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ABSTRACT
               This paper reviews the dominant theoretical framework
espoused by feminist writers in order to gain a deeper understanding
of the distinction between feminist groups on the question of
empowerment within the higher education establishment. Feminists are
described as falling into three groups--liberal feminists, radical
feminists and social feminists--though an alternative model sees
feminist thinking as influenced either by a liberation model of
pedagogy or by a gender model based on recent theories of women's
development. Four major themes of empowerment are supported by these
theories. The collective action and critique theme urges teachers and
administrators to seek ways to work together. The gender and power
theme sees the inequality and discrimination among women teachers as
a gender concern which encompasses larger issues of power. The reform
and feminist voice theme offers a model for feminist professionalism
in opposition to masculine, mainstream visions of career advancement.
A theme called caring, community, connectedness and equality
emphasizes collaborative relationships. Included are 34 references.
(JB)

EMPOWERMENT AND WOMEN IN EDUCATION:

A CRