin, a student in my class, asked the inevitable question in third*

*period: "Did they replace the windows just because someone called you a bitch?" Some of his classmates laughed. I felt my ire rise. Maybe my reaction was out of hurt, not anger. As a response to my 'teacherly look,' he replied, "What? I'm only saying what someone else wrote."*

*At the end of the day, a janitor walked in and, in a half-joking manner, asked, "My God! What are you doing to those kids that would make them hate you after only three weeks?" I was sure that this very question was on everyone's mind.*

*I left the building that afternoon thankful for having made it through the day without crying. As I left, the principal said, "Don't let that business bother you. It was just some kids with too much time on their hands. You saw what they wrote about me, didn't you?"*

*"Yeah," I thought to myself, "but it's not the same thing."*

#### A Common-Sense View

Over time I found myself repeatedly revisiting the events of that day in order to determine a reasonable explanation for what had happened. Rather than get caught up in an emotional, subjective understanding, I tried to determine the facts as objectively as possible. I wanted to uncover previously overlooked clues to what had 'really' happened. I searched for 'the truth.' Initially, I found myself making sense of this event using 'common-sense explanations' (Belsey, 1980). Common-sense explanations often rely on psychological theories of the individual to make sense of events (Lather, 1991). Common-sense understandings in western societies frequently celebrate the values of "hyper-individualism," which are based on liberal-humanist explanations of individual actions. These understandings view personal responsibility in terms of logical cause-and-effect relationships.

One example of such a psychological theory is behaviourism which espouses a stimulus-response relationship: that is, where a student's 'inappropriate behaviour' is understood as the result of a stimulus. According to

this theory, the graffitied comments can be understood as a response to the stimulus that the teacher initiated. I wondered how I acted in a way that provoked the students' undesirable actions. The janitor's remark certainly suggested such a possibility. I found myself wondering what it was that I did to make the students act in such an egregious manner and if, by some chance, my actions as a teacher provoked this response. This explanation seemed to me to be insufficient.

Another common-sense psychological theory that I used to explicate the event comes from developmental psychology, where individual responsibility is dependent on their developmental stage. In our culture, we consider students as young, under-developed members of society who need to be socialized into their roles as they mature. Reflecting on the events of the day, it might be reasonable to describe the situation as the work of a group of students who, because of their young age and immaturity, simply did not know any better. The principal's comments about these students "having too much time on their hands" seems to support the view that youth at this stage are not responsible for inappropriate behaviour. This too seemed like an insufficient rendering of the event.

So what was the truth of this event? In the previous common-sense interpretations (i.e. stimulus-response equals teacher provoked bad actions or kids aren't responsible: lack of knowledge equals immature bad actions), knowledge is based on a logical, cause-and-effect relationship. But again in my quest to understand these events, both of my common-sense explanations came up short. I began to wonder about how the text of the event --bitch/whore-- had something particular to do with it. My experience with common-sense explanations left language completely out of understanding the event. Bitch and whore certainly did not seem to be arbitrary terms. Language seemed important in this experience.



### A Feminist-Structuralist View

In order to take up the gendered language of this experience, I explored feminist-structural theory. How would a feminist-structuralist explain the bitch/whore experience? A structuralist would want to locate knowledge in a particular ideology to describe the different power structures that exist in society and that are manifest in language. Structuralism is concerned with whose interests are served by the knowledge claims that are made. As opposed to being objectively neutral, knowledge is viewed as perpetuating certain interests (Weiler, 1988). As such, knowledge comes from a place or point of view – an ideology. With a focus on the notion of inequality in schools and its relationship to patriarchy (Middleton, 1993), knowledge is understood to be a product of what is knowable through structures in society that are largely patriarchal. In terms of my story, the relationships and material conditions of inequality might frame the principal as the father ruling over the teacher/mother, who in turn rules over the student/child (Gaskell and McLaren, 1991).

Using the constructs of a feminist-structuralist perspective, the events of my teaching experience would be as follows: In order to understand my role as a teacher I would have to understand the limits and influences that society places upon women. For example, the words spray-painted on the classroom windows take on particular significance from this perspective. The words 'bitch' and 'whore' might be clues about society's range of understandings to describe the characteristics of women in a patriarchal society. Often times, a woman who is not acting 'nicely', being a good girl ('daughterly'), nurturing and supportive ('motherly'), can be labeled as 'a bitch.' In addition, women contend with the sexualization of their bodies. Western knowledge systems, based on dichotomous understandings, reinforce opposing descriptions of women and men. Women are equated with nature, the body, and desire; men are equated with culture, the mind, and rationality (Stone, 1994). Thus, all women run the risk of being labeled 'whores' by virtue of being equated with bodies that are

sexualized. What does all of this mean to me as a teacher, woman, daughter, sister, etc.? How can I read the bitch/whore event? Each label has the ability to drastically affect me as a woman because I believe that women are socialized to value the opinions of others. Outside opinions are often important to women for two reasons: the classification of women's own knowing as subjective/irrational and the expectation that women will consider others before considering themselves (selfless caring). From this perspective I was especially hurt by the power that was played out when I was labeled a bitch and a whore.

Cultural understandings and practices also accompany these labels. Physical, emotional, and sexual violence against women, for example, impact how we take up language in our society. Popular culture and the media portray vivid images of violent practices against women. I felt shocked by the words written about me and viewed the actions of a group of students as reinforcing patriarchal values of oppression against women. I then understood the words of the principal as patronizing – words spoken by the father, who was trying to protect his daughter from the 'harsh realities' of a brutal patriarchal world. I imagined that the young male students<sup>1</sup> were testing their future power in patriarchy, exemplified by Justin challenging me during the third period class. He was able to utter words that are usually unacceptable in formal public school settings. From the perspective of structural feminism, I understood that my feelings of frustration and devastation could be explained as a reaction to the oppressive patriarchy present in educational settings, and the ability of others to label me and define me.

As helpful as structural feminist arguments were in understanding ideological influences on knowing and the important role of language in transmitting these ideologies, I could not help wondering about the limits of this telling. From this perspective it seemed that my interpretation could get fixed into discourses of gender and powerlessness - i.e., the truth of who I am as a teacher

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<sup>1</sup> The principal suspended four male students for the remainder of the school term (three weeks) for causing the damage to the school. Two of these students were from my classes.

getting locked into a patriarchal structure in which I am a participant but where I am incapable of making change. This approach seemed to glaze over the heterogeneity among women, meaning that women are taken up as a unified whole. I also had the sense that I was somehow complicit in my own powerlessness. It seemed reasonable to assume that if I was aware of male oppression then I should be able to stand up for myself. Instead, I am left feeling like a willing participant in my own oppression. Once again, I felt these interpretations were not addressing my queries about the complexity of the bitch/whore teaching experience.

#### A Feminist Poststructural View

Although I was first introduced to feminist poststructural theory in a graduate course on Feminist Methods, I did not fully appreciate the extent to which this theory would inform my life until I had to make sense of the vandalism event. I remember how the key concepts in this theoretical approach resonated with how I take up the world, but it was only when moving through alternative explanations for the bitch/whore event that I came to viscerally experience (live/think/feel) a feminist poststructural space.

Poststructuralism is a theory that attempts to address some of the perceived problems with a static notion of identity as it investigates the importance of language and knowledge in relation to the larger structures in society (Weedon, 1997). Rather than a fixed notion of the self, based on a rational, stable self, feminist poststructuralism examines language for the structures of discourse which shape what kinds of understandings are possible for the individual (Davies, 1993). Meaning is constructed by discourse and influences what subject positions are available to the individual. No longer focused on competing roles of the individual, poststructuralism introduces the idea of a complex, contradictory-self. This concept of a multiply-constituted self is better described as subjectivity or as subject positions that are fluid, changing,

and agentic; a self that is "reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak" (Weedon, 1997, p. 32).

According to a poststructural perspective, the concept of discourse is important because language is not considered to be a transparent carrier of meaning or fixed in a particular ideology. Catherine Belsey (1980) explains discourse as a "domain of language-use, a particular way of talking (and writing and thinking). A discourse involves certain shared assumptions which appear in the formulations that characterize it" (p. 5). This description of discourse goes beyond simple language use to include social understandings and, therefore, socially expected behaviours. Language, as discourse, is understood as a way that meaning is spoken and acted-out by participants in a given context. There is no fixed obdurate reality. Taken as an approach to reading life, feminist poststructuralism looks for the many possible discourses simultaneously at play. For example, the words spoken by the principal, "don't let that business bother you," could signal a discourse of caring or empathy that the principal was choosing to evoke in his utterance. My acceptance of those words as patronizing could indicate my access to a feminist discourse which takes patriarchy into account while also recognizing the hierarchical position that the principal (an older male) has in relation to me (a younger female). This understanding is at odds with more traditional or common-sense understandings of what happened. As a teacher, I have multiple and often contradictory sets of beliefs to draw upon as possible 'truths.' Acting upon any one of these discourses carries with it consequences; there are still material conditions within which discourses operate. For example, how I get along with my students, colleagues, and principal at school is affected by what discourses I 'take up.' I am limited by my interpretation of the dominant discourses operating within schools that serve the institutional status-quo that respect values such as hierarchies, patriarchy, order, and discipline. The notion of discourse makes possible an understanding of knowledge as always partial, as well as bound by material practices.

Some writers have described the competition between discourses as the struggle for common-sense status (Belsey, 1980; Weedon, 1997). This view of power challenges the notion of power as a fixed, monolithic structure. Some poststructural theorists use Foucault's understanding of power, describing power operating as a network, always located in relation to knowledge (Bordo, 1993b; Weedon, 1997). Power is inextricably tied to knowledge because competing discourses vie for supremacy as *the* common-sense interpretation. Because of the multiple discourses operating in society, an important aspect of Foucault's notion of power is the corresponding resistance to it (Weedon, 1997).

Resistance is a concept that refers to the possibility of a discourse being 'taken up' or uttered into play, which is contrary to the dominant discourse in circulation at that moment. For instance, I may understand the events of that day at the junior high school to be a challenge to my authority as a teacher, or an impulsive act of a group of frustrated, disadvantaged youth. But within a network of discourses, I may also reconsider Justin's words as his attempt to resist the rendering of another person's (in this case the graffiti author's) resistance as invisible. By re-speaking the words, Justin puts this discourse back into 'visible' circulation, consciously or unconsciously. It gets remembered. I, on the other hand, want it forgotten/invisible. Any of these discourses provide both possibilities and limitations for subject positions available to Justin and me.

Within schools, discipline and authority discourses play a major role in defining what meanings are attached to events. Individuals are caught up in these discourses, which have consequences for all of us. For example, within discipline and authority discourses, I am a teacher responsible for the behaviour of my students. My silence back to Justin was my way of interpreting Justin's words within a discipline framework; that is, I believed his words were evidence of a challenge to my authority which may or may not have been influenced by gender. My reaction to Justin's remarks also has the potential to label me as a 'good' or 'bad' teacher within a discipline framework which has lasting consequences for how I view myself as a teacher. For instance, if I interpreted

Justin's query as a 'teachable moment,' I might have drawn upon other discourses available to me as a teacher, in order to talk about how people, especially women, are labeled or accused in society. I could have moved the discussion to include discourses of teachers as emotional human beings. My own emotions are part of my self-understanding, which, as discussed in the previous section, is influenced by how I think women are socialized to need others' approval. I want(ed) to be liked. My role as an authority figure, within a discourse of professionalism emphasizing traditional authoritarian relationships, is contested by other discourses, such as discourses of femininity, caring, or rationality and business. It is clear that multiple discourses operate simultaneously upon a subject.

#### Women Teachers in Power Relations

I have presented three readings of an event that I found troubling. My own experience and difficulty with interpreting a traumatic teaching moment prompted me to investigate whether other women teachers faced similar issues. As Shulamit Reinharz (1992) stated "the connection between the research project and the researcher's self frequently takes the form of 'starting with one's own experience,' particularly when the study concerns a disturbing experience" (p. 259). I wanted to know how other women teachers interpreted "disturbing experiences." What kinds of interpretations would women offer? Would any of them use 'common-sense' understandings to explain their lives as women teachers or might they offer more critical perspectives of their lives in schools and beyond?

For me it seemed that power was at the heart of the issue. My curiosity led me to seek out other women teachers and explore understandings about power and women teachers. In a feminist poststructural analysis, meaning is understood from the discourses that are accessed and 'in use' at a given moment. I wanted to examine the meanings and play of power in women teachers' lives and how the play of power affected women teachers' identity. I

believe analyzing and describing the discourses from which we create meaning in our lives is an important step towards making informed choices about and demarcating the possibilities for changing existing arrangements of power and material conditions for women. That being the case, the question, "who I am" as a teacher, emerges poststructurally as being about how self is constructed at a particular moment, as opposed to being fixed and finite. To this end, the following research questions capture my interest in exploring 'discourses in teaching moments':

1. What are the discourses of power evidenced in secondary women teachers' talk?
2. And, how do these discourses contribute, if at all, to the construction of a teaching identity?

#### The Structure of the Funhouse

As I embarked on my project, I realized that the notion of 'reality' and truth were problematic. My own reflections were full of possible and alternative perspectives. What I can claim to know and what I can take as 'true' are problematic within poststructural parameters. If I take up the world as 'knowable' and 'predictable,' then I feel stable and secure. If, on the other hand, I take up the possibility that the world is changeable, in flux, dynamic and shifting, then the way I understand the world gets determined, in part, by the discourses in which I operate and which operate upon me. This indeterminacy is confusing and uncertain. It's like being at the Exposition in the Funhouse. Come inside and see.

Initially upon entering the Funhouse, you must negotiate the Glass Maze. Constructed of glass walls, there are various pathways, often leading to dead-ends. Tracing steps back to find a new path is confusing as you make your way to the exit. Often, it looks as if you could easily find your way out, but inevitably, you do not see the path blocked until you feel the glass barrier. Because the Glass Maze is lined with mirrors, it appears as if the maze goes on forever with

endless possible pathways throughout. Having finally found the Maze's exit, you enter the Hall of Mirrors. In each mirror, you note a self-reflection that distorts your self image. Slowly you make your way from one framed mirror to the next, seeing your self as taller, then shorter, slimmer, then wider, depending on where you stand. The mirror images that you think reflect a 'real' you, reflect different and exaggerated self-images.

As you continue through the Funhouse, you feel your progress is constantly challenged. You walk up the moving staircase, which shifts back and forth, along the corridor that trips you with revolving disks, and over an undulating bridge. Each sure step you take, meets unfamiliar terrain. You are constantly thrown off balance. As you continue through the Funhouse, you observe different rooms. One room is built with a "forced perspective." When you move farther into the room, it appears to others that you grow larger. However, it was the construction of the room, designed with increasingly narrow walls and a descending ceiling, that provides the 'larger than life' illusion. Another room is mirrored. Diagonal mirrors produce images of you infinitely replicated. The mirrors are also angled to erase any other person in the room, even when you know he or she is standing beside you. The optical illusions astound and confuse you.

As you prepare to leave the Funhouse, you have one last obstacle to overcome: the tumbling barrel. With the tunnel spinning, you need to constantly walk up the side as you move forward. With each step, you wonder if you will be up-ended. You emerge shaken, a bit disoriented, and slightly alarmed by the experience. You find the experience difficult, and realize the challenges in negotiating the things that you take for granted.

The unsteadiness and the disorienting affects of the Funhouse are like the troubled, confused notions of teaching, women, power, and interpretation that result from taking up the complicated spaces of teachers and teaching poststructurally. Everything is suspect and called into question like my multi-layered read of the vandalism experience at the junior high school. The ground



is unsteady, as I make heads or tails of that experience, steps are tentative as I offer multiple interpretations, and results are unknown as I come to know myself as a multiply constituted subject/teacher. So too is how we might explore the complex lives and experiences of women teachers.

## Chapter Two

### Research Strategies

In a study about women teachers and power, I faced the problem of how to deal with a topic that contains various egregious meanings. As I suggested in Chapter One, my own understandings of women teachers and power are difficult and shifting. The multiple interpretations of the junior high school event illustrated this experience. Feminist poststructuralism writers unsettled me, as they challenged what I can know about women teachers and power, adding to my disorienting and disquieting feelings about this topic. The literature surrounding the topic of women teachers and power has guided my methodology and my interpretations of women teachers' words. For a more detailed account of the substantive contribution of the literature, see Appendix A. Before rendering alternative interpretations, I will focus on the way that feminist poststructural ideas guided my methodological approach.

My intention was to collect data about how power is enacted in the ways in which women teachers understand and talk about their practice, as opposed to a methodology that would simply ask participants for their views on power and teaching. Participants needed to be provided with a way to grapple with various meanings of power and the implications of those meanings for women teachers. Consequently, I used stories about women teachers and power to provoke participants' responses in focus group discussions, and individual interviews. The participants' talk became paramount as I investigated language, power, and subjectivity. In this chapter, I first outline who the participants in my study were and how I found them. Next, I describe how we proceeded over the four months of study. Lastly, I describe the process of discourse analysis that I used to interpret the data.

## The Participants

### Criteria for Study Participation

For this study, only women teachers were interviewed. I wanted to focus on the ways that women teachers make sense of meanings which structure and limit their teaching lives. I locate my study within a feminist paradigm that places women and their lives "in a central place in understanding social relations as a whole" (Acker in Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000, p. 210). I wish to avoid common-sense discussions that tend to overlook or underplay gender differences.

Finding participants for the study was at once both easy and difficult. While in graduate school, many classmates told me they thought my project sounded interesting and that they would like to become participants. A number of women teachers said that the project sounded like it was about an important issue in teaching. Reluctantly, I turned them down. I wanted the participants to be people that I did not know because I wanted to meet with practicing teachers, who faced the classroom every day. The teachers that I know and spend time with socially tend to be like-minded or at least know the ideological framework from which I often view the world. As it turned out, I realized that I knew one participant upon our initial pre-research meeting, recognizing her as someone I had met through mutual teaching friends. We discussed the potential problems that might exist because of our previous acquaintance and we mutually agreed to her participation.

Narrowing down the possibilities further, I considered the impact that a variety of participant-characteristics could have on the outcome of the study. I wished to work with women teachers who were presently practicing at the secondary level because I wanted to forefront women's experiences and understandings of teaching (Richardson, 1990; Usher, 1996). Additionally, I constructed the vignettes to reflect my own understandings as a teacher at the

secondary level. I wanted the vignettes to resonate with participants.

Therefore, it was also important that participants be familiar with secondary school culture as a result of extensive teaching experience. I looked for participants who had taught a minimum of five years.

Once I decided that participants should be practicing secondary level women teachers with a minimum of five years teaching experience, I also wanted to include a mix of school boards and subject specialist areas. Again, I had hoped to have a variety of perspectives present in focus group discussions. Participants from the same school board or solely urban boards may reflect dominant discourses from a particular school board's culture. Similarly, subject area specialists may also share analogous meanings about what good teaching is. Lastly, I wanted to select participants living close to Calgary, so that they could drive home after the focus group meetings rather than staying overnight.

#### Finding Participants

I found the participants for this study through various means. Originally, I advertised in the June 8, 1999 issue of *The ATA News*, a provincial publication available to all certified teachers in Alberta. It was my intention to conduct the research over the summer months, so the advertisement ran in the last issue before the summer and specified that the participants needed to be available over the summer months. This may have been the reason for the single response I received. Another participant responded to the advertisements that I posted on bulletin boards in the Faculty of Education building at the University of Calgary. The final two participants heard about the study through "word of mouth," after I phoned school administrators at a variety of school boards close to the Calgary area.

#### Study Participants

Because I am interested in the discourses of power evident in women teachers' talk, I did not collect detailed backgrounds and self-descriptions from

participants. Therefore, the information that I collected was limited. Personal descriptions provide a partial context for the subject positions and discourses that subjects take up. I did not wish to locate a participant's response solely within the individual herself or a categorical description that she might be viewed as representing. I felt this would be privileging a more psychological approach to the inquiry which would then centre on 'the personality' of the subject and the humanist assumptions that we can 'know' ourselves, unequivocally. This study is not an investigation of teachers' life narratives (c.f. Munro, 1998). My focus is on the discourses that individual teachers access and what subject positions are made available within those discourses. Given these precautions, I wish to provide the brief biographical sketch that I recorded for each of the four participants in this study. The names and schools are pseudonyms chosen by each participant.

Andrea teaches at St. Joseph's School, a Catholic public high school in an urban area. Teaching for approximately 10 years, her main focus is English, with some work in Religion and Social Studies. She is the mother of a middle-school child.

Sonia teaches at Caldwell School, a junior/senior school which has a specialty program for athletes. Sonia's subject area is the humanities, which she has been teaching for approximately 15 years. Sonia has recently returned to teaching from a leave of absence after recovering from a major illness. She has a graduate degree in Education.

Carolyn teaches at Nenwedn School, a small high school in a rural area. Carolyn has taught for approximately 15 years; her subject area is English. Carolyn wishes to pursue a graduate degree in Education.

Nellie teaches at Stonewall High School, a large high school in a rural area. Teaching for approximately 20 years, her subject area most recently is Art. Nellie has graduate degrees in both Art and Education.

All participants are Canadian citizens and Caucasian. Issues such as ethnicity, class, able-bodiedness, sexual preference were not discussed or

disclosed by participants. These are also important issues, but for this study the thread that I chose to unravel was gender.

### How We Proceeded

#### The Vignettes

It is possible to discuss literary texts alongside other texts, such as works of history and autobiography, and even more ephemeral texts, such as cookery books, advice manuals and so on, in order to reveal the similarities these texts display across generic boundaries. Discourse is therefore useful in that it can allow us to analyze the similarities across a range of texts as the products of a particular set of power/knowledge relations (Mills, 1997, p. 23).

Guided by discourse theory, the central assumption in my methodology is that discourse constructs meaning. Telling one's story is one way that draws on the meanings we make of our lives and who we imagine ourselves to be. In other words, "to be a self is to be able to render an account of oneself, to be able to tell the story of one's life" (Schrag, 1997, p. 26). Since I wanted to listen to women teachers' talk as they made sense of their lives as teachers, I thought that stories would provide a way for the conversations to start. I wanted to tell a story, in order to provoke a response. I hoped that a good story about women teachers would invite participants to interact with (accept and/or reject) the multiple meanings intersecting teaching and power. In addition, I anticipated that these vignettes would provoke participants to tell their own stories, further inviting complex and contradictory discourses into the discussion. As Schrag (1997) states:

The story of the self is a developing story, a story subject to a creative advance, wherein the past is never simply a series of nows that have lapsed into nonbeing, but a text, an inscription of events and experiences, that stands open to new interpretations and new perspectives of meaning (p. 37).

In each speaking moment, both the vignettes and the participants' stories provided opportunities to consider the meanings that are available, marginalized, or invisible in the production of what we can know about women teachers and power. With this in mind, I created three stories, or vignettes, centred around women teachers and power. I constructed all three vignettes prior to starting the research.

Because I wanted these stories to resonate with teachers, I started from my own personal memories of teaching high school. "Jessica's Story" (see Figure 1), the first story I created, focused on a "power-over/under" scenario of teaching, consistent with some of the memories I have about conflicts with administrators, colleagues, and students. In "Jessica's Story," the focus is on a teacher, a student, and an administrator. Loosely based on a personal memory from teaching high school, "Jessica's Story" presents a conflict about a school rule. Some of the issues that I anticipated would surface in the discussion of this story related to gender, levels of authority, power, formal and informal institutional rules, personal safety, conceptions of students, and school culture.

Figure 1: Jessica's Story

While on a prep, Jessica could smell the cigarette smoke swirling into the corner of her room in the high school wing. This happened often when someone came through the "smoke doors," or if someone was smoking with the doors open, or if someone was smoking inside the building. Jessica wondered which one of these it would be.

The effort to deal with the issue was a constant battle. Jessica had the room next to the "smoking courtyard" and her classroom window overlooked this area. Jessica had even moved her desk out of the smoker's line of vision because the constant "performances" for her attention were just too much. Jessica was the gatekeeper of the smoking policy. Often she found that students who "hadn't quite made it" outside into the courtyard before they lit up would see her coming and quickly exit or simply drop the cigarette.

Jessica wanted the intrusive smoke smell to stop while she was working, so out she walked. As Jessica rounded the corner, she actually saw a student take a drag on a cigarette. His friend saw Jessica, gave "the signal", and the cigarette was dropped. In a fraction of an instant all the possibilities flashed through Jessica's mind. Did she, for once, actually see a kid smoking? Would she be able to say, "Yes, he was smoking in the building"? This infraction of the school's smoking policy, was grounds for an automatic three-day suspension. Did the smoker have to be Jason, a known drug user (heroin) and dealer, who beat up his girlfriend (pregnant for the third time), and who was the son of a police officer? Could Jessica turn a blind eye when Jason's buddy knew she had seen him smoke? If she did ignore the issue, would she be setting herself up to be less credible in similar future encounters? Jessica continued towards them.

Reluctant to precipitate everything she knew would follow, she confronted Jason.

"You have violated the smoking policy. It is an automatic three-day suspension because you are smoking in the building. I am going down to the office to report this to the principal."

Jessica invoked the words that the high school staff had agreed upon to try and deal with the smoking problem in the school, even though every word came out of a brain that screamed resistance. As a teacher, Jessica believed in second chances, in talking it out. She was a woman of the 'please don't do that again' approach, a smoother-over of problems. Jessica also knew that ultimately the office wouldn't want to deal with the problem, and her experience told her that she would have to deal with it herself. Jason responded.

"Did you see me smoke?" he countered knowingly. Jason's unique understanding of society and the law - "innocent until proven guilty" - was in operation. Jessica refused the bait.

"Jason, you were smoking in the building and that is an automatic three day suspension".

"Did you see me smoking?" The tone was louder, more menacing.

Jessica paused. She reminded herself, "Okay, now it's time to think about diffusing a situation." "Keep your cool Jessica. Don't play into that game."

Again Jessica asserted, "I am going down to the office." As Jessica walked away Jason yelled.

"Did you see me fucking smoking? Huh Bitch?"

Jessica flinched. She had no idea how close he was behind her, but she kept walking. She knew she was afraid. Jason repeated the question again and again. With each of her footsteps, the volume increased. Terror gripped her. Instinctively, she prepared herself for a blow from behind. She frantically thought, "Is he stoned? What is he capable of?" Jessica knew the office was still a long way to go, and she wondered if she would make it there in one piece. Feeling a strong need to be physically rescued from the situation, Jessica knew the closed doors that she passed offered no refuge. Her female colleagues behind those doors had developed coping mechanisms to deal with the chaos of the halls - they hid.

As she neared the office, the fear began to subside, but the stress increased. Jessica started to second-guess herself. Had she really seen him smoking, or had she just assumed it? Was this worth making an incident over? Was Jessica right?

By the time Jessica arrived at the office she was trembling. The principal was talking to the vice-principal. Jessica interrupted. As she started to relay the story, her voice cracked and, to her horror, she began to cry.

"Why are you getting so upset?" asked the principal. "Did he do something to you?"

"No, but I thought he might," Jessica explained softly.

"Don't be silly," the principal replied, "he would never do anything to hurt you." (The principal's son used to play hockey on the same team as Jason.) "Of course we'll suspend him. Write it up and put it on my desk. Don't worry about it, I will take care of it." Jessica was deflated.

Jason was later suspended and, because the principal required it, he apologized for swearing at Jessica. But, for the rest of the year, Jessica had to live with the sneer of a young man's knowing face and his taunts.

I created the second vignette, "Margaret's Story" (see Figure 2), in order to address the conflict or tension that may arise between teachers and parents, and teachers and their colleagues. Designed to reflect a less confrontational stance than the first vignette, "Margaret's Story" is a story about a teacher who finds herself singled out for an individual action that is different than her colleagues' actions. This story included similar memories I have from high school staff meetings. As a fictionalized account of an everyday event in the lives of teachers, I wanted to provide the opportunity for issues to arise concerning:



community and power with colleagues, collegial support, mission statements in schools, different teaching philosophies, equality, fairness, privacy, and parental involvement.

Figure 2: Margaret's Story

It was the last period before lunch and the class was working on final revisions for their presentations on the different roles of government in society. From her desk, Margaret looked up at her class and wondered how prepared each group would be for this afternoon's presentations. She mouthed the words to the song that played on the radio at the back of the class.

At the end of the day, as she concluded the last period class, Margaret's students wanted to know what their presentation marks were.

"I will wait to tell you because not all groups have presented yet. And besides, everyone should have a pretty good idea of their marks. I'm sure there won't be any surprises," she told them.

On the way to class the next morning, Margaret picked up her messages. After reading them, she made a note to herself to return Mrs. Johnson's phone call between bites of lunch.

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At the end of the day, a colleague dropped by Margaret's room.

"How was your day?", Julie asked.

"Okay, I guess," Margaret replied. "Except for the lecture I received from a parent. She wondered if I knew how distracting it was for her son to be listening to music in my class. She told me that if I had been more responsible as a teacher, her son would not have done so poorly on his presentation. And get this! She wanted to know what kind of work goes on in a classroom with music blaring in the background."

Intrigued, Julie asked, "So, what did you tell her?"

"That the majority of students seemed to work well under those conditions. I suggested that other factors may have contributed to her son's lower mark, and that I would gladly discuss these concerns with her and Travis, face to face."

"You didn't say you'd turn the music off?"

"No. Why? Would you have?"

"Probably. I would never let my kids listen to music in the first place. Music is nice and everything but ...."

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At the monthly staff meeting the next morning, the principal mentioned a parental concern.

"It has been brought to my attention by a parent that music in the classroom may be a problem for some students. I assured her that teachers use music for specific purposes, and that perhaps the music in her son's class had been used as a reward or privilege for students. However, I did wonder about the level of concern surrounding music in the classroom. What do we want to do as a staff? Do we need a school policy on this, or can we leave it up to each teacher to decide?"

Margaret's gaze dropped to the table in front of her. "My God, how did this issue get to this level?" she wondered. Why did Mrs. Johnson have to phone an administrator? Did Julie tell anyone the story? Margaret felt herself blush.

The comments began:

"I wish we had time to listen to music, but I've got a diploma exam to prepare for. I don't know what happens in the humanities, but in math, we don't just turn on the music or throw in a video whenever it suits us."

"What message are we sending kids if music is playing? Music is for their own spare time – down time. When do kids learn to focus and settle down? We are not preparing them for the real world if we don't help them learn self-discipline."

"Who chooses the music? Have you heard some of the lyrics these days? You want to talk about a parental concern; wait until we get a complaint about the 'P' word in one of those songs."

"How many people in here have radios in their room? I listen to music all the time in my classroom. I find the background noise soothing, and it helps me focus. Isn't what's good for us, good for the kids?"

"Well I, for one, don't appreciate it when I get these kids coming into my class bugging me to let them play music because they get to in 'so and so's' class."

"Who needs the grief? Why bother rocking the boat? Besides, I would be hard pressed to explain to the superintendent why Puff Daddy was playing in the back of my classroom."

"If we don't leave this up to the individual teacher, then what's next? Will the threat of controversy determine every decision I make and affect everything I do? I get tired of trying to second guess what's going to ruffle someone's feathers."

Finally, the principal interrupted. "Well, once again, I think we have demonstrated the old adage of 'what we do or fail to do, impacts others'. Perhaps for the time being we could leave it up to the individual teacher to decide. I recommend that you also have the discussion in your classrooms. Perhaps this could lead to better understanding on the part of students and parents."

As Margaret left the staff room, she overheard someone say, "I wonder who it was?"

The third, and final vignette, "Theresa's Story" (see Figure 3), was designed to explore issues for teachers in the classroom. In this story, I described an average day for a teacher that included moderate tensions with students. In this case, I hoped to offer a story that would stimulate discussion about subjects such as: curriculum, the nature of students, and how bodies and desire are constructed in schools, including the topic of homosexuality in the classroom.

Figure 3: Theresa's Story

Theresa was so excited driving to work that morning.

"These kids are going to love it," she thought, "despite themselves."

She had stayed late the night before, preparing a handout on the different types of techniques used in advertising. She had a fresh new supply of popular magazines (as opposed to the Time or Maclean's normally occupying the back shelves) ready to be cut up and pasted to colourful poster paper. As she walked from the parking lot, carrying her load of magazines, one of her students said, "Does that mean that we get to do something fun today?"

"Of course! Don't we have fun everyday?" Theresa said to the back of the swiftly disappearing body headed through the doors. "We get to have fun today AND learn to be critical thinkers at the same time," Theresa thought, smiling to herself.

At the start of class, Theresa scanned over the attendance list. James was not there. "He's probably just late," Theresa thought to herself. She found out early in the term that he was the youngest child in the family, and that his mother treated James like he was still in elementary school, instead of grade nine. Frequently, James was allowed to sleep in.

As Theresa gazed over her own students, she saw a sea of sleepy faces. "Better move quickly," she thought, describing the categories of advertising techniques from the handout.

As she began the instructions - "Working in small groups, I would like you to find examples of each type of advertising from some popular magazines..." - a chorus of questions interrupted, before she drew another breath.

"Do we get to choose our own groups?"

"What magazines are there? Did you bring in any Thrasher?"  
 "Do you have any other colours for the poster paper. These suck."  
 "Do we get to use the smelly markers. I love the cherry one."

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 After the groups finally settled down, James arrived.  
 "Wouldn't ya know it. The day I'm late, we actually do something interesting," James announced.  
 Choosing to ignore his comment, Theresa suggested James join the group working closest to her desk.

As Theresa worked at her desk, her ears picked up snippets of conversations.  
 "Hey, look at this one."  
 "I'd buy a Pepsi from Cindy Crawford anytime," Scott said. "She's hot!"  
 "Not as hot as Pamela Lee. She's stacked!" James replied.  
 "Ya, if you like plastic". Jackie said.  
 "Who cares?" James remarked.  
 "Excuse me," Theresa interrupted, "but don't you have a project that you are supposed to be working on?"  
 "Yeah, but Ms. P. don't ya think Cindy Crawford's hot?" Scott asked enthusiastically.  
 "Well, maybe if she was a dyke, stupid" James shot back at Scott.  
 "James, that's enough of that," Theresa warned.  
 "What about Michael Jordan," Jackie asked, holding up a Nike ad. "He's a sweetie."  
 "I'm not sure what any of this has to do with the fact that this assignment is due, for marks, at the end of class" Theresa said.  
 "Humpf, maybe she is a dyke," James murmured, as Scott exclaimed, "No fair, that only gives us ten minutes."  
 "'Thems the breaks'. I guess, you should have used your class time more effectively." Theresa said, watching James cross the room to pack up.  
 She wondered if he had said what she had heard. Had anyone else?

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 At the end of the day, Theresa wearily walked about her room, picking up the pieces of paper cuttings littering the floor. The custodian would be unimpressed. Not to mention the parents who would notice the coloured felt pen marks on the arms and clothes of their children. Scanning over the advertising poster projects on the back wall, she wondered why she didn't notice the number of liquor ads in the magazines she had brought in.  
 "Well, I guess they had fun today."

I designed the vignettes to echo the multiple conceptions of power, from structural views of power over/under, to power as enacted in everyday practices in teaching. Interestingly, the first vignette, "Jessica's Story," was the vignette which most closely paralleled the participants' understanding of a research project about women teachers and power. After reading the story together, there was an immediate reaction from the group. The next two vignettes, which I consciously constructed about themes that teachers face everyday and reflect the 'taken-for-granted' aspects of teaching, elicited the question: "What does this have to do with power?" At one point, a participant offered to stop the tape-

recorder, while the group took the time to think about the connections to women teachers and power.

Each vignette was constructed from the teacher's perspective. The teacher was the central character in each story and the reader 'views' the story through the eyes of the main character. As I 'read' across the vignettes, I found common threads related to: What does it mean to be a teacher? What does curriculum mean? How do we negotiate gendered identities within school culture? How does high school culture affect our sense of our selves and our teaching identities? And, how do individuals negotiate institutional structures and expectations?

After constructing the vignettes and gathering participants for the study, I chose to structure the interview process in a particular way. I designed the research study to include both focus group discussions and individual interviews. I wanted the play of multiple discourses to be central to the methodology. Additionally, I wanted the participants to be able to share and respond to the stories of other women teachers from a variety of schools. Both of these goals were met by using focus group discussions.

#### Focus Groups

I had three main reasons for using focus groups. Firstly, women sharing their experiences with each other provides a valuable opportunity for each woman to discover what she may have in common with other women. Kristina Minister (1991) described the value that same-sex, focus group discussions can have when she remarked that "women speaking together encounter one another for the purpose of searching for and collaboratively constructing both personal and female cultural identity" (p. 34). Bringing women together in a group to respond to "the well-told collective story" and create their own stories encourages women to recognize: "That's *my* story. I am not alone" (Richardson, 1990, p. 129).

Secondly, I wished to address the "individualism and isolation" (Hargreaves, 1994) that may occur within teaching by bringing the teachers together in a group. Teachers spend a great deal of time with students and far less time with colleagues. Some participants told me they appreciated the opportunity to talk with their colleagues from different districts and schools and that they benefited from this aspect of the research project. One participant described how the time spent talking in the focus group discussions constituted part of her commitment to a professional development growth plan for that school year.

The final reason for conducting focus group discussions was methodological design. I wanted research participants to hear each other's sense-making, thus provoking a response to discourses that they may not have considered. Echoing the feminist poststructural notion of multiple subject positions or "nonunitary subjectivity" (Bloom, 1996), I wanted participants to have the chance to address or ignore one another's discourses. These discourses and the subject positions they suggest may be ones that they themselves did not consider. Usher (1996) states that

people internalize the rules of many discourses and do not accept them passively; they invest in some, reject others, create their own meanings for the choices they make, and position themselves in hierarchies. The researcher's task is to analyze the processes by which definitions and interpretations gain cultural approval, how power hierarchies are implicated in them, and whose interests are being served (p. 140).

In a focus group discussion, dominant discourse could also emerge and become reinforced by other participants, a key benefit when a research inquiry wishes to explore "everyday use of language and culture of particular groups" (Gibbs, 1997, p. 2).

The group discussions were more characteristic of focus group discussions because the interactions within the group were as important as the responses to my questions (Gibbs, 1997). For the first focus group, I read aloud the vignette *Jessica's Story*. Following the reading, I asked the participants for

their thoughts about the story and any issues that the story brought up. After these open-ended questions, the focus group discussed the story, their own stories and teaching in general. At times, when I felt a particular theme or topic was emerging, I explored the topic further using questions such as: What do you mean by that? Can you explain further? (Aubel, 1994). The rhythm and flow of the focus group discussions were generated by the group itself. I largely followed the tempo of the focus group discussion as informally set out by the group members themselves. All three focus group discussions proceeded in a similar fashion.

As I anticipated, the stories themselves provoked participants to tell their own stories. Participants asked each other questions for clarification. The discussions alternated between the specifics of the vignettes and individual teaching incidents, to larger discussions about teaching in general. We informally agreed that each focus group discussion would last two hours, concluding with participants arranging when they could meet again as a group and meet with me individually before the next focus group meeting. The focus group dynamics are detailed in the subsequent chapters.

#### Individual Interviews

As important as the benefits are from focus groups, it is also important to acknowledge the need for more private discussions away from the sanctions of the group. I wanted to also provide participants with a comfortable talking space. Focus groups may be difficult for shy or inarticulate members (Aubel, 1994). As well, feminist methodological concerns include acknowledging women subjects being governed by strong norms about what is appropriate to discuss. Cameron (1998) cautioned that women may use "norms of supportiveness and sameness" to censor different "selves" in exchange for "the rewards of friendly talk" (p. 956). Women participants may feel that the harmony of the group is more important than disagreeing and 'not getting along.'

Common-sense understandings, or dominant discourses, are often reinforced within group settings. And as I found out rather quickly, women teachers' talk was further complicated by notions of "professionalism" in teaching. Before the first focus group meeting, one participant emailed me to ask if "telling stories" infringed on the Alberta Teachers Association's Code of Conduct for teachers (Field notes, Nov. 26, 1999). I will explore this theme further in the discussion chapters addressing the discourse of professionalism.

To this end, I followed each focus group discussion up with an individual interview. Echoing the focus group process, the individual interviews were closer to "guided conversations" (Lofland and Lofland, 1984). I asked open-ended questions such as: "Was there anything that came up from the last focus group meeting? Was there anything that happened since the last time we met?" My intention was "to convey the message that in this situation, the narrator's interpretation of her experience guides the interview" (Anderson and Jack, 1991, p. 22). The responses ranged from describing a disagreement in the focus group discussion, to alternative interpretations of the vignettes, or personal stories of teaching which were "too private or embarrassing" to share with the focus group. If a particular discourse was emerging in their talk, I tried to reflect it back to the participant by saying "It sounds like \_\_\_\_\_ is an important understanding in your teaching. Would you agree?" If a particular discourse seemed to dominate the participants' descriptions, I tried to probe further by asking, "Can you imagine other possibilities?" Participants commented that they also enjoyed talking with me one-on-one because they felt that their everyday experiences were valued and validated (Minister, 1991). During the individual interviews, participants were able to more fully develop and explore their own personal accounts.

#### Research as Praxis

In the final focus group discussion, I wanted to provide the participants with an overview of the theoretical approach I was using to guide my interpretation of the research. I agree with Lather's (1991) interest in the praxis

of research. She stated that "in praxis-oriented inquiry, reciprocally educative process is more important than product as empowering methods contribute to consciousness-raising and transformative social action" (p. 72). I feel strongly that a research project guided by feminist poststructural constructs should make room for providing ways for participants to envision broader conceptions of what teaching is and who we are as teachers. On one level, talking about the topic of power was an important point of awareness. On another level, I recognize that a feminist poststructural approach is very different than a common-sense understanding. Therefore, I also wanted participants to have the opportunity to respond to the reconceptualization of power, from a Foucauldian perspective, and the importance of language in constructing what our experiences mean to us. Heckman (1990) writes "the silences and ambiguities of discourse provide the possibilities of refashioning them, the discovery of other conceptualizations and the revision of accepted truths" (p. 187). Therefore, I provided the participants with a way to "imagine otherwise" in the form of a brief handout outlining feminist poststructural concepts. At the same time, I was also very aware of "emancipatory projects" turning into new regimes of truth (Ellsworth, 1989); therefore, I was unsure of the merits of providing a feminist poststructural overview. Because I offered the overview at the end of the last focus group discussion, there may not have been enough time for participants to mull-over or respond to the summary in-depth. During the last individual interviews, some participants were very enthusiastic about the possibilities of poststructural concepts as a way of understanding teaching. I hope to follow up this aspect of the research further, in future research projects.

#### Discourse Analysis

Instead of assuming that people speak the truth, we should ask about the discursive conditions in which they have constructed their meanings (Usher, 1996, p. 140).



Making the transition between poststructural concepts such as discourse and subjectivity to data analysis is a complex task. I wanted to keep the notion of discourse fore-front in the analysis. For example, it was important for me to distinguish between 'a discourse' and 'a theme.' Rather than looking for recurring words that pointed to an 'overarching idea,' I focused on the ways in which women teachers used sets of words, phrases, and descriptions to create meaning and to understand themselves in their work. By focusing on discourse I placed an emphasis on three features identifiable in the teachers' talk: (a) 'sense-making,' (b) what acted as 'truth,' and (c) what discourses held this truth in place. In other words, my feminist poststructural view of discourse analysis meant that I was focused on what 'knowings' were made possible, how these knowings were contested by other knowings, and what this meant for how women teachers constructed their identities.

Different from the discourse analysis conducted by traditional linguists, discourse analysis in my research project is concerned with the "sociopolitical function" of discourse (Nilan, 1995, p. 29). This involves a move away from "content-analysis," which simply rephrases discourse at a more general level of language, towards what Sara Mills (1997) characterizes as "an analyses of text which is concerned not with individual language items, but with the effect of repeated choices on the meaning and force of the text as a whole" (p. 149). Developed from a critical discourse perspective, Mills suggests that discourse analysis should focus on "the way that people are positioned into roles through discursive structures, the way that certain peoples' knowledge is disqualified or is not taken seriously in contrast to authorized knowledge" (p. 149). Such an approach incorporates both a critical perspective and recognizes the importance of subjectivity - key concerns of feminist poststructural work.

For my purposes, I found that keeping the concepts of 'meaning- or truth-making' and subjectivity forefronted in the analysis process to be important (Ropers-Huilman, 1998). Patti Lather (1991) suggested that "facts are not given but constructed by the questions we ask of events" (p. 105). In the case of my

work, the facts I am interested in emerged in participants' discourses and discursive practices. To this end, I asked key questions while I 'read' the data, echoing the questions of other writers who have grappled with the challenge of employing poststructural concepts of discourse, power/knowledge, and subjectivity. I am using 'reading' here to refer to my interpretation of the data, as informed by literature, such as that covered in Appendix A, and my own understanding as a practicing secondary school teacher.

The project of discourse analysis from a feminist poststructural view is to look beyond/through/under common-sense assumptions normalizing dominant meanings. The way into this process is to investigate moments when dominant meanings are disrupted. Therefore, I interrogated misunderstandings or alternative understandings which cracked the 'smooth surface' of taken-for-granted meanings. When common-sense understandings faltered, I pursued a variety of competing meanings available in those moments. Tracing out those meanings goes back to the play of dominant discourses. The competing meanings in utterances indicate the complex and contextual meaning brought to a moment in the discourses that each person accessed and indicates the ways that phrases in moments represent meanings of what can be known. According to Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000), discourse analysis asks us to pay attention to "the *partial* and *incomplete* ability of language to convey something beyond itself, and the *variation* in the relative consistency and value of different utterances as clues to phenomena other than their own language usage" (original emphasis, p. 208).

For this research project, I kept key questions in mind as I read through the transcripts, questions such as those suggested by Joan Scott (in Miller, 1999):

- 1) How have some ways of talking emerged as privileged or normative, as other have been eclipsed or silenced?
  - 2) What do these processes reveal about power and how it operates?
- (p. 8).

In keeping with Ostman's (1996) suggestions, I began the discourse analysis process with looking at "what is said" and comparing it to "what can be said" while, at the same time, paying attention to "what is done when something is said" (p. 39). These questions guided my reading of both the individual interview transcripts and the focus group transcripts, which were particularly dynamic.

I began to analyze the data after the first focus group discussion of "Jessica's Story," and I continued analyzing the data after each subsequent interview. By employing discourse analysis, reading the data was an ongoing process. Throughout the project, each individual interview and subsequent focus group discussion was informed by the emerging understandings from the previous discussion and analysis. Specifically, after the initial focus group discussion, I transcribed the focus group discussion and read it for important meanings that emerged. I then used those meanings to construct the questions and guide my inquiry in the individual interviews that followed each focus group discussion. In the next phase of analysis, the emerging meanings from the individual interviews framed the focus group discussion and supported my inquiry of the second vignette. As each successive focus group discussion was completed, the data was clustered around key constructs in an attempt to trace what participants were saying about power in teaching. By the end of the third focus group discussion and individual interviews, inklings of what was being privileged, normalized, eclipsed, and silenced was palpable. Thus, the discourse analysis process was both recursive and cumulative.

For example, as I will discuss in Chapter Three, it was the moment when there was agreement among the group as they discussed "Theresa's Story" about the lesson using the magazine advertisements that I recognized the contestation of a dominant discourse. I was struck by the participants' collective criticism of Theresa's practices as a teacher. It was the strength of certainty about what Theresa 'got wrong' that in turn provided a way into a discourse about what was 'right' as a teacher. I then re-read the transcripts for the moments of 'rightness' in the participants' talk, looking for the taken-for-granted meanings

about teaching. I then further explored what had been surfacing throughout the discussions from the beginning, namely a strong sense of certainty that accompanied the participants' discussion of teachers' work. It was a 'knowing,' with absolute certainty, what was 'right' and 'good' about competent teachers that was striking, regardless of whether it was in classrooms with students, or in interactions with colleagues and administrators. The teachers' claims of 'right and good' in teaching seemed to be justified by meanings about professionalism. It was then that I pulled the 'thread' of the discourse of professionalism through the transcripts. Rereading the transcripts while following this thread, I looked for the ways that the discourse of professionalism fixed what was understood as 'right' in teaching. From this reading, I proceeded to re-examine the transcripts for moments of uncertainty, gaps, or silences in the talk about 'good' teaching practices. At these junctures, I traced other discourses which emerged in this complexity, such as a discourse of femininity and a discourse of caring, as I looked for ways that participants modified their previously held strong convictions of what good teachers are. In this sense, I tried to address moments when the dominant discourse of professionalism was contested and contradicted by the participants' use of competing and marginal discourses. It is in these contestations and contradictions that poststructuralists see the potential to counter and resist dominant discourses.

#### Organization of the Text

I have organized the discussion chapters into two sections. In the section entitled "Mirrors and Mazes: Describing a Discourse of Professionalism," I describe a discourse of professionalism and how it is reinforced and modified by discourses of femininity and caring in secondary schools. In the following section, entitled "Chambers and Corridors: Negotiating a Discourse of Professionalism," I provide particular examples of participants negotiating a discourse of professionalism. Participants negotiated various subject positions

made available through a discourse of professionalism and other competing discourses.

I do not intend to present the analysis as a totalizing summary of participants' talk. As Catherine Belsey (1980) explains:

Because language is not static but perpetually in process, what is inherent in the text is a range of possibilities of meaning. Texts, in other words, are plural, open to a number of interpretations.... Meanings are not fixed or given, but are released in the process of reading (p.19-20).

Therefore, the reading I make of the data is only one of many possibilities, but an important one, nevertheless. By exaggerating silences and probing ambiguities, I am deliberately disrupting the smooth veneer of taken-for-granted understandings, in order to create a "counterweight to naïve-realism" (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000, p. 208) about women teachers and power.

### **Mirrors and Mazes:**

#### **Describing a Discourse of Professionalism**

In Chapters Three, Four and Five, women teachers outline what is possible and impossible to know within a discourse of professionalism. In Chapter Three, a discourse of professionalism contains meanings associated with "expert knowledge." In Chapter Four, institutional discourses modify the initial freedom that women teachers assumed they had as professionals. And in Chapter Five, women teachers' talk reveals the boundaries of feminine discourses intersecting with a discourse of professionalism.

Throughout these three chapters, various meanings about professional competence and institutional roles vie for common-sense status and distort the image of the teacher. In the Hall of Mirrors, women teachers are tall and mighty and at other moments they appear short and small.

### Chapter Three

#### Women Teachers' Expert Knowledge: Sages on the Stage

Isn't this what many teachers have wanted to be for a long time? What's that expression, "The Sage on the Stage"? That you pontificate and give them [students] all the information, and then the kids do all the little busy work (Carolyn).

In this chapter, I explore the meanings that expert knowledge had for women teachers as they made sense of their own and other teachers' practices. Nellie described power and control issues for secondary classroom teachers in much the same way that Jackson (1968) described the "game of schooling." In Nellie's description, the teacher's centrality is established through the teacher's orchestration of the classroom context:

I can build a classroom, where you [the student] come in, I have the text, I tell you what the assignments are, I give you no choice. You come in; do the assignments and you are going to do well. And every kid knows that when they have a teacher, the first thing you do is figure out the teacher, right? I [the student] want to do well in this program, ...and once you've [the student] understood the teacher, you've got it made, right? Whether you can fit, tolerate it, make it or not. What I'm saying is is the structure of how that teacher delivers that program, that dictates a lot of the power and control issues.

Initially aware of the disparity between students and teachers in school environments, Nellie further explicated the ways that she viewed herself as capable of anticipating and, thereby, avoiding power and control issues in her own classroom:

In my classroom, I don't deal with discipline because I don't have to, because we don't go to the place where there are power and control issues. If you take a look at most discipline problems in classrooms, it is power and control issues, where the teacher says, "you do this," and the kid says, "no," and we're off to the races.

By "not going to the place" where power and control issues between students and teachers occur, Nellie suggested the possibility of teachers avoiding

discipline problems. From this understanding, a teacher's efficacy is tied to good planning, which means 'planning away' power and control issues. However, 'the plan' is unclear at this point in Nellie's description, but she spoke as if a plan existed.

The centrality of the teacher in participants' talk is important and emerged in a variety of ways. When the participants read "Theresa's Story," the focus group discussion revolved around what Theresa 'got wrong.' This vignette told the story about Theresa's advertising lesson and her reaction to James, a student who was late for class. I asked the group what struck them about "Theresa's Story." The following exchange ensued:

Carolyn: I think we've all had days like that. But I think she missed a lot of opportunities. <pause, silence>

Cara: In terms of what opportunities?

Carolyn: Even when the kids were talking about "I'd buy a Pepsi from Cindy Crawford - she's hot," it would have been interesting to say, "so, because it's a good-looking woman, it's a good product?" and she could have had a really interesting conversation about advertising. A teachable moment!

Nellie: I guess I felt glad she wasn't my teacher. <Laughter> because I thought "What is the purpose? What am I supposed to be learning?"

Andrea: Have fun?! <laughs>

Nellie: Well /and ok, so you're describing the categories of advertising to me. And our only job is to find examples of each type of advertising. Well that's what she got. So, *hello*, maybe you need a better plan! And honestly, I was just going, "I am really glad I am not in your class." Cause it isn't fun when you don't learn. And I would have felt that that was a wasted day. So I can cut and paste. Big deal! I know that sounds really negative, but I expect more! There's got to be a reason, there has got to be some meat to why you are asking me to do this or how is this relevant to the bigger picture. And like you [Carolyn] said, *totally* missed teachable moments, that *could* have brought some meaning to it and went right by it as if it didn't exist.



On one hand, the participants' responses demonstrated a willingness to challenge notions of good teaching practice. On the other hand, the participants' responses detailed Theresa's actions as ineffectual and disastrous. I was surprised that each participant concluded that Theresa was incompetent based on the brief 'snapshot' presented in the story. Their responses centred on Theresa and her practices, indicating that the teacher was the most important issue to take up in this story. Participants were struck by the way that Theresa had missed an important pedagogic moment. From their collective perspective, this story represented an example of what *not* to do in teaching. The participants continued to explore what it was, specifically, that Theresa had done and not done as a professional educator, suggesting important meanings associated with 'good teaching.' Commenting on the outcome of Theresa's lesson, participants stated:

Carolyn: So sometimes the objectives of the lesson will sometimes get in the way of the learning. <laughter>

Andrea: Yeah, whatever her objectives were. <laughs> You know, but there was a lot of stuff going on here. She could have really connected with these kids.

Sonia: Why was she sitting at her desk? <spoken softly>

Andrea: Yeah why did she bother?/

Sonia: /you know, that would have been the time to roll up her sleeves and sit with the different groups. I don't know. That's what I think.

Carolyn: Because she had the comfy chair! <laughs>

Andrea: Ain't that the truth <laughs>

<pause/silence>

Nellie: I'm just trying to think of a teacher who would do this, and I don't know of one and I think I am grateful that I don't. <laughs>

The group was united in their criticism of Theresa's actions. There seemed to be a clear sense of what 'bad' teaching practices were: unclear objectives and

detachment from students. As participants discussed what was wrong with Theresa's teaching, their sense of the 'good' and 'right' in teaching was evident in their talk: Teaching means preparing lessons that are relevant and provoke student learning. Teachers should utilize spontaneous "teachable moments" to extend or challenge the students' learning. Both of these actions rely on a teacher's professional knowledge to know instantly what is 'good' and 'right' for students. Each participant confirmed that all good teachers possess a certain professional knowledge.

When I considered the other topics that could have emerged in the focus group discussion, teachers' professional knowledge surfaced as significant. Even though the central character for each vignette was a teacher and the stories were constructed from the teacher's point of view, I was still surprised that the participants talked only about the teacher in each focus group discussion. For example, the participants could have talked about the students in "Theresa's Story." They did not. Rather, the focus group discussion was about what teachers can do *for* the students to enhance the students' learning. The teachers' talk shaped the students as passive, rather than active, agents. "Teachable moments" are active moments, times when teachers should step in, as opposed to a notion of 'learnable moments,' with a focus on a learning process for the teacher/learner. Thus, students are referred to in passing and are framed as the recipient of another person's actions. I found the teacher's construction of students intriguing. Why would the immediate reaction to the vignette, and subsequent discussions, overlook students? Teaching is configured as *the* way for learning to happen, confirming that teachers *know* what is right for students.

Teachers' expert knowledge as professionals then operated to legitimize teachers' actions. Thus, "planning away" power and authority issues, as Nellie suggested, is partially guaranteed in understandings that set the teacher up as 'knowers.' In the remainder of this chapter, I wish to explore the ways that the

image of 'teacher as expert' is constructed and contested in a discourse of professionalism.

### "Knowledge Keepers"

Undergirding both Nellie's self-description and the group's criticism of Theresa are assumptions about the knowing teacher-subject constructed and limited by a discourse of professionalism. Andrea expressed her concern with a particular kind of teacher-knowledge when she described her practice as follows:

I think sometimes, you said pontificating, and I was thinking sometimes my lessons are very teacher-centered because I am teaching a piece of literature or I'm teaching a certain concept. Or I want them to be prepared to write a certain kind of essay. So I do a lot of this teaching from around the room but I am very aware that that is *not effective all the time* <spoken slowly with emphasis>. And even though I may be the "keeper of the knowledge" or "the filter of the knowledge" because they don't know yet, until we've started these things.... For the most part, I start the lesson and I close it. What they do in between, hopefully they are learning something. But I worry about that sometimes, that I am the "holder of the knowledge." And I do try and find ways to make them independent learners and critical thinkers but I can't just send them off, we've got too many rules in my school <laughs> about kids in the hall.

Andrea described the complexity of the teacher being constructed as 'the expert' in the classroom. Andrea's words indicate how, on the one hand, 'teachers as experts' is an important concept because teachers do know specific concepts and details. But, on the other hand, teachers also want to facilitate students' independent learning. As a person who is "the keeper," "the filter," and "the holder" of knowledge, Andrea demonstrated that a certain *kind* of knowledge undergirds the teacher-expert. Knowledge is viewed as static, located outside of individuals, and known in advance by the teacher. Some authors have suggested that this configuration of knowledge is predominant in secondary schools and is characterized by a greater reliance on objective-knowledge and technical-rational curriculum (Connell, 1985; Hargreaves, 1994; Weiler, 1988).

One concern that the group expressed earlier was related to the uncertainty of Theresa's lesson objectives. The "learning" and "purpose" of the lesson were unclear to the group. Carolyn also described knowledge in a similar way when she described planning her lessons. She stated that "without that objective, I have found my lessons fall apart, if I'm not really clear on where I am going." Unpredictable learning moments, full of uncertainty, seem inconceivable when placed next to teacher-competence based on objective-knowledge, which is known and planned for in advance of the classroom.

Thus, the teacher as 'the expert' possesses certain knowledge that other people do not. And part of a teacher's expertise is the way that knowledge is meted out to students. Both subject content and pedagogic practice are based on objective and static knowledge. In Andrea's case, she was also negotiating the description of her practice as being "too teacher-centred." Again, a particular kind of professional knowledge supports certain teaching practices. Therefore, the uncertainty that crept into Andrea's description reflected her worry about her practice because she could not reconcile wanting to be both an expert and a facilitator. Andrea ended her description within the confines of the school rules - no kids working in the hallway. As 'the expert,' Andrea decided that students learn best when they are in the classroom, under the teacher's gaze.

As Andrea's words suggested, objective-knowledge claims cannot guarantee good teaching practices. Bad teaching can and does happen, even to those people who define themselves as good teachers. At the beginning of the focus group discussion of Theresa's practice, Carolyn suggested that "days like this" happen to teachers and she was glad that "it wasn't me." The focus group further discussed the ways that teaching practices tied to expert knowledge can be problematic:

Carolyn: Isn't this what many teachers have wanted to be for a long time? What's that expression, "The Sage on the Stage"? That you pontificate and give them all the information, and then the kids do all the little busy work. Instead of saying, "Look. Find out what/ look at the ads and have them pull out the information" have them do the work, rather than the teacher doing the work,

because cut and paste isn't work. That is just play. But if they had had to pull out ten ads and note similarities or something and then come up with some statements about it, then the kids could have been doing the work.

Andrea: It would have been much more meaningful.

Carolyn: And again they would have gone into higher level thinking. But there's a lot of teachers who feel, "the parents expect me to be the teacher." I have to stand, I have to give them [the students] the information. I have to give them the handout. And they say, "Why can't you just give us the notes?" Instead of/

Andrea: /that is so true!

Carolyn: Instead of them working for it.

The expert knowledge that permits teachers to be content-area experts or "sages on the stage" competes with expert knowledge about good teaching practices that support independent learning or "having the students do the work." These two competing meanings of the 'teacher as expert' are further complicated by a sense that parents want teachers to "be the teacher," content-area specialists who deliver objective-knowledge to students. Women teachers expressed their frustration with parents' and students' limited images of teachers as people who "know everything."

The notion of 'teachers as experts' is further contested during a time known as the "Age of Information." One wonders if there are limits to what teachers are expected to 'know' when information is equated with knowledge. Andy Hargreaves (1994) suggests that in the postmodern era, "the end of scientific certainties and the proliferation of contradictory claims to expertise can reduce people's dependence on experts" (p. 72). These changes have challenged the idea that the teacher is the sole 'keeper' of information, disrupting configurations of educators as the pederast, inserting knowledge into students, as the "sage on the stage." Sonia described this change best when she considered the excessive expectations of the teacher-knower in the classroom:

I'm interested in Social Studies but I don't know all the stuff, and I tell them [the students] that. Not all the time. "That's something I don't know and I have to look it up," and I've made a few errors, or we've all discovered something that none of us knew, even me as the teacher, and I don't care about that, it doesn't bother me, I don't feel like I need to come across as the one who needs to know it all. ...I don't know if that is going to change, that set up, that sort of hierarchy, or whatever that is, where the teacher is supposed to know it all, because now kids know that we don't know it all, which in one way is good, I think, but if its/ if you have the skills, to say "ok, lets explore and discover and find all this stuff together, or lets find out about this, and learn all this together," and the teacher can use other skills, that maybe are more instrumental, and relating, guiding, and how to ask questions, and how to research and that kind of thing, um, instead of what it used to be, where the teacher was the *one* with all the knowledge, dispensing it like medication or whatever, 'cause that's really where it was. <spoken softly>

Constructions of the teacher as the "keeper of the content-knowledge" did not make sense for Sonia. However, Sonia qualified her response when she stated that even though she told her students when she did not know something, she did not tell them "all the time." For Sonia, meting out content-knowledge is akin to "dispensing pills" - open mouth, pill goes in; open brain, knowledge goes in. However, expert knowledge about pedagogy sustained Sonia's claim to professionalism because she described the teacher as a facilitator, who was able to make curriculum both socially negotiable and personally significant for her students (Johnston and Nicholls, 1995).

#### Questioning the Expert

As Sonia, Carolyn, and Andrea have stated, 'teacher as expert' claims can present contradictory expectations within a discourse of professionalism. I was then curious about the ways that students' questions were taken up by women teachers. I wondered if narrow and contradictory definitions of 'teachers as experts' posed any problems for women teachers. Questioning is seldom a straight-forward process, as many truths vie for supremacy within the discourse of professionalism. The next time I met with Sonia, I explored her earlier

description of teacher knowledge by asking her about being questioned as a teacher. Sonia responded with the following narrative:

Traditionally the teachers are the ones who know and are distributing the facts and information. "This is what you need to do and know," so that when we get questioned on it, it can put us on the defensive sometimes. For example, this is a good example, because I *learned* through this. One of my students - she is just a top-notch student, she has got her life so organized, it is unbelievable, and doesn't seem to be overly stressed when exams are on, gets everything done, and never complains really - but she would question me when I/ and I know that sometimes I am a little bit vague about assignments. I know that, but that's me. So she would question me about either, how I was going to mark something that was quite subjective, like her English journal. You know, "How are you really coming up with the mark of 25 out of 30?" That's a tough one, like how do you/ or she would say umm, she'd say "did you mark our other vocabulary?", and I'd say "no" and I thought, why is she asking me that? And she didn't say why right away. Next time she said, "oh I am just asking because I want to use the back of the sheet. I try and conserve paper". But I thought she was attacking me, well not attacking, but criticizing or whatever her question meant. And part of that is that they are not skilled enough to communicate yet, and say "oh I need my sheet back. Do you mind if I get that?", and that's because they are really young. But then I realized that she likes to be very clear, she likes to be very clear on this, because she is very clear and she has decided that is how she is going to do things, so she wants her paper back. So now I understand. So for example, today, I said "do you want your paper back?" And she said "sure" and I said "now don't you be going and changing your answers." But at first I felt like, my instant reaction was, well what's that all about?

At first, Sonia responded to what she thought was a challenge to her authority. Sonia then re-read the situation, probed further, and discovered an alternative explanation - the student was conserving paper. A second reading exhibited the professional teacher as a reflective-practitioner. Sonia framed the event as a "learning experience." There is a way to get the true meaning of the story - to get her practice right. The 'first reading' was wrong and the 'second reading' was right, which places meaning back in the realm of objective truth - a case of "either/or" (Lather, 1991).

Alternatively, reading Sonia's encounter with the English student as a case of many meanings vying for supremacy, which are all accompanied by their own truths, provides an opportunity to explore the complex discourses and subject positions that contribute to this moment of power: the classic clash of a student challenging a teacher framed as a case of "both/and" (Lather, 1991). For example, in the first reading, Sonia had the authority to know what was best for her students, supporting the understanding of the 'teacher as the expert,' who properly read the student's actions as "challenging her authority." Yet, Sonia also acknowledged that her technique or practice of "being a little vague" may be contributing to the student's concern. In this second set of meanings, the teacher may not know or practice what is best for all students. Additionally, Sonia recognized that the 'subjective' marking of the English journals was hard to justify, demonstrating the tensions between the creative work of students and the need for objective marks. Then, in the re-interpretation of the student's action, the student's character as a 'good' student does not fit with Sonia's professional knowledge of a student's challenging behaviour. Therefore, the re-reading required the requisite understanding of children as spontaneous, contradictory, and unpredictable subjects. Thus, the teacher intervened on behalf of the student and provided for her needs. It is important to note that Sonia's teaching assignment includes Grade 7 and 8 students, which helps to contextualize her remark that students are "not skilled enough to communicate yet." Sonia concluded that she learned something and, therefore, was better able to plan for next time.

Interestingly, in this same example, Sonia still needed to enforce the rules of the institution – don't cheat – by using the answers on the back of the page. Of course this kind of cheating only makes sense in the context of acquiring objective and fixed knowledge in the form of tests that recall a 'right' answer. The student remained disciplined in her test-taking, even as the student's question disrupted the mechanisms of power. Technical-rational notions of the curriculum are kept intact, even as an attack on authority was reframed as a



misunderstanding of an innocent child's inquiry. Where is the power in this example? It is created in the moment between a student and a teacher, as various discourses are taken up or ignored. And the subject positions that are available to the student and the teacher depend on the teacher's interpretation of the situation. Ultimately the position of the teacher is maintained as the expert, because she has the ability to call forth the authority of the institution. The teacher is a genderless professional capable of planning away power and control issues, dispensing knowledge like pills, pontificating on the stage, and motivating independent learning. Thus, the secondary woman teacher is constructed as a 'mighty individual,' capable of great feats. Within a discourse of professionalism, expert knowledge seems to provide a base from which women teachers can make claims as legitimate knowers, and, therefore, women teachers act as mighty individuals who may tackle whatever crosses their path. The meaning of expert is entangled with measurements of worth. The image of the teacher is enlarged. We look into the Funhouse mirror and see reflected back an image that is tall, large, and mighty. Carolyn stated:

One of the things about teaching is that each of us... is a chief in front of our little tribe. When you shut that door, or whatever, when you sit the kids down in the desks, this is your space. This is what you do. When you have somebody else, when you have to interact with somebody else, you are no longer sole person in command. And a lot of us, seem not to be able to handle that well. That we can't stand any challenge to our authority, be it from a student or be it from another teacher or whatever... But I think it's a job where you are the *star*. I mean, you are up lecturing, or demonstrating or doing whatever. You're in command. And I think it's a *high* that a lot of us get....

Carolyn's words capture the euphoric moment when the teacher orchestrates the myriad activity around her as the expert-teacher. This place in the limelight is not easily shared.

### Differences Count Between the Experts

Women teachers' talk suggested that differences among teachers are understood in a variety of ways. Teacher differences were often associated with measurements of worth. Often participants spoke about the differences related to subject areas. Nellie said:

Sometimes it is what subject you teach and how long you have been there, for how much your word counts for compared to someone who is new, and depending on what subject they teach. And it exists and I think there is myths about it, I think.

Some of the competition among teachers arises from differential achievement results on provincial exams. Exam results became a point of contention between Carolyn and the Math/Science teacher. Carolyn stated that part of the issue was pride:

I know there is a little bit a *pride* or whatever in it too, in the fact that he reminds me that he is 11% above the provincial average on his tests and I'm not. You see I'm maybe 2 or 3% above. I would hate to try and point out to him his stuff, he does one experiment a year with the kids. And it's like "Sure you can have 11% above the test if all you do is teach to the test." But I would rather teach the kids how to think, and consider and do a few things. So philosophical differences here. Which doesn't endear us to each other.

The results are embodied in the teacher. By stating that "he is 11% above the provincial average" and "I am not," Carolyn has equated the results with the teacher. Purportedly objective measures of student achievement are used to construct who teachers are. Like students whose worth can be spoken of in terms of their grades, a teacher's worth also depends on grades - their students' grades. The students' results on these tests are constructed as synonymous with the practices of the teacher. However, resisting this measurement as an indication of her value as a teacher, Carolyn spoke back to the test results. 'Real learning' means not teaching to the test and, thus, is less rigid and less didactic.

Nevertheless, Carolyn spoke about her 'lost pride' when her students scored below the other teacher's students.

As the understanding of good teaching practice is narrowly defined within the realm of achievement test scores, teachers stake territory over an ever-shrinking place to stand as a good teacher. Hargreaves (1994) described the consequences of these strict meanings:

Many of the expectations held of teachers embody singular models of expertise and competence which demarcate good from bad, and fashionable from unfashionable practice ...[and] make it difficult for teachers to share expertise, still less to confide their doubts, for different practice may be construed as bad practice. Their very competence as teachers may be placed in jeopardy. ...The arbitrary imposition of expectations for teaching which contain singular rather than multiple models of competence; expectations that may mesh poorly with the teacher's personal self or with the context in which the teacher works (p. 150).

Hargreaves' reference to arbitrary expectations may be better understood as narrow definitions of what counts as good teaching. But what does make a difference is the way that framing teaching as 'good and bad practice' shapes the way that we get along with our colleagues. Such differences are intensified on smaller school staffs. Carolyn explained:

In a small staff where there is one [subject-area] teacher, people don't know what it's like to be that one teacher. So if there is one English teacher and one Social teacher, that means that there is nobody else on staff that is doing the same sort of stuff as you, or teaching in the same manner, because science and humanities are different. And there is a real "hmmpf look at that person" and again I don't respect that teacher who is scanning all of his tests. Now maybe there is the reason in science that that's what you do. I don't know because I'm not trained as a science teacher. And I guess I just say, look at all the work I am doing. He is doing much less work than I am doing, and we are getting the same amount of money? So there is a real *anger* there, and I think/ ... And then you tend to isolate yourself and say "I'm not going to deal with those people, I'm just going to stay in my room." ...I guess we are so busy defending our own position that I can't spare much thought for what you are doing over in your lifeboat.

Carolyn's description of difference follows her emotional transition from resentment to isolation. Subject-area significantly defines the 'teacher-expert' and 'good' teaching practices. Carolyn tentatively judged her colleague because she was not "trained as a science teacher," which implies an understanding of professional expertise as subject specific. There is no common understanding of 'good' teaching practices. But there is a measurement of the amount of work that a teacher does. So the teacher-expert's worth is linked to visible practices, indicating that subject area teachers who scan their tests through a machine are not working as hard as subject-area teachers who have to mark essays. These differences led to feelings of anger. With no way of understanding differences other than as the practices of a poor teacher, Carolyn sought refuge in her own classroom. In this case, her metaphor was the lifeboat, and teachers were sole survivors, isolated in the unpredictable sea of secondary schools.

Women teachers' talk tended to reflect the way that difference meant not getting along with others. Subsequently, these meanings reflect practices of 'digging in' or a siege mentality when discussing the experience of conflict with their colleagues. These descriptions reflect what Hargreaves (1994) terms "Balkanization" in teaching. Noticing the similarities to ethnic groups in the Balkans, Hargreaves describes Balkanization as characterized by "strong and enduring boundaries" between small groupings of like-minded people in schools (p. 235). He concludes that Balkanization is "sustained by the prevailing hegemony of subject specialism and its marginalization of more 'practical' mentalities.... [It is] a pattern that perpetuates and expresses the conflicts and divisions that have come to characterize secondary school life" (p. 235).

## Chapter Four

### Women Teachers' Responsibilities: Discipline

If we are expected to play *several* different roles, it's difficult to feel *powerful* in any of them, if there are so many of them (Andrea).

Women teachers often made the connection between professional competence and power. Participants talked about the difficulty of appearing competent within an increasing number of roles. Andrea described her multiple roles as a teacher, including that of teacher-advisor, a duty which was introduced to help insure that at least one adult in the high school was 'responsible' for a variety of student-needs not covered in regular classes. Andrea explained:

We have a teacher-advisor role in our school, most high schools do have a teacher-advisor role. So I have 27 kids that I register every morning, and I am responsible for making sure that they all get all their high school credits by the end of grade 12, and deal with their attendance, and their behaviour in other classrooms, because everything will be filtered through me. ... So I feel like because everyday I am responsible on so many different levels, for so many different kids, I can't feel like I'm doing *anything* really, really well. Unless I *sacrifice*, don't do one of the things I am supposed to be doing.

Within secondary schools, endless role demands disrupt understandings of 'teacher as expert.' Professional competence was at stake when Andrea described not doing "anything really well," leaving her unsure of her 'expert' claims. As Hargreaves (1994) suggests, teachers' roles are

increasingly being re-defined ever more widely, encompassing social and emotional goals as well as academic ones, concerns for the child's welfare at home as well as performance in school. Goals and expectations defined and understood in such diffuse terms become difficult, indeed impossible to meet with any certainty (p. 126).

Since uncertainty does not fit well with teacher competence, the teachers in this study were often forced to choose between what they perceived to be conflicting

role demands. In this case, role refers to the ways in which participants conceived of their "appropriate activities, their goals and their rightful claims and duties relative to others" (Burbules, 1986, p. 108). Participants frequently used institutional and professional discourses to determine appropriate ways to act. I use institutional discourses to refer rules which are the "externally imposed authority structures" of school as organizations (Wotherspoon, 1998, p. 99). I use professional discourses to refer to meanings that support teachers' "technical competence" and work place autonomy (Labaree, 1992, p. 125). Schools as institutions provide both expectations and regulations relating to women teachers' roles in secondary schools. In this chapter, I consider the play of power that occurred in those moments when women teachers negotiated, accepted, or resisted conflicting role-demands.

#### Whose Job is Discipline?

Discipline issues were an important topic in women teachers' talk about power. In the previous chapter, Nellie suggested that she "didn't go" to the place where power and control issues were a problem in her classroom. By contrast, other participants described the limits that role-expectations put on their duties as disciplinarians. In these descriptions, the school's administration played an important role in the hierarchy or 'pecking-order' that deals with student-transgressions. Andrea stated:

I guess this is a personal bone of contention, because I've been in this position so many times and spent sometimes my whole prep dealing with something I saw happen out in the parking lot and it just... to me, why can't I just make a phone call, turn it over, so that I can get back to work, see that's how I feel about it.... So you know, I don't see myself as superwoman and jump out with my cape on and solve everything, when I know there's an administrative team that deals with the discipline in the school on a much/ the heavy discipline things, things that are suspendable behaviours, I'd rather those guys deal with it, I'd really rather that.

Andrea considered the divergent meanings of teachers as experts trained to deal with behaviour and discipline issues. The image of the 'mighty individual' was

modified by an institutional discourse that designates certain tasks to certain positions. Andrea needed to create and negotiate a boundary between legitimate and illegitimate role-demands. Discipline outside of Andrea's classroom did not fall under her 'jurisdiction.' Clearly, "getting back to work" meant preparing for her course work. She believed that working beyond the classroom would require heroic or "superwoman" powers, which she defined as 'going too far.'

Carolyn argued that the severity of students' behaviour-problems determined whom should be responsible for dealing with discipline issues. Carolyn stated:

I think a lot of teachers are feeling a lot more pressure about "It's not my job. I want somebody else to deal with it." We seem to go around in circles with a student and I want somebody else to deal with it. That it's discipline, that's the administrator's problem... There's a difference between a kid being obnoxious in my class, I'm going to deal with that, and a kid throwing a chair out the window at school. That's the administrator's [problem] because it's huge. But regardless, I, as a teacher, have to deal with it.

Carolyn's explanation offered an example of meanings available in institutional discourses which may actually help women teachers limit endless expectations. "Teaching intensification" means that teachers' responsibilities have become increasingly more extensive and that their roles have become increasingly more diffuse (Apple, 1985; Hargreaves 1994). Carolyn might have been responding to the pressure on teachers to 'do more,' when she described the process of delegating tasks within secondary schools. The teacher, as a pedagogic expert, is responsible for behaviours within the classroom that are not classified as severe. The administrator deals with the remaining issues. But a teacher's responsibilities are not easily demarcated, as Carolyn suggested in her remark when she stated that it was the teacher who "deals" with students on a daily basis in the classroom. Teachers are ultimately the ones in contact with students because of mandatory attendance regulations. Therefore, Carolyn described the need to limit expectations of teachers in schools.

Women teachers' talk reflected the importance of institutional discourses for interpreting hierarchical power structures. Andrea perceived the differentiated discipline tasks between the principal and the teacher as quite acceptable:

Cara: Do we lose something, do we give up something, when we get them [administration] involved...?

Andrea: As teachers? <pause> I might have to think about that and give you a different answer

Cara: Sure

Andrea: But this is my first impression – no. I lose nothing, I don't feel I lose anything. I might lose some information, or some knowledge of what happened, but every case is individual, what if I went in and followed it right through and what happened is not what I wanted to happen, what am I going to do then? Because my say was not the final say, I'd rather/ I'd rather say "I brought it. Here is my extent, and now I would like your extent to begin" and I'm happy, I'm happy to do that. I don't feel like I'm *giving up* anything or that I'm not doing my job. I just feel like um, I think I said it in here, *I've got more important things to do. And I do* <spoken softly>

Even as Andrea accepted institutional discipline practices, she used many qualifying words which suggested a tentative understanding. Andrea felt that even if she was personally involved with the incident from the beginning, she may not be happy with the eventual outcome. The institutional rules were beyond her control in moments when "what happened is not what I wanted to happen." Andrea's concern was focused on her duties as a classroom teacher. As Burbules (1986) suggests, part of what makes ideologies dominant is that "most persons take most of their beliefs and values for granted" (p. 106). The individual's desires, perceptions, and preferences are influenced by the expected roles that these ideologies support. In the case above, Andrea described turning over problems to the administrator and feeling "happy to do so." Why shouldn't she be? Teaching intensification has meant that teachers feel increased pressures to do more. Teachers patrolling larger school-wide areas increases a



teacher's responsibilities. So when an opportunity to 'draw the line' at what does not constitute the job of the teacher, some teachers happily take up the organizational discourses that help demarcate such boundaries.

Nevertheless, the hierarchical structure of schooling frames the relationship among teachers, principals, and students. Within the institution of schooling, discipline continues to be both a function and a relegated responsibility; discipline contributes to the hierarchical structure. Consequently, the principal's role as a disciplinarian applies to both the student *and* the teacher. Teachers can reprimand students and be reprimanded by principals. A teacher's authority can be challenged by students just like a principal's authority can be challenged by a teacher. Carolyn described the teacher's oscillating authority in relation to the principal's authority:

Carolyn: I am thinking of a situation recently, I didn't challenge, but I dug in my heels on an issue with my principal and eventually he caved in. And I was going "Yeahhh!" I felt very good about it. And yet another time where something came up in a situation, and he hauls me into his office and I was just sweating buckets, because I thought "What have I done? What's going on here?" And I've also found that this one principal likes to pull you into his office and *shut the door* to ask you the most mundane questions. Now, that's a power trip, isn't it?

Cara: Is it?

Carolyn: I think it is. Because if it is something like "Hey, you want to be acting principal today?" why can't you ask in front of the staff? Why do I have to be locked in your office, with the door closed?

Cara: Why do you think he does that?

Carolyn: I think it is because it is that hold-over, isn't it? From when you were little kids, when you get called into the principal's office with the door shut. <spoken quietly>

Initially buoyed by the effects of "digging in her heels," Carolyn described her pleasure in having the powerful principal back down or "cave in." Carolyn enjoyed a moment of feeling more powerful than her principal, who was often viewed as more powerful in a school's hierarchy. However, Carolyn was quick to

point out that her feelings of power were temporary and fleeting; she was surprised by the effect of being positioned as less powerful by that same hierarchical arrangement. The institutional configuration of the principal was both beneficial (as a threat to recalcitrant students) and a drawback (as a threat to teachers). Alternative meanings, which might view the relationship between the principal and the teachers as professional colleagues, are absent from Carolyn's description.

In one moment, the teacher passed a mirror that produced an image which was 'larger than life.' Carolyn confronted the principal, and he backed down. The 'mighty individual' was a giant. In the next moment, the teacher proceeded further down the Hall of Mirrors and viewed a minuscule image in a different mirror. Carolyn was intimidated by the principal and felt like a student back in elementary school. The 'mighty individual' was transformed into the image of a child. Both images were possible because the principal was constructed as the ultimate authority, with 'power-over' teachers.

#### "It's Not My Job"

The oscillating image of the 'giant/child' teacher continued in participants' talk as they discussed the 'right way' for a teacher to handle discipline issues. The group was discussing "Jessica's Story," the story about the teacher who had gone to talk with the principal after a confrontation with a student she suspected of smoking in the building. The group debated the merits of Jessica's actions and the principal's response. Andrea sympathized with the teacher; Nellie did not.

Andrea: I think it is also interesting how she [Jessica] felt after dealing with her principal. She felt deflated. She obviously was affected by the way that this kid spoke to her and I'm sure we've all been there ... umm *and spoke to him and he said "uh nothing to be afraid of I'll take care of it" and she felt deflated.* <reading from the story> I felt bad for her at that moment <smiles> ...not a lot of support.

Nellie: She's turning it over. She's saying, "Well here, you solve it." There is no power in that. No wonder she feels deflated, she's expecting him [the principal] to fix it.

Andrea: Well that's his job. That's not my job <smiles/laughs>

Nellie: Really?!!

Andrea: That's not my job. Nope. I'm not/ I'm not paid the bucks/

Nellie: /Ahhhh

Andrea: /to suspend children and take them to the office when I'm on my prep to prepare for lessons

Nellie: So it's only his job?!!

Andrea: It should be the administrator's/ the administrative team's job. I can take the kid down there, but that's it. I've got them/ I've got better things to do. <laughs>

Andrea drew the line and stated "that's not my job." When descriptions of the teacher professional were contested, Andrea talked about the limits of the teacher-role within the hierarchy of schools. Nellie took up a different subject position within the discourse of professionalism that was closer to the teacher as expert or the 'mighty individual.' Nellie described the teacher as capable of carrying out many more roles within schools. Therefore, "turning the discipline problem over" to the principal was read in two very different ways: complying with the job of teaching, as institutionally defined, or shirking professional responsibility.

Within her stories, Nellie placed herself at the centre of competing meaning systems, capable of negotiating various challenges. For example, after the first focus group meeting Nellie described her assessment of the other group member's comments:

Nellie: I just felt that I came across as so assured, and knowing how to handle stuff in my own world, kind of thing, and that I just do it, and I don't look to others to fix it for me, and that wasn't the sense that I got from the others. I felt that they thought that there were lines drawn, and "No, I'm comfortable here, but not there,

and I would look for someone to be responsible," you know?  
and I was just struck by that because I thought "Why would you?  
Why aren't you doing it?", so a part of me/ it opened my eyes to  
other instructors, and probably how it is for a lot of people, but I  
have never seen it that way, so I haven't noticed it.

Cara: Had you speculated why that might be for others?

Nellie: I don't know, um some of it is probably choice, either choice  
about the fact that with that comes responsibility, if I do take/ let's  
say we come back to the scenario, let's say there is a conflict out  
in the hallway, if I then involve myself, then I also have to take  
responsibility for solving it, which takes time and energy, a lot of  
people don't/they already have enough to do, they don't want to  
add one more problem, so sometimes it is out of *choice*,  
sometimes it is out of fear, that they really don't want to get  
involved, because they really don't know the kid, and the don't  
know if that kid might be someone they really don't want to deal  
with, so it is out of a fear place. And the other is just plain  
authority, I don't feel that I have the authority, I'm just the  
teacher, somewhere they have owned *that* as a way of being.  
And I don't know why, really, why people do that, I just have  
viewed it as, this school is a place that I am in, whether I am in  
the classroom, hallway or whatever as a team, we all have roles  
and responsibilities, but it's kind of like a giant group working  
together, so if there is anything going wrong in one place, if I am  
there and I witness it, then I should solve it.

Drawing on a humanist discourse, Nellie became 'the mighty individual,' the  
teacher who was "assured" and "could handle her own thing." Choice is a  
significant aspect of this discourse and supports a very particular understanding  
of the individual. Nellie saw herself as a self-determining agent, free from  
constraint. Therefore, Nellie believed that she was making a choice and that she  
was solely responsible for that choice regardless of personal fears or institutional  
rules. She located the difference between "instructors" firmly within the  
individuals themselves. From her point of view, teachers require a strong will in  
order to overcome obstacles. Teachers who have "owned" a view of teachers'  
subordinate roles are somehow 'less' or 'weak.' The teacher was constructed as  
free from social contexts, such as gender, class, race, and sexual orientation and

free from social restrictions, such as those imposed by institutions or organizations.

Nevertheless, the notion of the stable humanist self is constantly contested. Nellie drew upon another set of meanings available in institutional discourses when she described a distressing situation. Nellie's principal accused her of stealing thousands of dollars. After searching for the course fees, Nellie returned to her principal to inform him that she could not find the missing money. He then told her that the issue was merely a communication problem because the money had subsequently been accounted for. However, rather than dismissing this instance as a mistake, Nellie felt it was more about "really subversive behaviour." After worrying all weekend "that they would even think that" she could steal the money, Nellie recognized a pattern of "unfair harassment," which left her feeling "violated." Nellie felt that her recent actions in the school may have prompted her principal's accusation. Nellie had pushed to secure a budget for her department, which then created a school-wide interest in site-based financing. This interest sparked a committee that was to have effectively taken the budgetary powers away from the principal. In addition, Nellie had been advocating for a student-run store, which was getting stalled in the 'proposal stage,' while the principal considered the idea (even though he verbally told her it was approved). "And then I get hit with these accusations. And I thought, you know,... maybe it is because I came up with answers to problems that I am a threat, and maybe he [the principal] is wishing that it was his idea," Nellie stated. In her own words, Nellie made sense of what happened in this instance and how she should have responded:

So I just made up my mind. No, I wasn't going to do it. Why? Why?! I have enough things on the go. Why add one more thing, that somebody obviously isn't going to appreciate, and who needs this grief, to be accused of um, these kinds of things. So I also made up my mind/ see and the whole idea of us collecting our fees, we didn't used to have to do that. And I feel very uncomfortable doing that. It's large sums of money! And I was sitting there going, you know what? There is no way I could have accounted for it. I don't have any paper work that proves it. And I went to the business manager and said "You know what? I'm not doing

this any more. It is not part of my job description, I have now had to go through this ordeal, this upset me greatly, and it's not appropriate. And understand when I send my kids with their money to the office I'm not trying to create more work for you, you just send them over to that administrator and he can collect the money. Here I'm not doing it."

Nellie had to negotiate the obligations of her role as the teacher in the institution. After her principal accused her of stealing, Nellie did not feel that collecting money for course fees was a legitimate teaching task. In the end, Nellie used institutional meanings of the teaching 'role' to resist the principal's harassment. Echoing Andrea's earlier comment, Nellie refused a future task that was "not her job." In this way, she resisted increasing responsibilities (teacher-intensification). The image of the professional teacher-expert and the 'mighty individual' were simultaneously embellished and diminished. As she continued through the Hall of Mirrors, various images were reflected back: The teacher was at once large and powerful, while in the next mirror-image she was small and powerless.

## Chapter Five

### Women Teachers' Bodies: Legitimizing Authority

When I was a younger teacher, before I developed my professional confidence, and maybe personal confidence too in myself, my emotions in crisis situations could/ like when I get angry, I cry, and I just know this. And I know steps to take, in order to avoid getting that angry, so that I'm left/ like I'm out-of-control (Andrea).

#### Experience

Even though teachers in this study relied on meanings such as the 'teacher as expert', the participants' words suggest that they struggled for legitimacy in secondary schools. The struggle related to experience, age, body size, and emotions. A teacher's experience, which usually means the number of years she has taught in the classroom, supported women teachers' expert professional claims. Teachers in this study remembered when they were beginning teachers, just learning the ropes. Nellie described one such memory and the way that experience helped provide comfort:

I think the comfort level is there, I don't think that you get to do more, but I think your comfort level about the parameters exists. When you are new, you are trying to figure out the playing field and how it works.

In general, participants had a common understanding of experience in the sense that they experienced something, lived through it, learned from it, and made changes to improve their practice for the future. They understood that more experienced teachers had more resources to draw upon. Experience is bolstered by a discourse of professionalism that supports the 'teacher as expert.' For participants, experience was an important concern and arose during the initial focus group discussion of the first vignette, "Jessica's Story." As they

discussed the story about a teacher confronting a student smoking in the building, they evaluated the main characters in the vignettes. Carolyn asked:

Do we have any idea how long she [Jessica] has been teaching at this school? We don't know her age or anything else. If she is a grandmother type, at the end of her career, then I would think that the principal should be respecting her for her years of experience and all the rest of it. Whereas, if it is a new teacher, he should be aware that she may not have as big a bag of tricks, or, as much experience as another teacher, and she needs to understand what is going on. If it is a teacher that has been there for a while, then the principal better deal with it because if this is one of his regular staff members, there is obviously a problem here.

As Carolyn suggested, experience (equated with the number of years as a practicing teaching) was a significant factor for making sense of "Jessica's Story." Experience was such an important factor in Carolyn's talk that experience dictated the principal's appropriate response. Experience determined whether the principal should see the problem as either Jessica's problem (as a young teacher) or a larger issue (if she was a "grandmother type"). Here, Carolyn has described the teacher's repertoire or "bag of tricks" as contingent on years of experience.

### Age

The age/experience notion of teaching is common place. Casual conversation about teaching usually includes queries into the number of years a teacher has practiced. Carolyn described the transformation of the teacher becoming more credible over time:

I can remember when I first started teaching, I kept waiting for somebody to come in say "You, out of here! What are you doing in front of a class?" <deeper voice> And I talked to a couple of friends who were beginning teachers and they said the same thing. But as people began to see me as the teacher and I began to accept that role and say "Oh, okay then. I can do that" - the little engine that could, I don't know. It does come with experience.

Claims of legitimacy were supported by public opinion. But does it matter that the individual seeking legitimacy is a woman? Carolyn continued her description



of herself as a professional, a professional female teacher negotiating a variety of legitimacy claims:

Carolyn: Well again this is me personally, because I have friends who are much more petite than I am, and I don't think that they feel the same sense of power. And I/ I am a presence, I am there, I am this big person in a suit.... Yep size too, and age, and I am here and I am a presence, I'm not some little feathery light-weight that people can dismiss easily

Cara: Because we equate age and expertise?

Carolyn: Sure with age comes wisdom, remember? But I think then that there is a problem there. I shouldn't say that because I feel that I have more expertise, so that I am more confident in my own abilities. I know that some people would say the older you get, you start to lose it, right? And then you become the dithering old lady who hasn't a clue who is teaching back in the 1940s, so there are consequences for being old too [laughs]

Cara: Right

Carolyn: But for me I just feel so much more comfortable with my teaching and my expertise and that I *do* know what I am doing, so I feel more powerful. The new principal comes in and starts looking at things and I sort of go "Excuse me? Why are we doing this?" And some things I let go and some things I don't. When I was younger and slimmer, smaller, the/I was teaching jr. high school, I don't think I was taken as seriously, now again that could be my perception, I was younger at the time too, but I can think where a couple of times, where male teachers kind of pushed me aside in a conversation or in a discussion. So it was, "You don't really have a clue what you are talking about."

Carolyn negotiated the complex meanings available when discourses of femininity (Mills, 1997) intersect with a discourse of professionalism; she considered the multiple and contested discourses about gender, age, years of experience, and body size as legitimate sources for women teachers' professional claims. In the first instance, Carolyn described the ways that age can be equated with wisdom, and thus an enviable asset for claims of teacher expertise. But age is not simply a positive quality especially as it is constructed for women. Partly due to the meanings associated with a woman's (re)productive

biological functions, older age for women can be equated with being both unproductive and senile. Carolyn regarded her 'middle age' as an asset that enabled her to speak back to the new principal, and to be taken seriously as a professional, something denied to her when she was a younger teacher. During the initial focus group discussion, Carolyn's understanding of the benefits of age struck a cord with another participant:

Carolyn: My thing is I just hate the way that you're supposed to be all these roles and not being allowed to be who you are as our strengths... [pause]. And I think... That's why I'm glad I'm getting into being middle-aged, I like being middle-aged. I think you have more right to be who you are and, and say "Yeah, I'm doing it my way".

Andrea: Yeah, I'm beginning to think forty... *isn't so bad*. <whispered>

Carolyn: <laughs>

Andrea: It's coming up for me real soon. *It's not so bad, it's better*. <whispered>

Carolyn described breaking away from fulfilling the expectations of others and doing it "her own way." Andrea agreed, but her response was tentative and conditional: age was quietly exciting, and yet, it was also dangerous to admit. Andrea's response suggested she was trying to enjoy the benefits of age in teaching while living in a society that emphasises youth, especially for women.

### Size

Participants' talk continued to suggest that women teachers' professionalism was constantly suspect. Women teachers' bodies seemed to interfere with their legitimate professional claims of authority. Carolyn's original description of herself, as a professional to be "taken seriously," was as a person who was not some "feathery light-weight." In this regard, Carolyn had a sense of her physical presence as a woman, who is a "big person in a suit." As the physical size of individuals has often been associated with power, larger physical stature holds the potential of physical coercion or intimidation. Recently the topic

of tough teachers in schools was brought up at a family dinner. My grandfather, mother, and uncle clearly remembered the 'tough' principal from their former hometown school. The principal would walk the hall and physically "slam" violators of school rules into the hall-lockers. The men in the group seemed to admire a person who could command such respect. As Pagano (1994) suggests, women high school teachers have had to negotiate physical differences between themselves and the "big boys." Pagano states:

The continuing problem for women teachers is authority. During the nineteenth century one of the chief arguments against permitting women to teach in the secondary schools was that their small size and fragile emotional constitution would prevent their exercising authority over the 'big boys.' According to this point of view, the business of education is something like a football skirmish and the exercise of authority amounts to subduing the other's body. The question of authority and what it consists of, who can legitimately exercise it, where it is possible for a female teacher to exercise authority or be an authority, continues to figure as a prominent theme in discussions of women teaching. ... In contemporary mainstream writing on problems of teaching, issues of authority are conceived within the bounds of considerations of management and control and are read as gender neutral. Such writing ignores what all women teachers know (p. 252 - 253).

In this case, Carolyn knew that both her height and her body mass supported her confidence as a physical "presence" in school. She felt that her size diminished criticism of her authority as a teacher.

Another aspect of the body-presence in schooling is the physical body of the teacher clothed to signal the significance of her position within the institution. As a "big person in a suit," Carolyn was also concerned with the look of a professional teacher. She later described her discomfort with her peers' casual dressing and the message to students:

I think it creates problems when the teachers are trying to be cooler than the students. I am disappointed with a number of colleagues who dress *down* to come to work, looking like they have been washing the car. Cause I think it is, again, that modeling for kids, that says, "This is a business, this is my business, and I want to treat it as an *important* place and that you are important and special to be here. So let's see what we can give you out of it," instead of "Yeah, let's come and hang out." I think I

did that with the sixties <laughs> I don't know, I'm old-fashioned in my views.

Supporting these signals of professionalism in teaching are masculine business values: a conservative suit. These norms are practised in institutions that are hierarchical, highly structured, and finite. The professional teacher's 'uniform' signals the seriousness of the work, meanings conveyed in a business suit. Andrea also mentioned the importance of clothing for educators in schools when she described how dress can differentiate between administrators and teachers. Andrea said "if you were to come in to our school and see the workings of the building you would be able to spot the administration, even the way they dress is different than us." Andrea's description suggested that the hierarchy of the institution is echoed in clothing. In this way, both the size and the age of the body are protected by a 'suit of armour.' More heavily influenced by masculine norms rather than feminine norms, the older, wiser, larger male figure in a suit signals the stereotyped professional authority-figure at the top of the school hierarchy. The 'mighty individual' image is exaggerated in order to smooth over the curves of the female professional body. The talk of women teachers seemed to suggest that often women teachers wish to borrow these signs to bolster their own authority in schools.

However, age and size differences do not guarantee professional authority status. During a focus group discussion of size and authority in teaching, two participants discussed the paradox:

Carolyn: I have found for me it is also my size, in that if there are two female teachers, the fact that I am tall and large, stops a kid. If it is one of my colleagues who is five foot two and ninety pounds wet... You know?

Nellie: Well, one of the toughest teachers I ever met was just what you described.

Andrea: <laughs>

Nellie: And, boy, she did it totally out of air, *air being* whatever that is, she could make the biggest kid in the school, stop in his tracks

and do what ever needed to be done. It came just out of that *belief* in her authority.

Nellie asserted that anyone is capable of commanding authority, regardless of gender or size. She argued that people who command authority from non-traditional (masculine) sources do so with a "belief" in their authority. However, her explanation does not describe how this is accomplished. The process of commanding authority remains arcane. The attraction of this explanation comes back to the exception. If the exception exists, then commanding authority in smaller bodies is possible for other women. This explanation echoes previous meanings about the ability of individuals to transcend social contexts and circumstances, in this case a small stature. From this way of thinking, if an individual is single-minded enough, if a person works hard, or has been blessed with "an air," then she can overcome adversity to triumph as an authority figure in secondary schools. The individual female teacher who does not command this level of respect is left wondering: "What did I do wrong?" This set of meanings is again dependent on the image of the 'mighty individual,' where the teacher-expert has an unwavering belief in her abilities. I wondered how this type of explanation might act as a 'myth' perpetuating gender equality in teaching by smoothing over the culturally constructed limitations of the female body in public spaces.

#### Fluid Bodies Leaking Excess

Like the cultural markers of size and age on the gendered professional body, emotions are similarly regulated (Foucault, 1980). Iris Young (1995) suggests that "practico-inert realities," defined as the social objects and material qualities that enable and limit actions, are especially prevalent for women (p. 200). Emotions are one example of practico-inert realities that govern women in our culture. The participants' words suggested their difficulty while living out these 'realities' in secondary schools. Given the importance of the teacher-

expert within a discourse of professionalism, women teachers' emotions seemed to spill forth into the spaces of schooling.

#### Leaking Tears

I know though that, and again, when I was a younger teacher, before I developed my professional confidence, and maybe personal confidence, too, in myself, my emotions in crisis situations could/ like when I get angry, I cry, and I just know this. And I know steps to take, in order to avoid getting that angry, so that I'm left, like I'm out-of-control (Andrea).

For participants in this study, being a professional seemed to negate "personal" emotions. Combining understandings of the feminine body with understandings of 'teacher as expert,' Andrea described her confusion with her experiences as a secondary teacher. Emotions that are "out of control," such as tears and anger, exceed the boundaries of professional identity. Additionally, Andrea differentiated between "personal" and "professional confidences," by describing them as separate. For Andrea, there was no understanding of emotion, especially anger, when she described herself as a caring teacher.

The focus group also discussed emotions and professionalism while reading "Jessica's Story," the vignette about the teacher dealing with Jason and the smoking policy. In the story, Jessica arrived at the principal's office crying, which prompted Andrea to recall a similar experience:

It hasn't happened to me in a while, but I know that when it did happen to me, that um it's/it's/it/it can make you feel very, very small. So talk about *power*, you feel like you've got nothing. And maybe that depends on a person's personal, emotional maturity or whatever. But I can still remember a time when a boy, uh, was very, very belligerent with me and started to swear, and I don't think I was a teacher any more, I was just me, angry....

There was no room for emotions, whether tears or anger, in Andrea's description of a teacher. It was inconceivable for Andrea to imagine an angry 'teaching-self.' Andrea constructed anger as "immature," leaving little room for its appearance in an adult. However, within the realm of 'the real me,' when Andrea was not caught in her understanding of professionalism, she could discuss anger.

Andrea's distinction between the personal and the professional seems to echo the difference between the 'roles we play as teachers,' and the 'real self,' our self-identity (Britzman, 1991). Women teachers' commitments, desires, and emotions are often erased or constricted by a discourse of professionalism. In order to maintain a coherent professional-self, women teachers may down-play or deny emotions.

Every time emotions came up in discussions with participants, I found myself remembering the mixed feelings I had about my own emotional restraint in school. When participants spoke of emotions, I tried to probe their explanations, in order to find out what meanings reinforced, limited, or contradicted each other. What meanings fix emotions as "out of control?" Are teachers' emotions ever acceptable in school?

Both Andrea and Sonia described similar understandings of the place of emotions in classrooms spaces. The emotions of students are acceptable because they are young and feel their experiences acutely. Sonia described teaching younger students: "especially if you're in a junior high, everything is about what is going on with them emotionally." Emotions for teachers were also acceptable, under specific circumstances. Both Andrea and Sonia mentioned their work with *Romeo and Juliet* as a piece of literature in their English classes. Each woman described how she let her students know in advance that the film would trigger the teacher's tears. This struck me as an interesting example because of the cultural acceptability of women crying publicly over 'love and loss.' Crying about relationships is more acceptable than crying about feeling "out of control." The latter explanation can be equated with a mental health condition that is undesirable in teachers.

Sonia talked about the importance of recognizing emotions in school. Sonia empathized with the teacher in "Jessica's Story," and she questioned the appropriateness of the principal's response to Jessica crying in the principal's office:

That whole thing I mean, that's just a <laughs> Well *he*/ well when the principal said, "Don't be silly" that's not hearing where she [Jessica] is coming from, and also the emotional stuff, where that's not looked at, often not look at very positively, that a female will become more emotional and feel frightened for her physical safety. Like she was worried that the kid would come up behind her, and um, ... the principal did not respond to the emotions that she was expressing at that time.

Sonia acknowledged that Jessica had a legitimate reason for being emotional – fear. Sonia expressed her concern that the teacher's emotions were ignored by the principal. Recounting her own story of being emotional at school, Sonia described the time when she found out that she had a serious illness and decided to share the reason for her upcoming leave-of-absence with the school administration.

Now I started telling my story, and I started crying when I was/because I was a bit fearful, 'cause they asked me a couple questions, like "How long do you think you'll be off?" and all that kind of stuff, so I started crying and then I felt/ and I was trying to breathe, so I didn't cry, cause I didn't want to come across as being hysterically *afraid* or whatever, but then I thought, I don't care, there were two females in this meeting and two males, and I thought, "This is where I'm at," and they were really good, they really accepted my *emotionalism*...I guess it was just important to me to be able to tell them *that* and be able to show them my human side, kind of, that I wasn't just a number.

Choosing to share an "emotional-self," her "human side" was a conscious decision to suspend discourses that support impersonal interactions between school personnel. Once again, a rational self is negotiated that is different from the 'real' self, as Andrea suggested above – the professional versus the personal self. In this instance, however, Sonia's "emotionalism" was accepted by the administration. Sonia informed her administration about a serious physical condition that was potentially life-threatening. Therefore, her fear was justifiable and her emotions were acceptable.

Both Sonia's and Andrea's stories dealt with emotions but each story portrayed "emotionalism" as either appropriate or inappropriate. In Sonia's example of being upset while describing a life-threatening illness, emotionalism was justified. In Andrea's example of crying during a crisis, her emotional



response was "out-of-control" in the school context. Each story suggested the play of various discourses vying for supremacy. Andrea further explored the multiple meanings of teachers' emotions in schools when she discussed the difficult positions in which women teachers find themselves in. While supervising a school dance, Andrea was asked to escort two non-students out of the building. Both girls were black. Complaining about a white boy who had made racist comments towards them, the girls then asked why he was not kicked out as well. Andrea said she would speak to him. But when she tracked the boy down, Andrea saw that he was receiving a dance award and, therefore, did not speak to him. The following Monday, the principal called Andrea into his office. The two girls and their mothers had come into the school to register complaints of racism with the principal. Andrea recounted the moment:

And he's asking *me* to speak to their statements, and I was so angry, that I started to cry, and I said, "I cannot *believe* you are asking *me* to take responsibility for what *happened* here..." The bell was just about to ring, like his timing couldn't have been worse, because I could not deal with it, I could not speak rationally, because I was choking from... from anger and tears. So anyway, he tried to hug me, as I got up and said, you know, "I've got to go. The bell just went." And he tried to hug me! <laughs> and I just pushed him away! And I thought, "You son of a bitch! I was here Friday night, giving up four hours of my Friday night, to supervise this dance, was told by an administration member, to go in and find"/ he wasn't going to go in so I went in, found the girls, kicked them out, this other story develops from it, and then there is a fight later. And I had already *left* when the fight had happened. It didn't even occur on school property. So I felt unsupported and I felt questioned and I felt defensive and that's what I meant about these difficult positions. Sometimes it would be easier if teachers were to do nothing, but we can't do nothing, you know. Because we are the ones on the front lines.

Andrea focused on the "difficult positions" in which women teachers find themselves. She needed to account for emotions, professionalism, race, gender, and hierarchical position in the institution, all in one telling. Initially, her tears, although out of anger, were taken up by the principal as 'upset,' prompting his reaction to hug her. Outraged by being comforted by the very person who "questioned" her practice, Andrea shrugged off his response in favour of conduct

conducive to professionalism. The bell had rung; duty called. Feeling powerless, Andrea expressed her frustration of, on the one hand, being told by an administrator to take on the problem of evicting the two girls, and then, on the other hand, being questioned about the way in which she handled the event. Andrea felt subdued and defenseless as a teacher. Her decisions were "questioned" and her actions were "unsupported," which prompted her to consider "doing nothing" the next time. But she felt entangled by her daily involvement with students. Andrea's tears of frustration seeped out in the principal's office.

#### Spilling Blood

In addition to emotions, the female bodies' presence is felt in other ways. I remember being quite surprised when Andrea brought up menstruation at the beginning of our last individual interview together. She spoke of a key biological process in the female body that, although widely understood privately, had no place in a public discourse. However, as I listened to Andrea making sense of the silence surrounding the topic of menstruation among a group of women where such talk should be 'safe,' I recognized the need to explore some understandings of menstruating female bodies in professional teaching spaces.

Cultural markers support a variety of meanings about menstruation (Young, 1995). I wanted to know about the 'knowledges' that women teachers had to live with in bodies which could seep into the confines of schooling spaces. Andrea took this up, specifically, when she reflected back on her teaching practice:

I was wondering about the female body. The biological, physiological female body and how none of us in our group over the last few months, talked anything about the effect of menstruation on our jobs. And the reason I'm bringing it up is because I'm menstruating right now, and I'm always very tired during that time. It definitely affects my mood and my day. I try not to let it. And like I said to you, when a high school girl tells me "Oh, I don't feel well. I've got cramps". And I say "Well, so do I" and uh, "Sit down," you know, "deal with it." I can take pain killers and stuff, but for those two days or so at the beginning of my cycle, I'm very, very affected

by that and I was wondering how if none of us brought that up, then maybe it wasn't such a big issue with everybody else.

And then I was thinking how, the same issues that you brought up, how would men have responded to the kinds of things we talked about. Would there have been as much emotion and personal reactions to things? Like I noticed as I'm reading through these transcripts, I'm very personal, like I'm very up-front with you. You make it easy for me to get affectionate and feel very comfortable. But I tell you so much in here and so easily, and I wonder if males could discourse the same way that we did. I wonder if there's an unwritten thing between women when there are no men about, that there's no competition, there's no need to be number one, or the one who said the most, or the one who gets her point out. We seem to be able to give each woman an opportunity to say her piece no matter how long it took her. I was just curious about whether or not this kind of thing would have worked with men. How they would have responded. Would they have said that these things bothered them too or do they write kids off more quickly or do they just not let these things get to them? I wonder.

This quote, in its entirety, moves from menstruation as an unspoken topic of knowing among women through to an exploration of what women know. As a female subject, Andrea's description spills forth with meaning about the female teaching professional both literally (menstruation) and figuratively (being open and honest with me). One striking point in her quote is that Andrea has explored the connections between knowing, support, and silence for a group of women. Andrea acknowledged that we, as high school teachers, deal with young women in classrooms who are also negotiating menstruating bodies in school spaces. Andrea's wonderings led her to explore the boundaries in talking about hidden or silent knowledge. Andrea wanted to know the extent to which the issues discussed in our focus group were specifically female related. In this sense, Andrea's queries echoed Young's (1995) description of a group's awareness of a "serialized condition." Young makes the distinction between women as a *group* who are a "self-consciously, mutually acknowledging collective with a self-conscious purpose" and women as a *series* who are a "social collective whose members are unified passively by the objects about which their actions are oriented or by the objectified results of the material effects of the actions of others" (p. 199). Because of this distinction, Young configures a gendered

analysis from the perspective of what women may have in common, without a requisite need for a 'raised consciousness.' In Andrea's case, she began to wonder about the serialized conditions surrounding women teachers and menstruation.

Andrea continued to delve into what a menstruating body meant for her as a woman teacher:

Andrea: Let's just say hypothetically to my principal, I would say/ if he says, "I hear you," you know, "yelled at this student and called her a bitch, can you speak to me about that?" And then I say "Well, you know, I'm PMSing". I would never, ever use that as my reasoning and so I would never um, I feel, and this is ironic too, I feel to speak about menstruation to a male administrator um, would be embarrassing and I don't think that's right. I don't think I should feel ashamed of my biological functions, but I would feel weak, inferior and ashamed, and embarrassed.

Cara: I wonder why that is.

Andrea: Probably because it's something that's just not spoken about and it's like, do it and do it in quiet and do it without anybody knowing and get on with it. ... But you know, it's funny, my kids, I sometimes shock my groups of students when I'll say something like "Sorry, I'm PMSing". The girls love it and the guys just don't know what to make of it. But I'm thinking, you know, they gotta know that this is part of being an adult woman and some of their girlfriends are and the women they're going to marry and the women that are going to be the mothers of their children and yet women are made to feel that it should be done in silence and not talked about because it's gross and I don't think that comes from women, I think that comes from men. .... But I'd never be able to explain that to my principal because I don't think that he would accept it as valid or he wouldn't see it as the real reason. I don't know.

Andrea's explanation demonstrated the complex regulations about menstruation for women in our culture. On the one hand, menstruation is a biological function, and, on the other hand, menstruation is a "gross" bodily function that has no place in polite discussions. The female body is "the grotesque body" that is an "open, protruding, extended, secreting body, the body of becoming, process and

change" (Russo, 1986, p. 219). For women teachers, menstruation is both a topic to educate students about the 'facts of life' and an anomaly that does not fit in a conversation with an administrator. A discourse of professionalism shores up the secreting female body.

Lastly, Andrea's description of the meanings of menstruation in women teachers' offers another example of "practico-inert realities" which both limit and support certain cultural practices. Although menstruation is often construed as a source of shame and embarrassment and, therefore, a topic not to be discussed, Andrea described a time that she was able to use this silence to her advantage:

Ironically this male teacher I keep referring to, this guy that teaches right next door to me, he loves to bug me and play practical jokes on me and I can never get him back. The thing that drives him up the wall is if I tell him, I'm bleeding like a stuck pig, and then he's like "la, la, la, la, la, la, la." <covering her ears – showing how he drowns out the sound>. He just can't stand this. So definitely that wouldn't be a discourse for us because he can't listen to it.

Andrea inserted her (fluid) body into the conversation by flipping the social taboo of menstrual silence and speaking it into public existence. Thus, meanings that limit, may also enable certain practices.

Placed within the glass maze, experience, age, size, clothing, emotions, and blood act as glass walls; women teachers as professionals are confined by the female body. As they searched for a way through the maze constructed by a discourse of professionalism, their claim to legitimate professional status was constantly hindered. These obstacles were erected by other discourses, such as femininity and liberal-humanism. Although they may not have directly spoken about these impediments, their talk revealed the intricate play to avoid, or side-step, the limitations of a feminine body in public school spaces. Meanings within a discourse of professionalism propel us through the glass maze as if the glass walls did not exist.

### **Chambers and Corridors:**

#### **Negotiating a Discourse of Professionalism**

In Chapters Six, Seven, and Eight, I consider the ways in which women teachers negotiate a discourse of professionalism. In Chapter Six, a discourse of professionalism often silences critique in teaching. Chapter Seven looks at the meanings that are unavailable to women as they make sense of their relationships with other women in the teaching profession. And Chapter Eight considers the ways that a discourse of professionalism intersects with discourses of caring to leave women teachers with few ways of understanding uncaring moments in teaching.

The play of power is revealed as certain meanings are allowed and disallowed in particular moments. In each instance, it is as if women teachers negotiated unpredictable terrain, along unknown corridors, only to arrive in mirrored rooms, confronted with optical illusions, rendering 'the known' unclear. The chambers and corridors of the Funhouse ensured a difficult passage.

## Chapter Six

### Silence, Silencing, and Being Silenced: Questioning Professionals

Any sketching of the profile of the self in community will thus need to begin with a full recognition of the discourse and action of embodied agents, face-to-face in situations of agreement and dissent, harmony and discord, liberation and oppression, mastery and slavery (Schrag, 1997, p. 82).

At the outset of our second individual interview, I asked Sonia where she wanted to begin. Sonia referred back to our second focus group discussion of "Margaret's Story," the vignette which presented a scenario of a teacher using music in her classroom and the staff's understanding of this practice. Sonia said, "I had an incident this week, and afterwards I was trying to analyze what was going on there." The incident began when Sonia attended an early morning meeting where some of the staff, department heads, and administration were deciding how to deal with an extra period in the school timetable. Certain departments were being asked to teach an extra class. In turn, those department members were worried about the extra teaching load. Concerned about the way the discussion was going, Sonia recalled her own reaction at that moment during the meeting:

I was sitting there, and I know I was 'reacting.' I'm sure I was shaking my head, a *little* bit, you know. I wasn't saying anything out loud, but I do show my emotions, and so I am sure that I was in some way.

At lunch time that day, one of the department heads came in to talk to Sonia, in her office:

He said uh, "Gee, now how can I start this conversation?" and he closed the door. And I thought it was about work-experience, or the students that he sent me, and I said, "What conversation?" And he said, "Well this morning in the meeting, when I said [our department] didn't want to take on anymore blah, blah, blah, you rolled your eyes, when I was talking

about how much work we do.” And I said “I what?!” I couldn’t believe it <laughs in disbelief> that’s what I said. I said “I what?!” He said, “You rolled your eyes,” and I said “Well you were sitting beside me, John.”

Having determined that another staff member must have relayed this information to the department head, Sonia was upset by what she considered to be an obvious act of unprofessional conduct. As outlined by the Alberta Teachers’ Association in the Teacher Code of Conduct, concerns about a person’s teaching practice are first to be directed to the teacher in question. However, Sonia quickly realized that the focus of the conversation was to illustrate the hard work going on in John’s department, and to request Sonia’s recognition and support of this work.

So anyway he went on... for the next 20 minutes telling me how busy his department is. So I mean first of all, I was ticked off, that he came and said this. And I said, “This is all assumptions that are being made.” ... So after he left, I was devastated. I was devastated for about a half an hour. I felt that I had been reamed *out*, um... for something that I had no/ nothing to do with. So I was/ I was absolutely devastated, and then by the afternoon/ I mean I was devastated and then I got angry, so I was carrying that around, and I kept saying, “Let it go, let it go, let it GO!” Oh yeah and before he left “Yeah, I just wanted to/ I don’t want to be enemies or” not enemies but um, “I don’t want this to stand in the way and, so everything is fine” So....

As Sonia made sense of this event, her emotions spilled forth. Both angered and devastated, Sonia talked about “carrying that around.” Unable to respond, Sonia described being “so shocked,” “totally broad-sided,” and “taken-a-back.”

Following up on these descriptions, I asked:

- Cara: So when we’re in those moments, when we are so shocked, you didn’t speak back because you were thinking what? What happens in those moments?
- Sonia: Well for part of it I was trying to figure out *who* that was who said that ... and THEN, then, then my thought also was, “Who on earth would do *that*?!” You know, if I am sitting in a staff-meeting and I see someone make a face about something that’s being said, I don’t go up afterwards and say, “Oh, guess what! Mr. So



and So was rolling his eyes, because you said we all have to do an extra half hour of supervision" or/ I mean to me that is pretty childish in my own sad opinion.

After she had time to think about what happened, Sonia began to make sense of this encounter. She found it nearly inconceivable that a staff member would comment on her physical response (shaking her head a little bit and showing her emotions) during the meeting. She did not speak up at the time, and, therefore, she did not want to be chastised. Resisting the 'disciplining gaze' of her colleagues, Sonia understood that critical thoughts are not to be discussed. Sonia then reframed 'the gaze' as childish; the telling itself became 'tattling.' Sonia drew upon many meanings to 'attack her attacker' using a discourse of professionalism to defend herself against charges of unprofessionalism.

Sonia: If you are a professional, then I think you should be able to have a more professional conversation about this. I think that people act like kids/ teachers act like kids, a lot of the times

Cara: In what way?

Sonia: Like this - "Someone was making a face while you were talking" <spoken with a whiny voice>

Cara: <laughs>

Sonia: that is so 'junior high,' I think. <laughs> I don't know, isn't it?

Cara: Yeah

Sonia: It's just... I mean that is not professional and if it [Sonia's reaction in the meeting] bothers that person who saw it, I think they should take it up with the person, in a nice way, like in a nice/ in a diplomatic way. You know, "Gee," you know, "I noticed that you really seemed to be reacting to what was being said in the meeting. What was that all about?" Or "What was going on for you or what were your thoughts about those things that people were saying?" Just to find out, was I reacting to him or just to /generally what was being said.

It is here that Sonia made the explicit connection between child-like behaviour and unprofessional behaviour. By describing this situation as "so junior high,"

Sonia was criticizing John's actions. This remark suggested that the person's development had arrested; his reaction was immature. Therefore, being nice, diplomatic, and neutral is an important strategy for getting along with others and is an important strategy for a mature professional to possess, in order to be recognizable as a professional. Getting along with other people is also considered an important example of women's emotional labour, where women often feel responsible for making others feel comfortable (Young, 1995).

When discordant emotions between teachers are framed solely within 'developmental' discourses, teachers have limited explanations for their experiences with their colleagues. With a restricted set of meanings available in discourses that support *adult* professional conduct, egregious behaviour and strained relations among colleagues are rendered invisible. cursory explanations persist in these moments, such as a flaw associated with adults who should 'grow up' or 'should know better by now.'

#### Silence is Golden

By challenging the meanings supporting "if you don't have anything good to say, it's best not to say anything at all," Sonia's story provides an opportunity to explore the ways that the discourse of professionalism can operate to silence critique in teaching. Teachers' opinions need to be confined to positive or neutral terms, even non-verbal opinions, as Sonia discovered. Generally, participants tended to access neutral or supportive positions when they talked about their teaching colleagues. Carolyn's description reflected this "automatic" response:

I'm the kind of person that when somebody says, "Oh the teachers at that school are lousy," I'm one of them. So automatically I take it on as my responsibility, even though I might not be one of the teachers who is being condemned, because I am part of the group. ... My two sisters, I mean they are supportive of me, as a person, but they are not supportive of education. My older sister has two kids in school in the large urban centre near here. And some of the stories [that] she tells me, I have to qualify for her or justify. And again, I don't know what I'm doing it. I'm just defending my colleagues.

Not having a personal relationship with the teachers who are being criticized does not prevent Carolyn from defending them within a discourse of professionalism. Indeed, as members of the general public consider themselves well-versed in educational issues because they have attended public school, teachers are frequently required to deflect public criticism. The defense of anonymous colleagues also acts as a way to secure our own choice to be teachers.

Further supporting the Professional Code of Conduct guidelines, Andrea stated "when kids start complaining about another teacher, there is this ethical thing, right?, that we all signed on to when we became teachers. We don't talk about another teacher with kids or other teachers. Well, we're not supposed to, but...." The general agreement seemed to be that teachers did not talk about other teachers. However, as Andrea suggested with her comment "not supposed to," teachers were also caught in moments when they felt that not all practices can be condoned. In this case, silence can act as approval. Therefore, teachers find themselves negotiating the fine line between not criticizing poor practice and not condoning it. Sonia described such a moment when she maintained a position that allowed her to act on her concerns:

My [sport] girls have been fairly open about talking about things that they hate about school and teachers, you know, they're not learning anything, or whatever. And I take that all with a grain of salt. I have, a number of times and in different situations, said "I don't want to hear any teachers' names. I shouldn't be hearing that" or whatever. But, sometimes, when they're just having their little conversations, I'll sometimes get involved in that. But I'm quite careful because I don't want to come off that I'm totally defending the school system or the teachers because I don't think some of them deserve to be defended, some of the things that are going on. But I might/ what I'll try to do is, "Well how can you manage yourself in that situation? You know that that's the way it is. So what can you do so that the situation works for you in some way? It's not the best situation, but that's the way it is." Just trying to encourage them, you know, to look at it that way instead of just sitting about complaining, complaining, complaining. Because complaining, complaining isn't going to make it go away, necessarily.

Sonia talked about her colleagues in a particular way because she did not believe that some of them deserved support. Instead, Sonia chose to direct the students' attention to what they could do under the circumstances. Sonia's explanation started with a reference to resisting a general endorsement of all teachers' practices. Wishing to negotiate the fine line between silence (agreement) and criticism (unprofessionalism), Sonia suggested that students consider how best to "manage" themselves. But this very approach, taking the middle ground, may serve to reinforce the ways that institutional practices continue uninterrupted and uncritiqued. By locating the issue in the individual student, the focus was taken away from larger structural explanations for the difficulties that the students talked about. Complaining, or speaking up, was no guarantee of "making it go away." Speaking up was regulated so that individuals turned 'the gaze' back on themselves. Questions were silenced, as "do the best you can" sentiments prevailed. Making things better for themselves echoes the self-help movement, which embraces humanist notions of the individual. From this viewpoint, individuals can change their experiences if they work hard enough, regardless of circumstances.

#### Breaking the Golden Rule

Up to this point, I have been discussing the ways that silence between colleagues is an accepted practice and one that is constituted by a discourse of professionalism. Sonia's story of her confrontation with John also provided insight into the ways that breaking this 'Golden Rule' invites repercussions. In her case, professionalism became a site of self-regulation and discipline.

Speaking out against a colleague can rarely be constituted in terms of informed judgement. Because teaching is essentialized as 'experience in the classroom,' relativism abounds. While discussing the ways that we take feedback or criticism from our colleagues, Carolyn outlined the reasons why teachers should not comment on other teachers' practices: "You're not in my class, you don't know; you don't know why I teach; what my teaching methods

are; you don't know how the kids interact." Speaking to everyone who is not in her classroom, Carolyn's explanation demarcated the boundary of a knowledgeable critic. Since the teacher is usually the only adult in the classroom, no one teacher has sufficient knowledge to criticize another. Differences among teachers, students, and subject areas are seen as idiosyncratic. Everyone and everything is uniquely different, preventing generalizations from being made. Ultimately, criticism is again silenced because as Carolyn said, "you can't know my reality."

Taking the time to criticize or judge another teacher was regulated within particular understandings of teaching. With a plethora of tasks and duties taking up a teacher's day, discussing and judging colleagues was viewed as wasting time. Nellie described the link between efficiency and judging others when she stated:

Part of me goes, "Who has time for this? If you are actually teaching and you are working with kids, and you are doing what you need to do, who's got time to figure out whose budget is what? Who cares?! Worry about your own stuff." I figure they have too much time on their hands. "Maybe you need some more kids in your [class]."

It is understood that if a teacher is not solely focused on her own "stuff" or work, then she may not be carrying the full weight of her responsibilities as a teacher. Having the time to complain may even indicate that a person is under-worked (not enough students to keep track of in the classroom). 'Minding your own business' in this sense implies that the teacher is working hard.

Speaking up, even when it is to talk about our own practice, can evoke mechanisms of regulation (Foucault, 1983). For example, while Sonia continued to make sense of the events with John, the department head, her description revealed how we are not only subjects of, but subjected to, the play of discourse. The discourse of professionalism can act as set of meanings by which to judge teaching practices. When John "goes on for 20 minutes" about the work that he does as a teacher, Sonia judged his practice:

He was going on about, "I don't know if you know, but I'm here until 6 o'clock every now and again. And that impacts on my family life and I work so hard. And when I leave here, there are no other cars in the parking lot". And you know I just, I started to feel sorry for him then, too. I thought, "You poor thing, then you'd better get a life! Because if you are expecting to be compensated or recognized, forget it! You're not going to be. You know, I mean that should be something that you intrinsically do because you enjoy it, but don't come and dump on me that your wife is going to laugh at you because you are taking on another responsibility at work." And so I said, near the end I said, "Well I don't want tell you what to do, but maybe you need to reprioritize what you do."

Sonia's tone switched. Now the emphasis was on evaluating what the department head was saying, while he described his work. As a teacher, Sonia was able to forward an explanation of teacher work that included efficiency, or time management. In a day and age of 'work smarter not harder' sentiments, teachers who do not "prioritize" what they do are not working effectively. In the larger context of a society based on middle-class values of work, it is also important to sustain an image of managing work-, family-, and leisure-time. This reinforces a "market model" in a society which sells leisure as a commodity, where "get a life" slogans support leisure consumption. Meanings about living 'the good life' include appearing to properly manage a well-rounded life.

In addition to reinforcing a middle-class work ethic in teaching, Sonia also accessed a discourse of caring. "Feeling sorry" for someone who is unable to negotiate the demands of teaching, positioned Sonia, at that moment, as a concerned teacher. By feeling sorry for him, Sonia positioned John as deserving pity for mismanaging his affairs. She took up 'the caring professional' subject-position by feeling sorry for him even as she judged his practice.

However, in the next moment, Sonia articulated having to negotiate these meanings in her own teaching practice:

Sonia: Then I started feeling guilty because I don't do that much at work, but one of the reasons why I don't do that much this year, I mean one of the reasons is, I'm preserving my health.

Cara: This is your first year back?

Sonia: Yeah and I don't know if he is getting back/ if he is making a comment, because I leave within a half an hour at the end of the day. And I don't believe that he is there everyday until 6 o'clock, either. *I don't think so, but anyways, so be it* <whispered>. I mean if that's his choice/ And then, you know, I started thinking about, my mind was wondering a bit, and I started thinking, well maybe you are really slow to work, and maybe that's why <laughs> ... I started to think maybe indirectly he was saying, "I'm here until 6 and you leave at 4 every day" he doesn't know, maybe I go back there at night, and that is one thing I don't like about teaching is when people start "Well, I'm here 'til/" you know whatever, or "I'm here at 7 every morning and no one else is here. People walk in five minutes before the bell and that ticks me off." When I hear that, I just stay right out of those conversation, because I just don't think people have a right to comment on people's use of their time.

The gaze was turned back upon herself. Sonia was uncertain if she was fulfilling her own work obligations during a year when she was still discovering the limits of her body after recovering from a major illness. Even so, a discourse of professionalism enabled Sonia to at once comment on another teacher's use of time, even as she does so jokingly, while at the same time cautioning against anyone passing judgement on other people's use of time. Professional judgement enables individuals to speak out and evaluate others. Professional conduct states that individuals will not speak out against others unless strict procedures are followed. Sonia recognized the norms of silence. Sonia's understanding returned to narrow standards of teaching. Meanings of time-management regulated both Sonia and John. After outlining the ways that John's description indicated an inefficient use of time, she ended the conversation by stating that no one should comment on another teacher's use of time. Remaining silent was the best alternative.

By considering some of the ways that a discourse of professionalism contributed to practices of silence, we can begin to understand the ways in which critique is often absent in teaching. Initially participants' talk suggested that silence happened by default. By "just supporting my colleagues," regardless of circumstances, a teacher can overlook problems with her colleagues' teaching

practices. Even when general endorsements are qualified, there was still a tendency to reinforce status-quo practices as "that's just the way things are." In an instance when silence was broken and criticism was leveled, individuals found themselves subjects-of and subjected-to equally scathing comments that suggested that they had "no business" passing judgement on others, or else they had too much time on their hands.

In a sense, these meanings compelled participants over the revolving disks set in the slanted floors of the Funhouse. As participants turned their criticism back on themselves, they found their feet thrown from underneath them. They enacted and re-enacted meanings that silenced others even as they silenced themselves. Within a discourse of professionalism, these women teachers silenced collegial and personal queries. Teachers were caught between meanings that suggested they should not criticize others because they did not want to be criticized, and other meanings that suggested that they should criticize others because others are not teaching 'properly.' A discourse of professionalism threw participants off balance. Simultaneously, as they judged others, they did not want to be judged themselves. Criticism in teaching seemed to require perseverance over a tricky terrain in the Funhouse hallway, in order to move the conversation beyond simply idiosyncratic practices of individual teachers towards any sense of professional conversation.



## Chapter Seven

### Erasing the Traces: Women's Relationships with Women

We were in a staff meeting. Our drama teacher had just thanked all the people who had assisted with his program. I came to the front to say that I wanted to thank Jane [the female assistant-principal] because she does so much for our program. He [the male assistant-principal] has felt threatened by her because she's a 'doer,' and he is a 'smoozer'. Smoozers don't have to work; they just have to yuck people up, right? So, he took offence to the fact that accolades are being given to this individual publicly in a meeting. So we come out of this meeting and I'm about six feet ahead of these people. There are two teachers on either side of him [the male assistant-principal], and I turned around because when I heard this, it struck me. So I turned around, and [the female teacher] is fondling the [male assistant-principal's] tie and saying "oh, you know it's so/ thank you for coming to my volleyball tournament. You know, I never could have done it with out you." And the other [teacher] says, "Thank you for," you know, "sleeping with me because my program would never be this good without it." And I went...they are talking about me! They are mocking the fact that we just thanked Jane. They are intimating that I'm sleeping with the [female] assistant-principal (Nellie).

Nellie's story outlined the moment when three colleagues initiated a role-play scenario designed to embarrass or intimidate her. Nellie framed the story as an example of being criticized for her public support of her assistant-principal.

And I just couldn't believe it, because, you know what really struck me? That this seemed normal, that this seemed like normal conversation. ...You know, how people can do things out of line and do it so often that they begin to think it's ok. It was there, it was there, at that point, that they didn't even think about the fact that I'm right in front of them. They wanted me to hear it, but they didn't really think about/they had been so used to being that way with this individual [the male assistant-principal], that it was normal.

Nellie found her colleagues' unprofessional conduct difficult to accept, especially since they framed it as 'normal.' Nellie decided to deal with this

incident directly. Because she had a parent meeting immediately following the staff meeting, Nellie chose to speak to the male assistant-principal first thing in the morning. The following exchange ensued:

So when I went in in the morning, [the male assistant-principal said] "What's your problem? We weren't doing anything. I don't know what you think you heard. I'm sorry for what you *think* you heard." I said "No, I know what I heard" and I just raked him about it.

As the assistant-principal attempted to reframe the incident as something that Nellie misheard, Nellie pursued her version of the events. Nellie asserted her understanding of the event when she said "I know what I heard." Later, Nellie's account of the incident was confirmed when one of the teachers from the group apologized to her for insinuating that she was sleeping with Jane, the female assistant-principal. "I'm sure they thought I was calling the ATA [Alberta Teachers' Association]. I think they thought their jobs were over." Nellie's ability to call upon her professional association was her ultimate defense against her colleagues' actions.

#### Talking Back: Professionalism as Power

A discourse of professionalism enabled Nellie to pursue this incident further. Stating that she simply wanted an apology from the assistant-principal, Nellie talked with the assistant-principal on two additional occasions. He never acknowledged the incident, and he never apologized for it. Justified by her professional association's written code of conduct, Nellie used particular meanings of professionalism while taking up the incident with her principal:

Nellie: So then I went back to [the male assistant-principal] and he still wouldn't apologize, and I said, "I'm discussing this with the principal and because of this and [a previous incident], I refuse to work with you. You are unprofessional and I will not work with you. That's what I'm requesting from the principal." So I went to the principal, told him what happened, and he said, "Oh, well you have to work with him" and I said, "No I don't. If you want to push this, I'll take it all the way up." He said, "Well, I can

mandate you". And I said, "Yeah, and you're protecting him right now, and they will know you are protecting him."

Cara: What do you mean by mandating?

Nellie: He is just saying "I'm the principal. I can make you do what ever I want." I'm going, "Try it! You want to push me? Do you want to see where this can go?", just trying to intimidate me into being quiet, and shutting up, and not making a stir. I said "No, no. The only way I'm going to be satisfied is knowing that I don't have to work with this guy [the male assistant-principal] ever again. Ever."

Nellie described the way that she dealt with the levels of the school hierarchy. She acknowledged that the principal was also an authority figure, someone with whom she had to negotiate. She needed his approval. Nellie dealt with the issue using the threat of exposure as a way to leverage her unequal negotiating position. Nellie's threat was that she could bring in the ATA to conduct an investigation into the incident. It would mean going public and inviting an outside regulating body into the school. What is interesting is that Nellie used this strategy as way to push back the obedience and silence that the principal was suggesting. Professionalism in teaching, which is codified and regulated by an official organization, made her approach possible. It allowed Nellie to play the ultimate card: the threat of outside scrutiny. For Nellie, this incident demonstrated her ability to talk back to and resist her administrators' hierarchical power.

In the end, Nellie felt that she had triumphed over the assistant-principal. She stated simply "he doesn't exist in my world any more." Nellie worked hard to make the male assistant-principal's presence 'invisible' in her teaching life. For example, Nellie no longer took her attendance to the male assistant-principal, and she had no correspondence or communication with him. Nellie described her satisfaction with this arrangement:

Nellie: I think it is a big joke. See this is it. This is why I say "I've won!" He's the one who has been living "out" and has been for over two years now.

Cara: It's been like this for two years, your relationship?

Nellie: Oh yeah, or our 'non-relationship' <laughs>. I'll come into the office, I'll say, "Hi" to everybody but him. It's a strange thing, but you know what? It is the personal satisfaction of him knowing, cause I know as well, that what he did was not right. He knows that.

It was from a position of moral certainty, or being right, that Nellie enjoyed her censuring practices in her "non-relationship" with the assistant-principal. Nellie blatantly ignored the assistant-principal in her day to day activities. What would typically be regarded as rude behaviour in the eyes of a casual observer was justified by Nellie because the assistant-principal refused to acknowledge what he did wrong and refused to apologize for his unprofessional behaviour.

Reminiscent of Foucault's notion of confession, the individual is disciplined in the institution of the school (Ball, 1990). In this case, it is an administrator who is disciplined within a discourse of professionalism. He should "confess" his sin of unprofessional behaviour and ask Nellie's forgiveness. Remember it is an apology that Nellie required to make this incident a non-issue and make it go away. It was framed as simply a case of an unrepentant sinner, a misbehaving educator.

Nellie constructed the male assistant-principal's reluctance to apologize as an indication of his pathology. After explaining her non-relationship with the assistant-principal, I asked her if it mattered to her that the assistant-principal may have misunderstood her behaviour as a person just acting bizarrely. She replied:

Who cares? Who cares? I don't value him as a person or as a professional. Anybody who clings to that is ill and needs help. And it's only a symptom of a problem he has with power, authority, and control.

Interestingly, Nellie distinguished between the assistant-principal being a person and a professional, and that she did not respect or value either rendition. By pathologizing his behaviour, Nellie's description of the assistant-principal kept the issue of sexual harassment firmly within the realm of an *individual* stepping

outside of the regulated practices of the profession. The talk was not about what institutional or patriarchal conditions existed that made this type of harassment possible. Rather the focus was on a 'sick' person who unashamedly misrepresented a moment of harassment, and who did not own up to his participation in it. Nellie's understanding of the event made it possible for the assistant-principal's actions to be framed as *idiosyncratic*.

Nellie enjoyed feeling powerful. What originally began as a story about the intimidating practices of her colleagues, transformed into an example of an individual able to take matters into her own hands. Nellie described how she felt in this position: "See I feel like I have the power now. It bugs the hell out of him that he can't tell me what do anymore, OR touch me. I'm an untouchable, like I'm over here. It drives him crazy." In an instant, a discourse of professionalism was used as a powerful tool to defend herself from an attack by a person who was in a position of authority over her. I asked Nellie about the extent to which the assistant-principal continued to harass her:

Cara: He can still say things to you and intimidate you/

Nellie: /not really, I don't have to work with him, I've won. I won! He can't/ I have openly challenged him and I don't have to work with him anymore, so he can't touch me any more.

Cara: Does that mean he doesn't say anything more to you?

Nellie: No. Oh he tries to talk to me, and I remember going down the hall one day and he said "Hi" to me and I said, "What part of the part don't you get that you don't exist anymore?"

Cara: And he said?

Nellie: Well, he just looked at me, just shocked, because I think he thought "I will just make a few jokes, and be nice, and it will eventually be over."

A discourse of professionalism provided Nellie with a way to assert a morally superior version of herself as a professional teacher. She used professionalism to justify her subsequent behaviour toward the assistant-principal. What would

be commonly regarded as unprofessional behaviour on her part was, in this instance, acceptable because of the history between them. Supported by a code of professional conduct, Nellie felt "untouchable." Using the threat of exposure to the ATA, Nellie delineated a way that she could keep her integrity as a professional: by not forgetting the incident and not being nice to the assistant-principal. Within the confines of a discourse of professionalism, the end justified the means; Nellie's morally correct practices as a professional educator justified her unprofessional conduct towards colleague. There was no other discourse available to make sense of or critique this event.

As Nellie retold this moment, I was struck by the way that gender was almost absent. A discourse of professionalism seemed to overshadow alternative meanings about Nellie's experience of harassment. However, in a brief passing comment, Nellie accessed a significant set of meanings regulating women teachers. Nellie adamantly stated "my program and the success of it has nothing to do with my relationship to the [female] assistant-principal. My husband is on staff," as if she were speaking back to the underlying criticism when her colleagues suggested that she was sleeping with the female assistant-principal. This brief remark provided a small opening into an alternative set of meanings about this incident. I wondered: What was the significance of sex as gender and sex as sexual orientation in this instance? How did Nellie's experience speak to the regulation of the female body in the public space of school? And, in what ways are female relationships similarly regulated in schools?

#### Female Bodies at Work

Nellie described her Fine Arts program as very successful. There were many students who wished to take her classes and there were many students who were on a waiting list to be in her classes. In her view, it was inconceivable that anyone could think anything but hard work made this success possible. As I mentioned earlier, women teachers struggle with legitimacy issues. Joanne

Pagano's (1994) description of women teachers grappling with issues of authority in bodies that imply they cannot handle "the big boys" may also apply to bodies that can seduce the bigger boys - other colleagues. Feminine bodies by nature are assumed to hold the promise of sexual enticement. This set of meanings is widely available and acceptable enough that both her male and female colleagues were able to suggest that Nellie was not an accomplished teacher because of her ability or skills, but rather was 'suspect' because she signaled a sexual presence at work. The feminine body can be viewed as seducing favours and securing promotions rather than earning them (Rothman, 1978).

Simply put this moment of harassment, as Nellie described it, is layered with gendered meanings: Nellie publicly thanked her female assistant-principal; the target of the harassment was female; and both a male and a female teacher participated in a form of harassment that questioned Nellie's competence as a teacher. Dominant discourses about work and gender enabled her colleagues to cast suspicion upon Nellie's educational abilities. The unspoken question was what *really* qualified Nellie to boast of a successful program: her ability to work hard or her ability to use her sexual prowess to 'get ahead.' Meanings about women's bodies as untamed/ungoverned suggest that women teachers have the potential to use their bodies sexually for an unfair advantage over others, both men and other, more chaste, women (Rich, 1979). The implication is that women have the potential to get ahead through sexual favours, because women's bodies and sexuality are heavily regulated. These meanings continue to circulate within a present-day discourse of femininity.

Explanations that question individual women teachers' merit contribute to women's sexual harassment at work. The inevitability and invisibility of such sexual harassment in the work place is problematic. Adrienne Rich (1983) describes the ways women workers in general have usually coped with these meanings and practices:

Economically disadvantaged, women--whether waitresses or professors--endure sexual harassment to keep their jobs and learn to behave in a complaisantly and ingratiatingly heterosexual manner because they discover this is their true qualification for employment, whatever the job description (p. 150).

As Nellie described her reaction to the assistant-principal, she did not behave "complaisantly and ingratiatingly," even as her assistant-principal seemed to expect her to simply laugh it off and carry on. However, by accessing a discourse of professionalism which side-stepped issues of gender, Nellie was unable to access alternative meanings. A discourse of professionalism rendered gender invisible.

#### Regulating Women's Relationships with Women

One significant aspect of Nellie's story is that her colleagues' actions were prompted by Nellie publicly praising her female assistant-principal. Nellie responded to her colleagues' comments as if they were questioning her affection for Jane, the female assistant-principal. Nellie was addressing a set of meanings which regulate women's relationships in particular ways. Meanings which sexualize the female body not only construct women's work and non-work relationships as sexual, but also construct women's same-sex relationships as sexual. The implication that Nellie could have been a lesbian compelled her to state "my husband is on staff," as if to forward an argument that she could not possibly be having a sexual relationship with her female assistant-principal. Her statement was given as proof that she was officially heterosexual. In this moment of meaning construction, the discourse of professionalism relied on assumptions of heterosexuality. This state of affairs brings to mind Adrienne Rich's (1983) claim that "compulsory heterosexuality" often goes unnoticed as a powerful disciplining force.

Homosexuality acts as a discourse outside of mainstream notions of sexuality. The topic of homosexuality is present, and for many teachers is often dealt with in a way that corrects students' derogatory use of words related to



homosexuality. For the women in this research inquiry, homosexuality also remained relatively unexplored or uncritiqued as a discourse. Recalling "Theresa Story" about the advertising classroom assignment, one participant referred to the student's comment insinuating that the teacher was a "dyke." Andrea stated:

[Theresa] didn't seem to mind that James sort of called her a dyke, and I thought that was good because we have to realize that kids get angry at us. It usually isn't to us *personally*, its because we're the teacher or something. So I thought it was good that she didn't take it too personally.

In this example, the word "dyke" was merely an indication of a student's anger towards his teacher. For Andrea, using the word dyke signaled that the student wanted to disrupt the authority of the teacher. In a second example, Carolyn described her understanding of James' comment in a similar way. Carolyn detailed the actions she would have taken in similar circumstances:

I might be tempted to say "Whoa, hold it a minute there. What does how I am or who I am have anything to do with this and what's making you, having to make that judgement." I guess calling the kid to account is a good thing to do rather than just letting it slide by because again, I think it's a bit of a slam and I think it also shows a little bit of frustration on the kids part as to you're not valuing to what I'm having to say here.

Again the focus returned to the teacher and her practice. The word "dyke" was constructed as a signal that the student is feeling frustrated, and as such, the teacher may pick up on the cue to be more sensitive or follow up deeper emotional issues with the child. Homosexuality, as a marginalized discourse, does not appear to be a possibility for discussion. Carolyn pointed out this silence:

It's interesting that we didn't talk about that [moment in the story] in the group, that we just sort of let it go. Then again, as teachers in the public eye, we're not supposed to talk about these things, and yet we are. So I think, it does make us uncomfortable that we can talk about our sexuality with kids.

Nellie, Carolyn, and Andrea were accessing meanings which keep "compulsory female heterosexuality" (Rich, 1983) in play. Adrienne Rich describes heterosexuality as a repressive system that works hand-in-hand with patriarchy. Rich sees sexual-harassment in the work place intimately tied with the practice of compulsory female heterosexuality. When framed as sexual deviants, homosexuality is a lifestyle which is heavily regulated for teachers in schools. Lesbian teachers live a "hide-and-seek" existence (Singer, 1999). Often grouped with other 'deviant' sexual practices, homosexual teachers can find themselves equated with pedophiles, which seriously undermines a teacher's ability to be considered an effective educator (Silin, 1997).

#### Just Gossiping

Nellie talked about her colleagues' harassment only briefly during the focus group discussion. She went into more detail during a one-on-one interview. When Nellie gave a cursory account to the group, she may have been regulating her own talk, thereby reinforcing silence norms for women. Speaking together with other women, even when looking to support one's colleagues, can be a heavily censured activity. Women talking together can be framed as gossip, which carries largely negative connotations (Rysman, 1977). 'Keeping quiet' norms discipline women talking together by framing them as 'idle gossips.' These meanings then combine with the above mentioned strong taboos against same-sex relationships with other women in ways that severely limit what women teachers, as a group, can say and discuss with one another. Smith-Rosenberg (1983) discusses same-sex relationships among women during the nineteenth century and finds that, historically, the dichotomy between heterosexuality and homosexuality was significantly blurred, as these women experienced deeply intimate and committed relationships with each other during a time when homo-social groups were more acceptable. Smith-Rosenberg contrasts this type of relationship with the strict present-day codes of conduct about same-sex groups. She encourages a moderate view of sexual and emotional impulses as "part of a

continuum or spectrum of affect gradations strongly affected by cultural norms and arrangements, a continuum influenced in part by observed and thus learned behavior" (p. 55). Under present social practices, we have limited ways to know and speak about our relationships and friendships with other women, including our colleagues.

Work such as Smith-Rosenberg's (1983) support inquiries into the consequences of viewing women's relationships in purely dichotomous terms. For women teachers, praising each other can be sanctioned with threats of being labeled homosexual. In turn compulsory heterosexuality is enforced and distant, objective, anonymous, emotionally-devoid relationships are promoted. Women's relationships with women are reduced to efficient transactional relationships. Women lose the opportunity to hear how other women make sense of their experiences, thus losing an opportunity to say "that is my story also" (Richardson, 1990). Presently, naming and discussing difficult moments often remains isolating.

It is as if we see these images in a mirrored-room within the Funhouse. At the beginning of chapter, Nellie was constructing a tale about unprofessional behaviour by her colleagues. Through various constructions, the focus of the story was on professionalism. The resolution to the conflict occurred when Nellie 'erased' the assistant-principal from her daily activities. "He doesn't exist anymore" required a slight turn of one mirror in order for Nellie to eradicate his presence from her environment. Nellie's telling centred around her perceived successful resolution to this problem, as if she were only seeing herself in the mirror. By focusing on what she could do as a 'mighty individual' armed with a discourse of professionalism, we can see Nellie's image go on forever in the Funhouse mirrors. The illusion is that others disappear, and that the image of the 'mighty professional' continues in perpetuity.

But the same positioning of the mirrors rendered gender invisible in Nellie's story. The mirrors turned to eclipse gender as an important strand of meaning in this event. We can no longer see 'sex' in this moment of harassment.

Women's feminine bodies at work carry meanings with them that masculine bodies do not. Women teachers' same-sex relationships transgress what is understood as 'acceptable' and reinforces women's silence. A discourse of professionalism makes only certain things knowable. Dominant discourses combine to leave women teachers little room to talk with other women colleagues in a way that is not only supportive but may also bring an awareness of commonly encountered instances of harassment experienced in the work place. Rich (1983) suggests that this may be a common thread in women's history.

The history of women who--as witches, *femmes seules*, marriage resisters, spinsters, autonomous widows, and/or lesbians--have managed on varying levels *not* to collaborate. ...Women in every culture and throughout history *have* undertaken the task of independent, non-heterosexual, woman-connected existence, to the extent made possible by their context, often in the belief that they were the 'only ones' ever to have done so (p. 143).

Nellie's story is not solely an instance of triumph, because Nellie rendered invisible practices of sexual-harassment and compulsory heterosexuality. The limited availability of feminist or critical explanations to offer multiple understandings of this event was evident. What can women talk about and what meanings can they bring to the discussion? What would it mean to forefront feminist discourses in such moments? Without such meanings, individual women teachers are largely left with traces of difficult and horrific moments which stories of individual heroism cannot simply erase.

## Chapter Eight

### Erasing the Day: Caring for Students in Secondary Schools

#### Caring for Kids

The participants in this study talked about the importance of relationships in teaching. When talking about the complicated play of teachers' relationships with students, Andrea stated that "we do get looped and bonded with them." Referring to her own teaching beliefs, Nellie described relationships with students as being central to her practice:

I see it that it's my job to work with this kid, and it's the building of a relationship. The kids I work with, there is respect and there is trust. They can't get a way with doing bad things, but I trust in the fact that they are good kids. They are disciplined in a way that has dignity and respect for them as people. And it isn't a power-trip. And it isn't about control. It's about helping them to be better people and showing them how to do that. So it's the working out. I deal with kids. I don't know but it's the 'how you do it' that really makes it work out.

Nellie talked about respect and trust as part of the work she does as a teacher. Speaking back to conceptions of power being only about 'power-over', both "power-trips" and "control" do not make sense in a discourse of caring where relationships with students are based on trust and respect. The "give-and-take" negotiated in the relationship is supported in the "working out" with students. Nellie elaborated further by giving an example of a time when she intervened with two female students who were fighting in the hallway. After talking to one girl, Nellie found out that the larger issue was harassment. Nellie left the decision of whether to report the problem to the office up to the student, thereby placing the subsequent course of action and decision-making in the student's hands. Later, the female student reported the matter to the office, where the

problem was addressed and cleared up. Nellie explained the significance of this event:

It was about the relationship I had with this girl, trusting in her, that/ you know kids don't just scream at each other. There's an issue/ taking the time, it took me all morning! I wasn't in my classroom, but this issue needed to be dealt with. It's bigger, and kids have those [issues], and if you don't deal with those [issues], you can't go on to what needs to be done.

Nellie's action emphasized meaningful communication when "time is required for such dialogue. Teacher and student must know each other well enough for trust to develop" (Noddings, 1994, p. 177). The combination of trust and relationship-building was also carried through to Nellie's classroom:

My classroom is also set up that I can trust that they [students] are working. And I don't have to be there, because they aren't working for me, they are working for themselves. So I have no qualms about being able to go do this. It's the way that you structure it. You can either believe in the kids and their ability to learn, which is what I believe/ everybody has the ability to learn, and then empower them to trust them enough, that they are going to love it enough, to get out of their way and facilitate a structure that allows that.

As part of an overall teaching approach, whether dealing with incidents in the hall or in the classroom, Nellie has structured her teaching practice to trust in her students' learning. Nellie envisioned abilities and possibilities in her students. Therefore, Nellie constructed her practice as a facilitator supporting her students, rather than leading or directing them. Trust and mutual respect seemed to be central to a relational understanding of teaching.

The connections between the emotional work of mothers and teachers caring for children has been explored by many authors. These writers have described the predominance of motherhood values within women teachers' beliefs and practices (Gaskell and McLaren, 1991; Grumet, 1988; Noddings, 1994). For the women in this research inquiry, the most obvious connection to motherhood emerged in their talk about students. Metaphors helped construct

and reinforce discourses of caring. One important indication of a deeply entrenched meaning system about women as care-givers/ women as mothers was captured in the simple phrase: "my kids." Carolyn explained "there is an ownership amongst the teachers, about 'these are our kids.' 'Cause we don't talk about them as 'my students.' They are '*my kids*.'" Carolyn described the bond that teachers feel between themselves and their students that is more intimately tied to the teacher herself. These are not merely just a group of students, a mass of unknown people. Sonia described the way that caring for students or 'kids' does not mean that a person needs to be a mother: Sonia explained, "Well sometimes I say I feel like a mother. I don't know why because I'm not a mother, or haven't been a mother. But I do feel they're my kids." The signal "my kids" places students within the realm of women's 'natural' nurturing, relationship-promoting abilities.

Carolyn described the ways that female teachers are more likely to be relied upon for their caring qualities and are in turn more likely to provide it:

I think the female staff members tend to be a little more listening and nurturing, willing to sit down with kids <pause>...than the male staff members. And I'm thinking, on our staff again, whether it be an administrator/ the kids would rather go to the guidance counselor than they would the principal, and its male and female there. When we had a female administrator, the kids were much more willing to approach her, even though she wasn't, you know, "Oh, let me give you a hug and everything will be ok" kind of stuff. But again they felt they could talk to her. And I don't see that with this principal. Personality? Could be. But it could also be *the role* that the male principal is that *step up* from the female principal, and that the female principal is a *step up* from the staff members, too.

In Carolyn's description, women were more likely to be approached by students as someone to "talk to," regardless of whether they were female teachers, guidance counselors, or administrators. Carolyn's words supported images of women teachers as "more listening and nurturing," and thus doing the 'emotional work' in schools. Reinforcing the connection between caring and women teachers' work, Carolyn stated, "female teachers are the ones who are giving,

giving, giving because we are better at it than men, right?" This description reinforces general understandings of "the supposedly superior ability of the woman teacher to nurture the young" (Prentice & Theobald, 1991, p. 6). Caring and giving are seen as feminine characteristics embedded within the core of each female educator. While describing her teaching practice, Nellie stated "kids come first, subject matter comes second," which substantiated her earlier actions with the two girls in the hallway. Even within the context of high schools, Andrea could state "in the end, these kids are just babies," which in turn supported her decision to "try not to be too hard on them in my room."

However, these descriptions were frequently qualified. In a variety of ways, caring was limited by the discourse of professionalism which more often emphasizes rational rather than emotional values. Andrea provided an example which offers a glimpse of both sets of values. She described women teachers as more sensitive to the emotional needs of students, while simultaneously negotiating institutional expectations of 'toughness':

If there is a girl in my classroom who is... let's say, constantly breaking down, crying and something is wrong, and she needs to go and deal with an issue, and I let her go, I want that girl to know that number one, um... I want her to deal with whatever is wrong so that she can come back and *learn*. But I also want her to know that she can *trust* me and that I *care*! And I know there are some male teachers with the/maybe female too, with the crying female, they need to go talk to a friend in the bathroom, they [the teacher] just refuse! Just refuse - "Grow up. Get yourself together," you know? As far as I'm concerned, I can't learn when I'm like that. So how could this kid even [learn like that], you know? Whether or not/some people might call me a softie, as a result, like I get very defensive if someone calls me soft.

A discourse of caring was paramount in Andrea's description. It not only contributed to perceptions of teachers as caring and trustworthy, but it also encouraged students to deal with issues that might impair their learning. However, the work of schooling is not to be overlooked. When Andrea described being ready to "learn," she talked about a particular type of learning, the kind that is done in the classroom, under specific circumstances. Here learning means



acquiring knowledge found in the Alberta Program of Studies, not the learning that may result from a student working through her emotions. But Andrea recognized that, as a teacher, she walks a fine line. Andrea risked being labeled a "softie," some one who was too easy on students. Being labeled a push over is a serious charge by high school standards. Heralding a discourse of professionalism that supports objective, logical values and judgements, tough teachers are decisive and enforce the rules. Andrea accepted these 'hard' values, even when they contradicted her self-described "soft" practices.

Andrea continued to negotiate the contradictions when she described herself as a "bleeding heart." Andrea suggested that high school student-evaluation often overlooks the importance of a teacher's compassion for her students who are "sincerely trying":

If I could give these kids marks, based on how hard they've tried? We'd have a lot of honour kids. But you know I can't do that. But why can't I be that part of their learning experience? Why can't my caring or my compassion for them be a part of/ the mark can be one part, and the mark is factual and objective, and I can be the other side of it, where even if they didn't get a 70 or a 65, they remembered feeling worthwhile in this room.

Andrea's description drew upon the equally important discourses of caring and professionalism and described the limits of caring within a framework that values the 'factual' and the 'objective.' What ultimately matters in terms of qualifications for a high school diploma or entrance to post-secondary institutions is the numerical grade. Andrea proposed an alternative way to 'count' using caring and compassion. Andrea tried to expand a traditional view of learning and achievement, in order to make room for legitimate caring. The discourse of caring is often subsumed under the dominant and taken for granted meanings embedded in a discourse of professionalism.

### Drawing the Line

As Andrea suggested, there is a risk of being taken advantage of as a caring teacher and each participant pondered these risks. Some teachers found the contradiction between caring and professionalism easier to deal with when more clear-cut boundaries were demarcated. These teachers talked about "drawing the line" or talked about teachers who have "crossed the line." For example, rather than blending caring and professionalism, as Andrea described above, Carolyn described "drawing the line" as a professional educator:

I think there has to be a line. That even though I am willing to sit down and listen to their [students'] troubles, and give them a shoulder to cry on, and give them a little pat, I am still a *teacher*. And there is that line when you come to talk to me.

In this description, identifying oneself as a teacher meant that the most significant characteristic of teaching was authority. Carolyn may act as a caring person, but she firmly maintained a view of teaching in terms of institutional roles. In doing so, Carolyn's perception of her role as a teacher ultimately influenced her actions. Caring and teaching were described as two different practices and were at odds with each other.

Acknowledging the difficulty in maintaining professional distance while also establishing relationships with students, Carolyn provided the following example:

I have a student who I really like, and we get along just/ well, not teacher's favourite, but I just like this kid as a person. And then I'll ask him to do something, from the teacher point of view, and he just sort of sloughs it off. So I called him on it, and said, "Look," you know, "Yes we get along and all the rest of it, but you have to understand that I'm still a teacher." And he was fine with it, you know?

If Carolyn encouraged a "personal" relationship with a student, she risked not being taken seriously by a student who would "slough off" her requests. From

"the teacher point of view," Carolyn wanted compliance. When the student read the relationship as being more personal and equal, he believed he had more choice about what he would or would not do. But the student's relationship was with a person who, in this case, was a professional. Carolyn was "still a teacher" and expected the student to accept the authority that her role commanded. Because caring teachers are "soft" teachers, institutional discourses are used to legitimize female teacher's descriptions of themselves. A discourse of professionalism helped maintain the distance that the teacher needed in order to validate caring relationships in the context of secondary schooling.

#### The Kids We Hate to Love

"Jessica's Story" profiled a 'bad' student, Jason. Jason was the student who was confronted by Jessica for smoking in the school. As shocking as the story was, the group seldom talked about Jason. Only Carolyn mentioned him as a potential source of difficulty, when she said:

Just the whole thing with the way the kid [Jason] is, you know with the "beating up the girlfriend, and the pregnant thing", we already know that he doesn't have a lot of respect for women, those are the really fun kids to get.

Carolyn's anticipation that Jason might have difficulty respecting a woman was mentioned briefly and was not explored by others in the focus group. Jason was simply referred to as one of "those kids." Carolyn's experiences with "those" students in the classroom was euphemistically referred to as "fun," and remained unclear. Carolyn did not elaborate and no one in the group, including me, asked Carolyn what she meant by that remark. It was a moment of 'the understood,' but unspeakable, knowledge of challenging students.

Later on in the focus group conversation, Carolyn continued to access a discourse of professionalism that supported dedication to all students. Carolyn's concern was with Jessica's response to Jason:

I think it has to do with respecting the kids themselves. We all have seen teachers who if they don't like the kids/ if they are there to just pick up a paycheque, the kids know it and they are going to treat the teacher accordingly. And the teacher usually doesn't last as long as the kid does. <pause> To me this is a kid [Jason] who ... I don't know, to me, this teacher [Jessica] sounds like one who is not going to be in the business very long.

Talk about "Jessica's Story" was firmly focused on the teacher, as Carolyn's description indicated. Even when Carolyn tried to further describe Jason, she had no words with which to portray him. Carolyn started to talk about "the kid" and stopped; the focus went back to the teacher in the story and the kind of teacher Jessica must have been. In this case, the student was characterized as a heroin-dealer who was accused of beating up his pregnant girlfriend. Describing the 'bad kid' was unutterable. Carolyn did not finish the sentence "this is a kid who..." but she did have an ending for the teacher. Carolyn concluded that Jessica resembled a person who could not handle teaching or would "not be in the business very long."

During the same focus group conversation, Nellie described a personal instance of how she dealt with a similar student in a similar situation. In Nellie's case, she discovered that a student had brought a gun into her classroom:

And I just walked over, and I don't know what possessed me, but I just said, "Give me that! What are you thinking?" He gave it to me; I looked at it and I/ Whew! There's shells in there. "Take those out," and "You're going"/ you know, I just/ Afterwards I just went/ I thought, you know, that probably wasn't all that smart at that point [to take the gun away]. But he wasn't/ I knew the kid well enough that the kid wasn't/ he was just trying to impress the other kids, you know, he wasn't going to go after those kids. It was an insecurity thing, where he was trying to look cool.

Nellie's explanation was halting, rife with false starts and stops. As she tried to make sense of the story, Nellie pulled pieces of meaning together: her relationship with the student; her role as the authority in the classroom; her personal safety. Nellie finally arrived at a picture which concluded that the student's actions were harmless. The focus of the story was on Nellie's actions,

as a teacher, and the student's behaviour, as an attention-seeking adolescent. There was no room for an explanation about violence or a violent student in the classroom. All students seemed to deserve the caring that women teachers can provide.

There seemed to be very little room within discourses of professionalism and caring for talking about difficult students. For example, I asked Nellie directly, "Have you ever met a kid you didn't like?" She replied:

Yeah, there's no question, you're a person, and I've had situations where that has occurred, where we have had major personality issues, we just sit down and I say "Look it, you don't have to like me, and I don't have to like you. That isn't what this is about. You are here to learn. You demonstrate skills, ability, technique, and a desire for what you are doing and you are going to do well, period. And if we just stay out of each others' faces, then we are probably going to like it a whole lot better."

Nellie's quote suggested a removal, make the problem disappear. "Staying out of each other's faces" is about rendering invisible the kids that teachers do not like. Interestingly, Nellie later referred to this same student as a good student who was not working to potential. Therefore, her whole story was based on a student who was reluctant to work to a higher standard rather than a story about a 'bad student.' If 'underachieving students' warranted an erasure, I wondered what degree of erasure 'delinquent students' would require.

Trying to negotiate the space between seeing "the kids" as someone's child and seeing students as difficult, teachers may find themselves in a void. Jeff Doran (1999) describes his conflicting feelings as a high school teacher teaching a group of 'bad' students when he asks, "Why do I find myself hating them?" (p. 32). He states that hate is "a word teachers don't allow themselves to use" (p. 32). The teachers in this research project were equally reluctant to talk about hate or anger towards students or to acknowledge the difficult students that teachers encounter in their classrooms. I was struck by the dearth of descriptions about 'bad kids' from participants. Hate, anger, and other 'dark feelings' were words that appeared to be disallowed - omitted or carefully

couched in clever colloquialisms. There were hints and slips, but somehow the sacredness of the "student as someone's child" was rarely transgressed. How can teachers' descriptions of the difficult child, student, or class, go beyond "poor behaviour?" How might teachers discuss 'challenging' teaching moments?

### Erasing the Day

One semester, Andrea was assigned a particularly large English 13 class. Typically filled with students who are classified as low-achieving or as having problems with expectations in 'academically' streamed classes, the composition of this class was also unique; there were 32 boys in a class of 44 students. Andrea appealed to the principal to split the class up into two smaller classes. She was told that it was not possible with the present timetable. Andrea described her struggle with space:

The sheer size of the class made it impossible to even fit enough desks for students in the room: I had one kid sitting at my desk! Eww, like I hated it. I felt like I had absolutely no boundaries at all. There was no division between, you know/ and I felt very outnumbered and stressed.

Numerous attempts to manage chronic lates, absences, lack of resources such as textbooks or novels, all proved impossible. Traditional classroom management techniques, such as using evaluations as an external motivator for good behaviour, proved ineffective. Positive reinforcement for good behaviour helped sometimes but, frequently, Andrea simply referred students to the principal's office. Her level of frustration was evident in the way that she described the passage of time:

There are 21 or 22 weeks in a semester, and um I started playing games with my self <laughs>. I have a calendar in my other office, and I would put a star, on each day that I got through, without crying <laughs>, because I would have days where they [the English 13 class] would leave the room, they were period four [last class of the day], and they would leave the room and I would shut the door and I would go into that little corner by my thermostat and I would cry, and whenever they see me/ because I felt SO *defeated* and there had been a couple of fights in my

room and like there is a hole in my wall over there, behind my map. I tried to cover it with my map <Cara: Wow> but um, I thought I was going nuts <laughs>.

Time was a measuring stick for survival: the number of days left until the end of the semester. Like a prisoner who marks time on a prison wall, Andrea marked her school calendar. Just making it through the day was an indication of success.

The description of her experience with the English 13 class can be juxtaposed with Andrea's own self-identification as a teacher who cared about students. As was the case with all of the participants, teaching was described as an activity which was strongly directed by feelings of caring and the importance of relationships. Andrea talked about her practice in terms of the effect she had on her students. Part of her job was to make students feel special in their relationship with their teacher. Andrea liked the students and they in turn liked her. Andrea framed this as a certain kind of power:

I don't know, but I know that I've got that kind of power. But it's not the kind of power that I equate with political power or being top and they're bottom. It's a power that kind of comes back to me. Its kind of cyclical, um, I feel it from them, I give it to them, I guess. I feel it back from them and it just makes the relationship bigger and better because, um, a lot of what I'm doing when I say, "There's something special about you" to the kid, is I'm giving them some power ... and I know that it is something that cannot be measured sometimes, because every kid is an individual and I'm an individual um... *but I know it makes me a better mother or I'm a better teacher because I'm a mother, I don't know* <softer voice>. But I don't know. But this idea of *giving*, giving of myself to help others grow, comes back, and then I grow, and then, like I say, it is kind of cyclical.

Andrea's narrative reflected the description that all of the teachers in this study used to illustrate their understanding of teaching/learning: Relationships with students are essential in education. The best way for Andrea to describe this relationship was as a fluid, "give and take," cyclical configuration between herself and her students, closer to motherhood, than an impersonal institutional practice.

Andrea struggled to make sense of a moment that was nearly indescribable, a 'no-place space,' where dominant discourses offer incomplete understanding of events. Andrea found it difficult to make sense of an awful situation with her English 13 class because it challenged her understandings of all students being basically good people. Andrea thought that it was unprofessional to be "bitching and complaining about kids" so talking to me about students in a critical way must have been difficult. As Andrea described her less-than-caring actions, her shock was palatable:

I'm not saying that that classroom situation was my fault, but I made a lot of mistakes. A lot of yelling; a lot of swearing at kids I couldn't stand; taking them out in the hall way and saying, you know, "*You asshole*" <spoken softly> and they'd *laugh* at me. And one time, I was so angry, I was out on the stairwell with this *girl* and I said "You are acting... like a bitch" and she, uh ... she said "Well you're the bitch" and I started to cry. I could feel the tears welling up in my eyes and I, I thought, I can't let this ... *witch* see what she had reduced me to. But at the same time I'm thinking, I am a *human*! I can't *take* much more of this.

The almost unutterable words came out in a whisper, naming and labeling students with such egregious words. A teacher's self-concept as a professional clashed with her concept of self as a caring person. The tension here was in the "human space" that was neither professional nor caring. Neither discourse made sense in this instance.

Andrea attempted to untangle the contradictions by drawing upon her skills as a practitioner. Again, her understanding of experience came into play to suggest that veteran teachers should not have to deal with these situations. Andrea outlined the changes in her practice that this group of English 13 students incited:

The first couple years of teaching I was/ I didn't know what my expectations were and then my boundaries were set and very rarely did I raise my voice to a kid or name call, or any of that stuff. It's like all of that fell away with this group and I was naming-calling, I was yelling, I was throwing things, like throwing down my paper onto the ground, throwing



my pens down. Those things made me feel ashamed because I hadn't been there for so long.

The "place she hadn't been for awhile" was the place where Andrea had limited teaching techniques to handle different situations with students. Andrea constructed her actions in terms of her practice as a beginning teacher, when she made "rookie mistakes." A challenging class that "just about did me in" was framed as a teacher's personal failure.

By focusing solely on her own practice, Andrea side-stepped many issues about 'bad' students that teachers do not like or get along with. With her English 13 class, Andrea had already characterized the general-streamed class as "underachieving, unmotivated, hormone-fuelled, when-can-they-pop-out-for-a-smoke type of kids, and 'how I can I get the highest mark for the least amount of effort in this room.'" Andrea gave this description while laughing. Her laughter may have been an attempt to soften her stereotype of her students. It may also have indicated only one emotion among the many emotions that she was feeling about these students. During one soft-spoken moment, Andrea voiced opposite feelings: "I hated them, as a group, I hated them. And then I hated myself for that, cause I couldn't find a way to look forward to the class. I had a really hard time with that so...." Andrea's revulsion seeped into her explanation, challenging her understanding of how a caring teacher acts. A language of hatred towards students is subversive; Andrea whispered her loathing. But at the same time, Andrea described her shame, a disappointment over her ability to be a professional and "look forward" to teaching the class.

Andrea struggled with various understandings of her experience with her English 13 class. Near the end of the interview, she stated:

It frustrates me, when I hear that there are negative teachers, but when I hear negative administration too. Not so much in this school, but in other schools I've been in where, "Well that kid's a write-off. Well that kid's a zero." And it breaks my heart, maybe as a mother, I don't know. I don't want *anyone* ever thinking that my child is a write-off! Or anybody thinking

that I am a write-off because of a behaviour, or because of um... three strikes and you're out.

Just as she wanted to be cared-for and to care for others, "writing-off" students was akin to being care-less. Andrea described the bind of the mother-teacher:

Here I was with a bunch of these 16, 17, some of them were 18 [year-olds] in English 13, um, bringing me to a level that I haven't been to for years. I was trying to defend myself. I don't/ I'm not kicking myself for the yelling, and the name-calling and the swearing. It was my reaction. But um, I know what it does to *me* when I've gone to that level. I know I just want to hide. I want to erase the day. I want to get to the point where I have just about lost my temper, and I don't. So when I look at it that way, I know I didn't do it very well.

Andrea's descriptions highlight the importance of caring and professional discourses. When she reached such a contradictory place, she wanted to "erase the day." Reflecting back on Andrea's comments about marking the days off her calendar, I wondered how many days that she would have liked to "erase." By making sense of this event using only discourses of professionalism and caring, Andrea felt compelled to take back meanings that had no place in the professional, caring space of her classroom. Although categories such as gender, race, and class are known to teachers, they rarely are called upon to make sense of harrowing moments in teaching. What might be the significance of a white middle-class female teacher teaching a predominantly male, racially mixed, working class group of students in a class designated as low achievers?

Discourses of professionalism and caring promised participants a certain path with which to negotiate difficult moments with 'challenging' students. Intensely uncomfortable moments, like the one told by Andrea, drove these women teachers down dark hallways searching for ways to understand their experience. When Andrea looked up to get her bearings, she did not see herself as a self-defined caring teacher. This was a moment when she knew that she acted in an uncaring way, thus she "wanted to hide." These uncaring ways were then justified as "human reactions" to a situation that professional training did not

address. Andrea was concerned that her behaviour indicated that she had made 'rookie mistakes.' The difficult students were not the issue. The assumption was that all students deserved caring, regardless of circumstances or actions. The horror of seeing the self as a mean, uncaring, swearing, 'out-of-control' teacher needed to be erased. The mirrored reflection captured the terror of feeling trapped within the Funhouse labyrinth of competing and distorted meanings. The individual teacher was left waiting for time to pass, for the image to fade, for the discovery of the porthole out of the 'no-place space' and the dead-ends of restricted meanings. Critical discourses that could challenge the dominance of both caring and professionalism were absent.

## Chapter Nine

### Exits: Reinterpreting Women Teachers' Experiences of Power

Throughout my research project, I have considered the ways that women teachers understand and negotiate power in the secondary school. A discourse of professionalism has emerged as significant. I have presented women teachers grappling with what it means to be professional in a variety of contexts. In this chapter, I summarize the various facets of a discourse of professionalism. Each set of summaries is presented against the backdrop of the Funhouse, in order to heighten the feeling of the unexpected as I trouble dominant meanings of professionalism. In closing, I suggest implications for further research.

### Mirrors and Mazes: Describing a Discourse of Professionalism

Addressing my first research question, I found that a discourse of professionalism shaped how women teachers talked about power. A discourse of professionalism emerged as a rule-bound discourse, demarcating how women teachers could and could not talk about their practice and how they could or could not act as teachers. In the first three discussion chapters, I outlined the traits of a discourse of professionalism. I organized these chapters around the Funhouse Hall of Mirrors and the Glass Maze, in order to illuminate the multifaceted meaning of professionalism. I represented participants' understandings and assumptions about teaching as a set of images in the Funhouse mirrors. Perhaps, as David Labaree (1992) suggests, women teachers appeal to professionalism because it offers them "a way to escape identification with the unpaid and uncredentialed status of mother[s]" (p. 132). As he examines the roots of a discourse of professionalism, Labaree describes two key elements often associated with professional status: formal knowledge and

workplace autonomy. Both of these elements were important in the teachers' talk.

I began the discussion chapters by examining the individual teacher and her professional claim to formal knowledge. In Chapter Three, "Women Teachers' Expert Knowledge: Sages on the Stage," I noted that women teachers equated expert knowledge with a notion of a 'right' way to be a teacher. As an example, all participants agreed that in the third vignette, entitled "Theresa's Story," Theresa 'got it wrong' as a teacher. Expert knowledge meant knowing what was wrong with other people's practice which in turn meant knowing what was right. Following the rules within a discourse of professionalism guaranteed certainty in teaching. Clear objectives, predictable outcomes, and classroom control were some examples. In addition, as the "keeper of the knowledge," a particular kind of knowledge seemed to count for teachers: knowledge that was technical and rational. Labaree (1992) describes expert knowledge as being influenced by both rational and technical movements, in what he called "the rise of the science of teaching." He describes the latter in terms of a "solid training in a form of knowledge about teaching practice that is specialized (no longer dependent on the disciplines), authoritative (scientific), and inaccessible to the layperson ('counter-intuitive')" (p. 134). The teacher's relationship to that knowledge, the way that she shared that knowledge with students, was contested. And as colleagues practiced different understandings of what it meant to be a "knowledge keeper," participants in turn judged their colleagues' practices based upon observable standards of competence. For example, students' achievement-test results measured a teacher's worth. The tension between images of teachers as facilitators and images of teachers as experts, who "dispense knowledge like pills," was played out when colleagues compared their practice.

Amalgamating meanings about the expert knowledge of professional teachers, I constructed the image of women teachers as a "mighty individual," capable of great feats in teaching, regardless of circumstances. Britzman (1991)

describes a similar subject position as the "rugged individual" who can overcome "any inherited circumstance through sheer ingenuity and individual effort" (p. 236). The professional is configured as an expert, capable of any task. Consequently, the teacher is constructed as a "transcendental being, able to rise above the disorder of social life and be untouched by its dynamics and its beckonings" (Britzman, 1991, p. 236).

In Chapter Four, entitled 'Women Teachers' Responsibilities: Discipline,' I explored institutional practices supporting the notion of the 'mighty individual.' Explicitly recognizing the effect of secondary schools' organization, Shaw (1987) states that:

secondary schools have become larger, internally complex and differentiated, and bureaucratized in structure. They are increasingly subject to external monitoring and control, to curricular guidelines in greater detail, to regulation in their use of resources, and even the need to bid competitively for certain elements of funding (p. 781).

Women teachers negotiated work place autonomy and increased role-demands (Hargreaves' (1994) notion of teacher-intensification) in a variety of ways. Participants tested and resisted institutional limits, by drawing on the notion of "it's not my job." On one hand, the organization maintained a professional hierarchy with teachers' behaviour governed by rules enforced by the principal. Teachers' professional judgement was restricted. Interestingly, teachers who followed the rules were considered less powerful by some focus group members. In the hierarchy of the school, teachers were simultaneously cast as powerful and powerless, depending on whether a person went along with the rules or deliberately refused them. However, on the other hand, a teacher's adherence to bureaucratic and hierarchical configurations of secondary schools also carried an opposite meaning. By following the rules and limiting 'the teacher's job,' some women teachers actively resisted a kind of teacher-intensification that makes 'everything' a teacher's job. Refusing to be responsible for endless tasks meant that teachers could have more time to prepare classroom work. The 'mighty individual' is configured as powerful, both as barely confined (with few limits), and

as increasingly confined (with many limits), under specific circumstances in schools.

A discourse of professionalism acts to reinforce beliefs that teachers should do everything, under any circumstances, including 'taking on' the perceived shortcomings of the institution of schooling. Ironically, it is the institutional discourses within schools that demand endless effort and dedication from professional educators. By accessing meanings of the 'mighty individual,' women teachers reproduce the very structures that bind them. However, because a teacher's abilities and circumstances always limit what is possible, expectations frame women teachers as failures.

In Chapter Five, entitled "Women Teachers' Bodies: Legitimizing Authority," I featured gender as an important layer of meaning within a discourse of professionalism. In common-sense understandings of professionalism, a professional model often "leaves unresolved the basic question of gender" (Biklen, 1995, p. 45). Frameworks often fail to critically take up the ways that "men continue to dominate most of the professions while most of the women who do professional work remain segregated both within and among professions in the least powerful and rewarding work" (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1992, p. 120). Laird (1988) argues for multiple interpretations and historically specific critiques of teaching as "women's true profession." Women teachers in this study seemed to adopt a discourse of professionalism in order to legitimate their authority.

Participants needed to 'manage' their bodies in the public space of secondary schools. Interestingly, Barth (1967/1991) describes the importance of gender in the design of the Funhouse at the beginning of the twentieth century. As both men and women attended the Exhibition, spectators would often stand near the Funhouse in order "to watch the girls get their skirts blown up" (p. 104). Barth was referring to the pressurized hoses set up near the front of the Funhouse, which operators would inflate when women passed by, thus lifting their long skirts and exposing their bodies. Because propriety dictates that modest (chaste) female bodies should be covered in public spaces, exposed

female bodies may become spectacles. Women teachers talked about 'managing' their female bodies in order to limit their exposure.

Participants were concerned with their legitimacy as teachers, which appeared to be linked to their feminine bodies in secondary school space. Bartky (1990) considers body size, gesture, and ornamentation when she examines "those disciplinary practices that produce a body which in gesture and appearance is recognizably feminine" (p. 66). For women teachers accessing meanings of professionalism, this often meant being "less female." Women teachers found it difficult to discuss the presence of female bodies in schools. Participants made a distinction between a teaching identity that was controlled, objective, and professional, and a personal self that leaked tears, effused emotions, and seeped menstrual blood. A woman teacher's professional identity was constructed in order to 'transcend the boundaries' of the female body. From physical size and dress (suits) to years of teaching experience, participants accessed masculine values within a discourse of professionalism. The distinction between a 'personal self' and a 'professional self' was created because the two were constructed as incompatible. Thus, while one could be professional *and* caring, one could not be professional and emotional. School time was designated as a time for a 'professional self'; non-school time was designated as a time for a 'personal self.' Given the difficulty in limiting the amount of time one is 'a teacher' (a professional self) during the day, these women teachers faced eradicating significant possibilities for who they could be.

A discourse of femininity layered through a discourse of professionalism contributed to a kind of 'difficult knowledge' that women teachers hold. By difficult knowledge I mean something that defies explanation because of the limits of meanings within a discourse. Women teachers might have tried to distance themselves from the difficult knowledge that gendered understandings bring because of the association of women with the irrational (Stone, 1994). Bolero (1999) states that "women's exclusion from the ideal of reason has rested on her association with emotion, nature, and passive subordination" (p. 10). With



the importance of legitimacy within a discourse of professionalism, emotional and irrational reasoning threaten a woman teacher's authority.

In the constructions of the Funhouse, gender acted as a glass wall within the maze of professional meanings. The assumption was that women teachers could proceed through their practice using a discourse of professionalism. However, their passage was impeded by invisible, though felt, gender barriers. Women teachers' assumptions of gender equality masked their own descriptions of negotiating their female bodies in secondary schools. Bronwyn Davies (1992) describes the consequences of women viewing themselves as genderless. She states that female speakers are better understood as "marked":

Although liberal feminists thought they could escape such marking by making the same claims as men to positionless speech, they could not be heard, even by themselves, as doing so because their own subjectivity got in the way. Having taken up as one's own the relevant emotions and the pattern of desires implicated in constituting oneself as woman, asking to be heard as if one were a man becomes extremely problematic (p. 54).

#### Chambers and Corridors: Negotiating a Discourse of Professionalism

Power relations are rooted in the system of social networks (Foucault, 1983, p. 223).

In the last three discussion chapters, I addressed my second research question examining the ways that women teachers take up subject positions available within the dominant discourse of professionalism. I was interested in how individuals "identify their 'own' interests in discourse by becoming the subject of particular discourses" (Weedon, 1997, p. 93). Through tales of specific teaching moments, participants described the play of power as they struggled with contradictory meanings of what it means to teach and to be a teacher. I presented these chapters within the chambers and corridors of the Funhouse, where women teachers negotiated relationships among themselves, their colleagues, their administrators, and their students. Each moment demonstrates the play of power, reflecting the meanings that both allow and disallow certain understandings of the teaching self.

In Chapter Six, entitled "Silence, Silencing, and Being Silenced: Questioning Professionals," I considered the practices of silence and omission as teachers acted professionally towards their colleagues. Using a discourse of professionalism, teachers were "governed not through a monolithic and all-powerful State but through systems of 'truth' ...that serve[d] to constitute human beings as autonomous subjects with a responsibility (or even an interest) to conduct their life in appropriate ways" (Fournier, 1999, p. 284). Observable signs of teacher conduct were part of the "systems of truth" in this chapter. Shaw (1987) describes teachers, who are not easily supervised within the confines of their classrooms, as regulated by "specific proxy controls" such as "punctuality, appearance, up-to-dateness with marking, syllabus coverage, visible preparation, [and a] willingness to participate in extra school activities" (p. 781).

Women teachers in this study had to negotiate the restrictions of "specific proxy controls" for themselves and their colleagues. Initially, being professional included either publicly supporting colleagues' actions or "minding your own business" and remaining silent. When confronted with a peer complaint, Sonia used a discourse of professionalism to refuse her colleague's criticism and then to forward her own judgement of his practice. But then Sonia was restricted by the same meaning system when she wondered if she was meeting the requirements of the job, when she was leaving work shortly after the end of the school day, in order to preserve her health. In a sense, then, a discourse of professionalism allowed her to disrupt her colleague's perceived attack on her professionalism and to resist a play of power. However, in the next moment, Sonia was confined by the same narrow sets of meanings. A discourse of professionalism acted like revolving disks beneath her feet. Sonia was thrown off balance, as she disciplined herself with a discourse that she herself put into play.

A discourse of professionalism fashioned subjects who both produced and contested these conditions as given, for themselves and their colleagues. Therefore, understanding multiple subject positions helps us discern the play of power in women teachers' lives. Valerie Walkerdine (1993) explains:

Understanding the individuals not as occupants of fixed, institutionally-determined positions of power, but as a multiplicity of subjectivities, allows us to understand that an individual's position is not uniquely determined by them being 'woman', 'girl' or 'teacher'. It is important to understand the individual signifiers as subjects within any particular discursive practice. We can then understand power not as static, but produced as a constantly shifting relation (p. 219).

Lastly, in Chapters Seven and Eight, I examined the ways that a discourse of professionalism was used to resist dominant meanings and refuse certain subject positions. Beginning with the chapter entitled, "Erasing the Traces: Women's Relationships with Women," I focused on the struggle that a participant had when she was confronted with ambiguous meanings surrounding same-sex relationships at work. Initially, Nellie related an instance where she needed to use a discourse of professionalism to speak back to her assistant-principal, whom she regarded as incompetent and unprofessional. Nellie faced the hierarchical configuration of the school, when the principal initially refused her request to stop working with the male assistant-principal. Nellie then countered with the threat of exposure to the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA). The ATA acts as a regulatory body governing the teaching profession in the province and "is one which polices its members' conduct and performance" (Warburton, 1986). But in Nellie's case, the ATA's policing function acted as a way for her to resist her colleagues' harassment. She refused a particular subject position. Nellie described 'erasing' the assistant-principal from her daily school life. She had "all the power now"; she was an active agent. The mirrors were turned, and his image disappeared.

However, the meanings that govern women's relationships with other women in teaching remained invisible in this instance. Sexuality is at the heart of meanings about the feminine body in public (masculine) spaces. Coupled with the meanings surrounding women's professionalism that I discussed earlier, female bodies need to display a 'heterosexual public self.' Bartky (1990) describes the impact of internalized discipline on women, when she states that:

In the regime of institutionalized heterosexuality woman must make herself "object and prey" for the man.... In contemporary patriarchal culture, a panoptical male connoisseur resides within the consciousness of most women: They stand perpetually before his gaze and under his judgement. Woman lives her body as seen by another, by an anonymous patriarchal Other (p. 72).

Nellie explained that her program was "solid" and that her husband was on staff, which silently acknowledged questions about her professional integrity. It was as if a woman teacher was refusing the gaze of the patriarchal other when she turned the mirrors to make the male gaze disappear. Few meanings about same-sex relationships were allowed. Female friendships appeared to be regulated because women talking together and supporting one another can be negatively construed. The mirrors that were turned to render the assistant-principal invisible also rendered "institutionalized heterosexuality" (Rich, 1983) invisible within a discourse of professionalism. There were no meanings available in a discourse of professionalism in order to critique patriarchy and institutionalized heterosexuality.

In Chapter Eight entitled, "Erasing Ourselves: Caring for Students in Secondary Schools," I considered the important layer of caring that mitigates meanings within a discourse of professionalism for secondary women teachers. Caring discourses abound in this chapter as women teachers negotiated competing meanings about their practice. Participants constructed teacher-student relationships as cyclical relationships, based on "give and take." Students were rendered as "kids" when each teacher took ownership of a group of students. However, teachers do not care for all students, all of the time. As Doran (1999) states, hate is a word that teachers seldom allow themselves to use. The teachers in this research project were reluctant to talk about hate or anger towards students or to acknowledge the difficult students that they encountered in their classrooms. Hate, anger, and other 'dark feelings' were almost unspeakable.

Some women teachers used boundaries to "draw the line" at what being personal and professional meant for them. With "I am still a teacher" statements,

women teachers refused the image of the 'personal' in favour of the image of the 'professional.' A discourse of professionalism helped maintain a distance that legitimized caring relationships in schools. Women teachers constructed themselves as caring professionals who were more professional and less caring, when caring was equated with being "too personal."

Although all of the participants easily accessed meanings of care about students, they also talked about 'careless' moments. Andrea's story about the English 13 class was a 'careless' instance which revealed the subject positions available within discourses of caring and professionalism. For participants, being careless meant "staying out of each other's faces," swearing, anger, or tears. Often the focus of meaning-making remained on the teacher and how she did or did not handle uncaring situations appropriately. However, when a woman teacher fell through the gaps in meanings between competing discourses, she ended up feeling ashamed. Wanting to "erase the day," Andrea was left in a void of meaning. Explanations for horrifically uncaring moments fall back to 'it must be the teacher's fault.' Subjects positioned within a discourse of professionalism cannot be rescued with a discourse of caring, when women teachers act in uncaring ways.

Defaulting to the construction of the 'mighty individual,' women teachers were left feeling solely responsible and feeling the shame of their poor practice without taking into account the contextual conditions that may have greatly contributed to that practice. Reducing issues about 'difficult' students to classroom management techniques supports Boreham's (in Shaw, 1987) idea that teachers make "technical decisions, but typically they remain indifferent to the broader social issues involved" (p. 777). However, remaining within the confines of the mighty individual "infuses the individual with both undue power and undue culpability" (Britzman, 1991, p. 236). Limited discourses ensure that liberal-humanist notions of the self firmly supported the guilt and shame that often envelopes teachers. Driven down unknown corridors, participants glimpsed their discomfiture in the mirrors.

Frequently, these teachers relied solely on their own agency in order to erase horrifying meanings as professional educators. Because women teachers "are not unitary subjects uniquely positioned, but produced as a nexus of subjectivities in relations of power which are constantly shifting," we can see them rendered "at one moment powerful and at another powerless" (Walkerdine, 1993, p. 208). Silence and erasure of unwanted meanings allowed subject positions that were both powerful and powerless: It permitted women teachers with a way to refuse dominant meanings. But it also ushered in meanings about a 'no-place space,' where material conditions did not change. As Chris Weedon (1997) argues:

discourses represent political interests and in consequence are constantly vying for status and power. The site of this battle for power is the subjectivity of the individual and it is a battle in which the individual is an active but not sovereign protagonist (p. 40).

My research project is about the ways that women teacher use a discourse of professionalism to refuse discourses of power and the difficulty that resulted from this practice. The meanings within a discourse of professionalism co-opted women teachers to reproduce debilitating meanings. As moments and meanings unfolded, women teachers were often caught up in identities that they did not recognize. Pathways of meaning promised in the Funhouse often disoriented them. Meanings contradicted one another, pathways doubled-back or drove a person into a glass wall. When lost in the Funhouse, people have choices, as Barth (1967/1991) describes:

When you're lost, the smartest thing to do is stay put till you're found, hollering if necessary. But to holler guarantees humiliation as well as rescue; keeping silent permits some saving of face - you can act surprised at the fuss when your rescuers find you and swear you weren't lost, if they do. What's more you might find you own way yet, *however belatedly* (p. 103).

For women teachers, a sense of self was split between the personal female self and the professional genderless self. Because the chasm was considered too wide to cross, the personal female self was often denied. Occasionally, when the

personal female self crept into school spaces, women teachers worked hard to manage or erase its presence. The final resting place for women teachers' identity is as a genderless professional repeatedly silenced or placed under erasure because she is always already constructed as a transgression to dominant understandings of what it means to be a professional.

### Invitations for Change

For teachers, I urge constant discussions about the definitions and meanings of professionalism that are produced in our talk as teachers, whether at department meetings, staff meetings, or professional development sessions. Following a similar technique of discourse analysis, educators can discuss discourses and subject positions without talking about any one individual specifically. Therefore, critiquing teaching would not be about good or bad teachers, but rather it would be about the set of meanings which produce certain subject positions and the corresponding consequences to others, such as students, colleagues, and administrators, within specific social and historical contexts. Teachers could look at dominant meanings in professionalism, how these meanings affect our practice, and how they affect our relationships with others. Additionally, teachers could consider the meanings that we want to resist as well as those alternative discourses that we may be overlooking, such as discourses of feminism.

For teacher professional associations and unions, I would suggest that feminist meanings be used to examine the organization's structure. The Professional Code of Conduct could be reviewed in relation to how it gets played out in practice. In what ways does the Code of Conduct allow teachers room for critique in their profession, and, conversely, how does it work to silence teachers? The intention of the code could be discussed, whether its function is to regulate, to provide support in times of crisis, or other meanings. How might feminist discourses be used to support women teachers within these organizations? Discussions and negotiations should include specific cases of

harassment which recognize systemic sexist practices. Teachers' associations could then initiate professional development programs for school boards and schools staffs/communities. These programs might echo a discourse analysis approach to reflect the multiple and contingent aspect of truth claims. I believe that professional associations need to advocate on behalf of women teachers: They need to forefront gender as an important issue for consideration during negotiations with school boards and government agencies. The differences that gender makes should be acknowledged as an important factor among the organization's membership.

For teacher educators, I would suggest that post-secondary classrooms should again include resources and strategies that acknowledge a multiplicity of truths, so that prospective teachers may also choose from a plethora of discourses, as they construct what they can know about the world and who they can be as teachers. Teacher educators need to be conscious of reproducing debilitating notions of professionalism in teacher preparation programs. Labaree (1992) includes a powerful argument in his work when he suggests that it was the rise of formal training within the university that supported the quest for professional status within teaching. He states that these moves were prompted by male high school teachers who were looking to increase the prestige of the profession from "the rising feminization and falling prestige of their calling" (p. 138). Readings and discussions should emphasize multiple meanings and subject positions in teaching. Having taught in the University of Calgary's Master Teaching program, I have witnessed and participated in a program that pursues the constant negotiation of the multiple and difficult meanings of teaching.

#### Implications for Further Research

Further research in the area of gender and power might take an action-research approach. In such research, investigators would actively involve women teachers as "'knowing subjects' in the 'always already' political nature of the research process" (Gibson-Graham, 1994, p. 214). This research would invite



women teachers to discuss the possibilities of discourse analysis as a way to understand power and their teaching practice. Ultimately, an action-research process could "create the discursive spaces in which new subjectivities can emerge" (Gibson-Graham, 1994, p. 220).

#### Exiting Through the Tumbling Barrel

As we moved closer to the Funhouse exit, the tumbling barrel loomed large. The escape from the complex meaning of women teachers' professional identity appeared close at hand. A tentative step forward produced the now familiar misstep. Righting ourselves, we walked up the sides of the wall in order to advance. Could we leave?

In the tumbling barrel, too, just inside the Devil's-mouth [exit from] the funhouse, the girls were up ended and their boyfriends and others could see up their dresses if they cared to (Barth, 1967/1991, p. 104).

Spectacles still.

### **A Final Thought**

As I complete my writing, I have returned to teaching in the high school classroom, but with a different orientation towards my teaching practice. I wondered if there would be a noticeable difference. After a month into the second semester, Laurie, a Social Studies 30 student, said to me, "You haven't taught high school before, have you, Ms. Ellingson." I was surprised by her comment and contemplated her meaning. With an orientation towards discourse and relations of power, I consider the joys and sorrows of my returning year.

I recognize the struggle that I have with incorporating new ideas into my teaching practice. I find that my focus has changed. My curricular orientation is no longer just about the 'facts' that students should know. But rather, I find myself more interested in the meaning that a certain knowing has for students. How is a particular issue relevant to students now? How will knowing this bit of information in a particular way, from different perspectives, contribute to the way that they live in the world? I have become more interested in exploring individuals' present and past subjectivity and the importance of investigating various subject positions against a social and historical context. My lessons now explore a variety of truths, using different resources, about a series of events or moments in time and the subject positions that a variety of people took up in those moments.

Consequently, I am also interested in recognizing a variety of marginal discourses and subject positions, including race, class, and gender. I am finding students receptive, and particularly interested, when I make comparisons between the positions of young adults (the students' preferred description as opposed to teenager) to other adults in society. I frequently offer alternative perspectives when discussions of gender are brought up in class. In my classroom, I challenge dominant values to mixed reviews. I find myself engaging students who staunchly defend heterosexual, patriarchal positions. Frequently, I view these young men as taking up dominant discourses reinforced in a variety

of institutions in our society, rather than merely as neophyte tyrants honing their craft. When I engage these students, I recognize that, on the one hand, I am giving voice to an already prominent position. But, on the other hand, I believe that other students may be hearing an alternative perspective when I speak back to them, putting into play discourses that are often absent in high school spaces. I have enjoyed the remarks from quiet young women, when they approach me after class to say that the silent majority support what I am saying. I am troubled by a silent majority, but glad that young women feel alternative views can be expressed publicly by a teacher.

With an orientation towards knowledge as partial, contingent and perspectival, I now view classroom management and classroom evaluation in a different way. I have found that I am less focused on the disciplining and regulating functions of schooling. What I previously constructed as 'off-task' behaviour, I now heed as an opportunity for students to explore issues that are important to them at the time. I pay attention to the discourses that students bring to discussions and the ways that they negotiate meaning with each other. I ask for students' written responses to issues in order to demonstrate that knowledge is constructed by all writers, in a series of texts that help make up the stories of history. Students usually ask me what I want from them, which prompts a discussion about what learning is and could be in schools. I believe that a combination of an alternative understanding of curriculum, classroom management, and evaluation has positively impacted my relationship with the students that I teach. I am 'seeing' these young people in a different way. A teaching approach that incorporates discourse analysis made it possible for me to disrupt (at least momentarily) dominant meanings in high schools.

But alternative discourses also provide a framework for those meanings and practices that continue to remind me of the oppression and silencing that goes on in schools. In a year where I was struggling to align my classroom practice with a new pedagogic orientation learned in graduate school, I realized that it did not matter what I was doing in the classroom, as long as I was "keeping

a lid on things." What I do in my classroom is not as important as what program I run outside of the classroom. I sit through planning and budget meetings that glorify extra-curricular sports programs and leave the corresponding meanings of patriarchy, hierarchy, and militarism as unproblematic. No meanings exist outside of 'the glory of the winning team.' I cringe as I overhear the intimidating and humiliating talk of coaches as they regularly discuss failure and weakness using terms that belittle femininity and homosexuality. I am dismayed when I see that it these same coaches who receive the affection of adoring pupils. The 'mighty individual' cultivates a 'cult of personality' among groups of young, able-bodied, white, middle-class privileged students. I am struck dumb when others point out that our school has extra-curricular programs for the "geeks" too, like computer club, student council and yearbook club. The dominance of militaristic, patriarchal, and hierarchical values, along with the corresponding expectations of teachers' 'free-time,' appear impossible to dismantle.

It is not that discourse analysis makes it possible to now know what is right for students in my classroom or for myself as a high school teacher. But it makes it possible to feel like I am pursuing what is important in education. Furthermore, I recognize power in a different way. For example, I refuse the suggestion in Laurie's comment that I was an incompetent teacher because I did not appear to have taught high school before. I recognize that doing things differently can be taken up as not doing things the 'right way.' I also know that there is not 'outside' power (Bailey, 1993) and that feminist discourses, like other discourses, carry with them plays of power in their meanings. I do not pretend that power does not exist between myself, my students, my colleagues, and my administrators, but I try to imagine how I can remain open to other meanings, while still staying close to those moral convictions that I value. I am working on living out the uncertainty that constant negotiation brings to my teaching practice. Perhaps it was this tentativeness that Laurie, the Social 30 student, noted as different.

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## Appendix A

### Secondary Women Teachers and Power: Surveying the Literature

The literature on women teachers and power is vast. How women teachers are described, what counts as important issues in the research on women teachers, and how the topic of power influences what can be known about women teachers includes a panoply of perspectives. I hope to illustrate the possibilities and limitations of a variety of perspectives dealing with the topic of women teachers and power.

#### Women Teachers' Identity

##### Institutional Roles

Sociological studies tend to focus on structures that define and reinforce certain behaviours of individuals within institutions (Lockhart, 1991). Structures are considered to be the relatively enduring patterns of social organization (Wotherspoon, 1998). By considering larger structures that influence individual actions, sociological studies and theories locate individuals in a larger context. Frequently, traditional sociological investigations looked at teaching from the perspective of the Sociology of Work (Acker, 1989). Teaching has traditionally been framed as a role within the institution of schooling (Wotherspoon, 1998). Common expectations for teachers were found in norms or rules governing expectations for appropriate behaviour.

An early example of this approach comes from Phillip Jackson's (1968) work entitled *Life in Classrooms*. Jackson investigates the everyday culture of schools and uncovers what he calls the "four unpublicized features of school life": delay, denial, interruption and social distraction. Jackson describes the role of the teacher and some of the corresponding duties which support these four

features of school life. For example, in the role of "gatekeeper," teacher duties include determining who will speak, acting as supply-sergeants and official timekeepers, and granting special privileges to deserving students (p. 12). The role of the teacher is cast as an active participant in the drudgery of schooling.

A more recent example of an inquiry into the role of the teacher is Dolmage's (1996) *So You Want to be a Teacher*, where the author suggests that prospective teachers should consider the demands of two very different roles in teaching: the executive and the counselor. The executive role includes the role of the supervisor, director, critic, evaluator, organizational spokesperson, and mediator. The counselor role is comprised of duties about being an advisor, facilitator, intellectual guide, and counselor (p. 109). Dolmage concludes that these teaching responsibilities are mutually exclusive and contributed to the "absurdity, anxiety, and defeat" (p. 109) in teaching.

Dan Lortie's (1975) sociological study of school teachers is often cited as an example of taking up teaching within the "Sociology of Work" context. For example, within this book, the chapter titles indicate a sociological focus on work roles and the institutional organization of schools. The chapter entitled "The Limits of Socialization" supports the sociological perspective of human behaviour favouring nurture over nature. "Career and Rewards" is a chapter that maintains the focus on teaching as a profession - as a job. Lortie describes three distinct characteristics of the work of teachers as conservatism, individualism and presentism (teachers' fixation on the here and now) (p. 211). Accordingly, Lortie describes the individual teacher within a structuralist frame: "It becomes clear, then, that the self of the teacher, his [sic] very personality, is deeply engaged in classroom work; the self must be used and disciplined as a tool necessary for achieving results and earning work gratifications" (Lortie, 1975, p. 156). From this view point, the individual worker is highly socialized within the institution and the gender of the teacher is not taken up as significant.

Sociological perspectives also place teaching within the larger context of society. For example, Lockhart (1991) discusses the impact of liberal-democratic

ideologies on the education system in an industrial society. Lockhart suggests that teachers may find it difficult to ameliorate values that promote the idea of equality among students while at the same time fulfilling an industrial society's need for specialized knowledge and occupational functions. He argues that in an industrial society, scarce resources and economic rewards are distributed unequally. From this perspective, the teaching role is situated within the context of society, in this case an industrial/capitalist society, that pulls and strains the functions of individuals beyond his or her control. Values and desires located within individual teachers are challenged by institutional demands for conformity and by societal demands for a differentiated workforce, which Lockhart (1991) describes as the "occupational realities of Canadian school teachers" (p. 18).

The broad themes of teaching within sociological studies provide a starting point for understanding some of the issues about women teachers and power. As Dolmage (1996) suggests, role-conflict partially explains some of the challenges in teaching. The notion of roles may assist people in understanding the demands or expectations that go along with the job of teaching. Roles help illuminate what individuals may have in common in organizations because roles help situate the individual 'actor' within the space of the 'play', where the script is the norms and expectations of the organization within a larger culture. For example, according to a feminist structuralist read, my 'sub' role was akin to the teacher's role as the classroom authority. I could walk into a classroom, two months before the end of school, and teach another teacher's class, which indicates the interchangeability of actors within the script of schooling. In this case, I was the authority, regardless of whether I was a teacher or a substitute teacher. With a focus on roles, I was a teacher guided by expected behaviours as were the students in my class. That students were singling me out for acting-out behaviour suggested that I was not very effective in my role as an authority.

However, these broad themes often overlook individual differences; teaching is viewed as a stable, definable role, regardless of which person

assumes it. Goodson (1992) criticizes Lortie (1975) for his simplistic and often condescending treatment of teaching because it has "a good deal of prescription and implicit portrayal but very little serious study of, or collaboration with, those prescribed to or portrayed" (p. 3). Goodson calls for inquiries into teaching that consider "the complexity of the school teacher as an active agent making his or her own history" and advocates research methods that sponsor "the teacher's voice" using teachers' personal and biographical data (p. 4). Goodson suggests that "life history data" shows the importance of a teacher's experience, background, and life-style, both in and outside school, which has an impact on views of teaching practices (p. 243).

Other authors further emphasize the importance of the teacher's identity and professional knowledge in order to address the complexity of teaching that previous authors neglected. Teacher biography/autobiography is a suggested method for exploring teaching identities (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990; Pinar and Grumet, 1976). Butt, Raymond, McCue and Yamagishi (1992) recommend a holistic research approach that addresses teacher identity because "the dynamic complex interrelatedness of classroom activities and human interactions and the situation-specific nature of teaching are better respected" (p. 52) compared to teacher-role research. For example, within this type of approach, my biography would be an important layer of meaning as I interpreted the vandalism event at the junior high school. In this case, it is more than the teacher role that is important. My teaching experience was mostly at the high school level, not the junior high school level. And as a 'sub,' I was uncomfortable with "keeping a lid on" the classes and "getting them through" the program of studies versus my need to establish relationships with students and working with new pedagogic approaches that I had been exposed to while I was a graduate student. Deborah Britzman (1991) best explains the importance of disrupting "role/function" descriptions of teachers by turning to the importance of language:

The image of teaching advocated here is dialogic: teaching must be situated in relationship to one's biography, present circumstances, deep commitments, affective investments, social context, and conflicting



discourses about what it means to learn to become a teacher. With this dialogic understanding, teaching can be reconceptualized as a struggle for voice and discursive practices amid a cacophony of past and present voices, lived experiences, and available practices. (p. 8).

#### Gendered Roles

If we want to understand and change the work lives of teachers, issues of gender are central (Lather, 1994, p. 244).

As sociological work explored how "life operates at the intersection of context as in issues of race and gender" (Goodson, 1992, p. 236), culturally constructed categories of gender emerge as important perspectives to include in the investigation of teaching (Acker, 1994; Lather, 1994). Michael Apple describes the invisibility of gender in educational research on teaching as "the absent presence" (in Lather, 1994, p. 242). Sandra Acker (1994) describes the inadequacy of traditional sociological writing surrounding gender in teaching. She states that such writing suffers from the following shortcomings: it characterizes women as inadequate within a 'deficit-model' framework; it has a low regard for women teacher's intellectual capacity; it persistently links women to family roles; it describes a poor sense of history; it provides simple models of causality; and, finally, it subscribes to a pervasive ideology of individual choice (p. 80).

One of the ways that writers have sought to address the invisibility of women in studies of teaching is to go back and forefront women's experiences within certain historical time periods. Feminist historians recognize the need to recover women teachers' stories and experiences and to reflect subtle and complex details that often occur within traditional scientific inquiry (Fox-Keller, 1986). Alice Prentice (1999) demonstrates the ways that teachers' work was/is an important part of labour history and that women were often overlooked as "unacknowledged workers" (p. 29). Prentice's earlier work with Marjorie Theobald (1991) explores the notion of the "feminization of teaching" by reviewing accounts of women teachers over the last 150 years. They found that

many accounts overlooked the work that women did as teachers in the "private" sphere of the home and tended to idealize the role of women as "nurturers" in the classroom (p. 6). Prentice and Theobald (1991) conclude that traditional historical inquiry dealing with women teachers often apply concepts and words that "did not fit" (p. 19). Danylewycz and Prentice (1991) describe the need for a feminist analysis in order to address the apparent contradictions within gender-neutral historical explorations of women teachers' claims for professional status:

It was the uncertainty of [women teachers'] position in the labour force that helps to explain how women teachers could flirt with the mystique of professionalism while at the same time their members referred to themselves as the exploited or as toilers and hirelings. In recalling their double bind one returns, finally, to feminists' recognition of the need for a *nuanced analysis of work and a less dichotomous vision of the social order* if we are to understand the work of women (p. 154, emphasis added).

However, within historical traditions to reclaim a prominent place for women teachers, there also needs to be a place for theoretical perspectives and historical contexts. Theobald (1999) criticizes American feminist-historians' general lack of contextual/structural framing when dealing with women teachers' experiences. Women teachers' were generally depicted as heroes capable of conquering adversity. Theobald examines the case of the "American teacher-lady as hero" and describes an underdeveloped analysis:

The educational state remains enshrined as a dark revisionist presence, sometimes emerging in embodied form as the superintendent, sometimes providing a foil for women's superior ways of doing things, but by and large unexamined, leaving women's experiences as teachers floating free of the material and structural conditions which underpinned them (Theobald, 1999, p. 17).

Theobald posits that women teachers from the past are portrayed as heroes, irrespective of institutional, gendered, and historical constructions.

Similar concerns have encouraged some feminist theorists to adopt a neo-Marxist or critical theory approach to the topic of women teachers (Weiner,

1997). Both critical theory and feminist theory are concerned with "the underlying causes of educational inequalities and change (Wotherspoon, 1998, p. 29). Often this means looking at the sexual division of labour and women's roles in society (Apple, 1985). For example, women's traditional child-care tasks are viewed as compatible with women's roles as mothers and teachers (Gaskell and McLaren, 1991). After surveying critical feminist literature on teaching, Danylewycz, Light and Prentice (1991) conclude that "school teaching has thus been presented as a classic case of the sexual division of educational occupation ladders and men have been favoured at the top" (p. 34) reinforcing the belief that "women teach and men lead" within education. Feminist writers have borrowed key ideas from neo-Marxist theory to delve into the exploitation of women teachers' labour (Acker, 1989; Kenway, 1997; Lather, 1994). For example, Patti Lather (1991) states:

Problematizing the feminization of the teaching role provides an exemplary illustration of the way women's labor in the 'helping profession' becomes 'motherwork': the reproduction of classed, race, and gendered workers. ... Teaching has come to be formulated as an extension of women's role in the family: to accept male leadership as 'natural' and to provide services that reproduce males for jobs and careers, females for wives and mother and a reserve labor force (p. 245).

Sociological studies within critical theory traditions have been helpful in illuminating influences, such as gender, on teaching. I offered a preliminary read in Chapter One that reflected my frustration with the principal's remarks about the events of vandalism at the junior high because I understood women's roles as subordinate to men's roles. Father-daughter configurations of male principals with female teachers suggests that a gendered analysis addresses broad concerns of women teachers and power. However, some authors argue that traditional critical theory tends to frame women teachers as uniform, one-dimensional workers, following and enforcing patterns of the hierarchical institution of schooling (e.g., Acker, 1994). Some feminist researchers investigate the limitations of structural approaches to women and education (ex. Lather, 1991). The limits of feminist structural work lies within the artificial order

that is placed on complex and contradictory experiences of individuals within those structures. Smith-Rosenberg (1986) states:

Class and gender are terms that describe social characteristics: occupation, educational levels, consumption patterns, size of family, modes of social interaction. Simultaneously, they constituted conceptual systems, organizing principles, that impose a fictive order upon the complexities of economic and social development (p. 33).

Some feminist theorists have been pursuing ways to problematize the taken-for-granted arrangements of gender (ex. Kenway, 1997). They are addressing the limits of structuralist theory that suggests that there is a consciousness, or at least a false-consciousness, and that individuals are merely subjected to oppression and inequality within institutions. As Gordon (1986) states: "good historical listening embodies a critique of the concept of false consciousness" (p. 29). These authors then examine the individual within these structures and consider the choices that individuals make within structures, in ways that challenge one dimensional descriptions of oppression and inequality.

#### Subjectivity and Subject Positions

One way that theorists have addressed these concerns has been to explore the ways that individuals may produce meaning within a given context. Agency is an important concept which addresses context while considering teaching identity. Teresa De Lauretis' (1986) and Kathleen Weiler's (1988) work characterizes the initial exploration of a complex contradictory subject and the importance of discourse. De Lauretis (1986) states:

Self and identity, in other words, are always grasped and understood within particular discursive configurations. Consciousness, therefore, is never fixed, never attained once and for all, because discursive boundaries change with historical conditions (p. 8).

She describes the importance of "discursive boundaries" which limit what 'truths' are available to individuals in discourses as they make sense of their identity at a given time. In Weiler's (1988) study of feminist teachers, she describes some of these discursive limits. Weiler finds that sexist practices and material restraints

influence working-class, single mothers' teaching career choices (p. 86).

Weiler also includes the ways that the individuals made sense of possibilities for social change, which Weiler later develops into an understanding of agency (Weiler, 1999). Weiler (1988) concludes that researchers need to take a closer look at "classroom discourse" in order to disrupt narrow definitions of schooling (p. 151).

A theoretical turn towards discourse and subjectivity offers a multifaceted understanding of women teachers. For example, feminist and gender studies influenced the work of many contemporary curriculum theorists. Within a reconceptualist frame that "focused on educational experience not as it was planned by technocrats, but rather as it is lived, embodied, and politically structured," feminist curriculum scholars "combat ahistorical and essentialist interpretations of both curriculum and human nature. At the same time, they extend their investigation into the construction of gender ideologies as these are expressed in the daily educational experience of students and teachers" (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubman, 1995, p. 358 and 394).

Feminist poststructural theorists have focused on understanding teachers as contradictory subjects (Walkerdine, 1993; Weiler, 1999). Within this approach, identity, or subjectivity as it has been reconceived, has been described in terms of multiple notions of the self – a complex, open, unfinished, and contradictory self – constructed in discourse (Weedon, 1997). Developing Foucault's notion of discourse, Hall (1997) describes discourse as "a group of statements which provide a language for talking about - a way of representing the knowledge about - a particular topic at a particular historical moment" (p. 44). For example, within a given context, teachers may enforce rules, as disciplinarians, or make exceptions to the rules, as caregivers, depending upon which discourses they access. Teachers' understandings, actions, and subjectivities draw upon available discourses and shift from one speaking-moment to the next. Weiler (1999) writes:

Subjectivity has been employed to try to capture this quality of the social construction of the self; it implies the struggle and contest over identity, the ways in which selves are unstable, shifting, constructed through both dominant conceptions and resistance to those conceptions, and suggests the incomplete and sometimes contradictory quality of our lives both in the present and as we construct our pasts through memory (p. 46).

Employing poststructural notions of subjectivity and discourse, recent feminist research explores a variety of topics dealing with women teachers: Theobald (1999) looks at women teachers' oral histories and narrative accounts during the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century; Weiler (1999) considers rural women teachers in a California county from 1850 to 1950; Middleton (1993) and Ropers-Huilman (1998) investigate feminist teachers in post-secondary education; Munro (1998) collects life-histories of women teachers; Britzman (1991) works with pre-service teachers; and Ellsworth (1988) and Gore (1995) investigate the pedagogic practices of educators. These investigations advance complex descriptions of women teachers, that are context specific and go beyond narrow definitions of teaching that previous research presented. In my case when I was substitute teaching, meanings about the event move towards an understanding of multiple subject positions within many competing discourses at that moment.

#### Women Teachers and Power

Power conjures up images of inequality, a nemesis of democratic schooling. For feminist theorists, power seems to be *the* central issue of concern (Allen, 1998; Weiner, 1997). The way that power is discussed reflects the attempts made to make sense of a complicated issue. So for convenience, discussions of power seem to be situated in simply talking about "the powerful versus the powerless." Therefore, an investigation into the topic of women teachers offers an opportunity to consider the ways that writers and researchers have attempted to make sense of the contradictory constructions of women teachers as both powerful and powerless.

I was led into discourses of power through feminist poststructural theories about subjectivity. The poststructural concept of power is an important notion tied to subjectivity through discourse. Further developing Foucault's description of power tied to knowledge, feminist poststructural theorists trouble the way that something is known to be true (Davies, 1992; Weedon, 1997). I wish to again echo the shifts in thinking and writing about power in educational research, as I did with the concept of women teachers' identity/subjectivity, working from structural configurations of power within schooling, taking up feminist concerns with power, and finally moving to poststructural and feminist poststructural understandings of power.

#### Power Over/Under

*Power* has been defined, variously, as control, authority, influence, force, coercion, and having impact. It has been called good, bad, demonic, and routine (Reed, 2000, p. 22)

Structuralist theorists often acknowledge the role of power in education as important because different individuals or groups have unequal experiences of power within education (Apple, 1985). Burbules (1986) writes that traditional theories of power "have assumed that power is a property of *individual* persons, wielded *instrumentally* as a means to particular *intended* outcomes" (original emphasis, p. 96). With a focus on the institutional role of the teacher from a structuralist perspective, teacher power has often been portrayed in a "power over/under" model that has viewed the teacher as an instrument of the institution. As stated earlier in this appendix, there are often conflicts between the different role-expectations of teachers. Jackson (1968) describes a teacher's role conflict as occurring when the teacher is "working for the school and against it at the same time. He [sic] has a dual allegiance - to the preservation of both the institution and the individuals who inhabit it" (p. 154). The implication is that these interests are at odds and that teachers must "choose sides." However, when moments arise which challenge the authority of teachers within institutions, the power of the teacher becomes "power-over" students. Spencer's (1986)

description of power within school organizations supports Jackson's work and typifies a general, taken-for-granted understanding of power in teaching. She describes classrooms as:

social settings in which teachers hold the most powerful positions. Teachers are expected to gain and maintain control over students, and students are expected to comply with rules and obey their teachers. Teachers can manipulate their power through positive or negative sanctions over which students have no control. However, within the context of the school or school system as an organization, teachers take a subordinate role to administrators (p. 6).

When power is presented as power-over/under, power in teaching is configured as a set of hierarchies: students on the bottom, teachers in the middle, and administration at the top. Power is equated with control. The dichotomy of power-over or power-under seems to depend on which pair of hierarchical positions are compared. Jackson (1968) views the power relationship between teachers and students as "grossly unequal" (p. 32). Jackson's work reinforces a structural understanding of power in the classroom, where the only way for students to feel powerful was to resist in some way. Lortie (1975) uses Jackson's (1968) work to suggest that students' resistance, then, becomes feared and anticipated by teachers who feel their own sense of powerlessness. Jackson (1968) simply states that schools are places where "the division between the weak and the powerful is clearly drawn" (p. 10). From this perspective, students, teachers, and administrators engage in adversarial relationships of power and use various techniques to ensure that they emerge as the winner. The individual is again constructed within broad institutional roles.

When I applied structuralist understandings to my substitute teaching experience in the junior high school, I narrowly defined the event as a power struggle with my students. The graffiti-comments signaled poor classroom management practices. I felt that the students' behaviours (both the graffiti and the comments in the classroom) were disobedient. However, from a structuralist perspective, the students' actions could instead be viewed as commendable, depending on "what I had been doing to those kids" for three weeks, as the



custodian had asked. The students' responses could have been a case of the "weak" triumphing, momentarily at least, over the strong, in a David and Goliath scenario. But these dichotomous descriptions seemed to simplify a complex moment in teaching, which led me to feminist structuralist work.

### Power as Oppression

In contemporary mainstream writing on problems of teaching, issues of authority are conceived within the bounds of considerations of management and control and are read as gender neutral. Such writing ignores what all women teachers know (Pagano, 1994, p. 253).

The premise of a feminist structural approach is that men have power over women (Weiler, 1988). A feminist structural investigation would focus on the extent to which women are powerful. Amy Allen's (1998) work typifies feminist concerns with discussions of power. She supports a complex feminist account of power that attends to the many facets of the *process* of power including: "power-over" - intended to address masculine domination; "power-to" - intended to address feminist empowerment and resistance; and "power-with" - intended to address feminist solidarity and coalition building. Structural feminist writers view women educators within a patriarchal setting, where rule of the 'father' has perpetuated a masculine understanding of power and authority, and therefore has determined how power and authority are negotiated in that setting (Pagano, 1994). From a feminist structuralist perspective, power is configured as *degrees* of power within dominant and subordinate, overt and covert patriarchal arrangements. Thus, women in education can be viewed as subordinate to men, like wives to husbands, as students can be viewed as subordinate to teachers, like children to parents. Some feminist authors attempt to look at the subtleties or complexities of gender and power. For example, Lather (1994) refers to Jean Baker Miller's work investigating the distinction between relationships of temporary and permanent inequality:

Women are dominant in relations of temporary inequality such as parent and teacher, where adult power is used to foster development and

eventually removes the initial disparity; they are submissive in permanently unequal relations where power is used both to cement dominant/subordinate dynamics and to rationalize the need for continued inequality (p. 245).

Therefore, power and authority for women educators is understood in these terms as both temporary and elusive.

However, the use of feminist structuralist and critical theory arguments exclusively, may not address a significant aspect of the complexity of the issues. Bordo (1993a) describes two major areas of concern and contradiction within structural understandings of power:

The oppressor/oppressed model provides no way in which to theorize adequately the complexities of the situations of men, who frequently find themselves implicated in practices and institutions which they (as individuals) did not create, do not control and may feel tyrannized by. Nor does this model acknowledge the degree to which women may 'collude' in sustaining sexism, - for example, in our willing (and often eager) participation in cultural practices which objectify and sexualize us (p. 190).

Important as they are in identifying patterns and roles, structural and critical theory arguments are helpful, but limited, in addressing a number of complex, subtle, and murky issues, such as the differences between individuals, the active participation of individuals and the interpretation of power as other than just oppressive. A structuralist notion of power defines power as a 'thing' so, therefore, it becomes possible to argue what is *real* power. We find ourselves returning to the dichotomous and rigid understandings of experience, which have significant implications for understandings of the self. Kitzinger (1992) summarizes this point when she states:

If power is seen as imposing 'false' consciousness, inauthentic desires and preferences upon women, then there is a concept of a true authentic inner self, which can spontaneously generate its own actions and free choices, a self that could be free of external influence (p. 432).

#### Power as Relational

Up to this point I have been discussing power from a structural theorist perspective, which largely views power as locatable, monolithic, and oppressive.

Poststructural writers reframe the structural discussions about power as 'productive' rather than destructive (Popkewitz, 1991). Informed by Foucault's notion of power as productive, post-structuralists understand power as interactions and relationships rather than an entity that is possessed by some people or by systems and desired or resisted by others (Burbules, 1995). Thus power is reconceived as a web – a system of relations (Foucault, 1980). Burbules (1986) describes four qualities of power as a system of relations: relations of power are reciprocal, transitive, latent and overt, and are interrelated (p. 104). Within this conception of power, Burbules states that power is "not simply a matter of getting people to do things (or not do things), but a relation of human attitudes and activities against a background of conflicting interests" (p. 104).

Poststructural theorists also describe the importance of discourse within relations of power (Popkewitz, 1991). Power is tied to knowledge, in discourse, because competing discourses vie for supremacy as "common-sense," not only as *the* 'truth,' but also as the correct way that we know something to be true (Weedon, 1997). Power is thus considered productive because it is produced in discourse. Foucault (1980) argues:

What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms of knowledge, and produces discourse (p. 119).

Here power is reconceived as something that permits us to know in particular ways. For Foucault, these two concepts are inextricably linked and, therefore, power is often represented as "power/knowledge" (Foucault, 1980). Knowledge is heavily influenced by the discourses that we access while making sense. Talking from a Foucauldian perspective, Popkewitz (1991) writes that "power, in this sense, is productive of social identity rather than instances of repression, violence, or coercion" (p. 31). Therefore, for poststructural theorists, knowledge, discourse, and subjectivity are interrelated to the relations of power.

Feminist theorists have had an uneasy relationship with Foucault's understandings of power (Nicholson, 1990). On the one hand, some feminists have supported a notion of the multiplicity of power and investigated the political significance it may have for changing women's experiences in society (ex. Bailey, 1993). Kitzinger (1992) explains that "poststructuralism embraces a pluralist view of power which militates against the identification of any particular group (e.g. men) as 'powerful'" (p. 437). Therefore, poststructuralism is viewed as helpful in understanding the complexity of power that feminist 'power-full versus power-less' definitions overlook.

Other feminist writers, however, have declared that "Foucault undermines feminism" (Ramazanoglu, 1993, p. 2) because, within a Foucauldian framework, "power is everywhere, and so ultimately nowhere" (Hartsock, 1990, p. 170). Because power is located in knowledge, and knowledge is pervasive, so is power. Therefore, power becomes accepted as 'just the way it is.' Consequently, power is viewed as "neutral", devoid of a partisan location. As Bordo (1993b) states: "most of our institutions have barely begun to absorb the message of modernists social criticism; surely it is too soon to let them off the hook via post modern heterogeneity and instability" (p. 242). In other words, just as feminist work has begun to locate and identify patterns in institutions that contribute to the oppression of women, poststructural theory (offered by yet another male theorists) asks feminists to abandon such pursuits.

Thus, many feminist poststructural theorists borrow and modify certain Foucauldian concepts in order to recognize the importance of discourse, subjectivity, and power, for complex understandings of women in society (Kenway, 1997; Weedon, 1997). Bordo (1993a) explains that "the fact that power is not held by *anyone* does not entail that it is equally held by *all*. It is 'held' by no one; but people and groups *are* positioned differently within it" (original emphasis, p. 191). Therefore, an important aspect of a feminist poststructural analysis of power is the examination of the many discourses that

women have available to them in society, and the extent to which women are likely to participate in them, knowingly or unknowingly.

#### Women Teachers' Subjectivity and Power

I have argued throughout this appendix that using structuralist notions of identity and power, exclusively, are limiting, as they often fail to account for individual differences and the complex moments of power created between individuals. The consequence for women teachers has been that simplistic descriptions of authority and power have either located power in a monolithic, hierarchical structure, far beyond the control of individuals to make changes, or have located a lack of power in the individual, resulting in the individual being blamed for positions of powerlessness. However, feminist poststructuralism offers a possibility overlooked or denied by narrow structural understandings - agency. If power is considered to be relational within a dynamic network of discourses (as opposed to an individual's possession), individuals have the opportunity to take up, ignore, or resist discourses. Bronwyn Davies (1993) explains the difference between a structuralist and a poststructural analysis:

A poststructural analysis, while having its roots in structuralism differs fundamentally from it. Structuralism recognizes the constitutive force of discourse and of the social structures that are constituted through those discourses. Poststructuralism opens up the possibility of agency to the subject through the very act of making visible the discursive threads through which their experience of themselves as specific beings is woven. It also defines discourse and structure as something which can be acted upon and changed (p. 12).

Feminist poststructuralism offers a way to reveal and investigate the complexity of a multitude of discourses, thus offering opportunities to resist dominant discourses and take up alternative discourses. The individual plays an important role in interactions of power, as individuals negotiate the tension between being positioned by, and choosing to take up, discourses, while at the same time mirroring the complexities and contradictions that are constructed in individual lives.

Within poststructural understandings of discourse, the individual chooses among competing meanings. The individual has an active part to play and, therefore, has agency. Because power is "*productive* of subjectivity," we "exert power over ourselves by constructing ourselves in particular ways" (original emphasis, Hepburn, 1997, p. 34). However, agency is not as straightforward as it first appears to be. The individual is not always solely responsible for her choices because the circumstances of her life may limit her options. Consequently, the individual is simultaneously *positioned* by discourses. Certain discourses make some understandings possible and other understandings impossible.

Alexa Hepburn's (1997) study is an example of research that attends to discourses in use. She considers the impact of liberal-humanist discourses on teachers' construction of secondary school bullying. She describes the circular logic of "she is a victim because she is a victim" as a major characteristic of humanism, especially within psychological discourses that describe what individuals *do* "in terms of who they *are*" (p. 29). Hepburn describes these constructions of individuals a "Catch-22 dilemma" where it is common practice to see a person's actions as "emanating from some inner core of being, so that bad behaviour means you are a bad person, or if you are victimized you are 'obviously a victim'" (p. 38). Hepburn illustrates the importance liberal-humanist discourses that constructed accounts of bullying in three ways: a) the teacher blamed the individual; b) the teacher blamed the group; and, c) the teacher justified the bullying of certain kids. What can be known to be true about the "victim" or the "bully" changes with each speaking moment.

While attending to discourse, gender makes a significant difference in a poststructural analysis. For instance, Bronwyn Davies (1992) specifically refers to "the experience of being assigned to the category female, of being discursively, interactively, and structurally *positioned* as such, and of taking up as one's own those discourses through which one is constituted as female" (p. 54). In the instance where the words "bitch and whore" were written on my classroom

window, a feminist poststructural read would mean that I was both positioned by, and actively took up, specific meanings within a discourse of femininity, even when the principal framed "bitch" as an example of the 'unacceptable language' within schools. I felt hurt as I took up meanings within a discourse of femininity that suggested that I was being an uncaring or malicious woman. At the same time, the principal rendered the word "bitch" as an example of students' 'bad talk' toward school personnel, framing the word within a discourse of schooling. Values and practices such as those relating to emotion, caring, and femininity compete with notions of efficiency, accountability, and order. Institutional practices may support a variety of discourses or may even privilege a few, allowing certain discourses to achieve authoritative or common-sense status. My subjectivity is affected by the discourses that I take up as a woman.

Valerie Walkerdine (1993) provides another example of the importance of female subject positions and plays of power when she observed several kindergarten classes. She describes the discourses available in moments of power and authority between a kindergarten teacher and her students as shifting, not just fixed to a particular cause. She relates an instance where a group of kindergarten boys were speaking in a sexually explicit way about a classmate and their teacher. The teacher responded by framing the boys' talk as silly and immature. Walkerdine effectively describes how both the teacher and the young boys interacted in variant moments of power:

Although the teacher has an institutional position, she is not uniquely a teacher, nor are the boys *just* small boys. Particular individuals are produced as subjects *differently* within a variety of discursive practices. ... We can understand the boys as both subjects in patriarchal discourse perpetrating patriarchal oppression upon their teacher and at the same time children oppressed/controlled by the authority of the teacher (original emphasis, p. 209-210).

Knowingly or not, the teacher chooses not to take up a patriarchal discourse. She is both subject of and subject to patriarchal discourses, even as this discourse is silent in her own explanation. Therefore, like subjectivity, power is variant and located in moments.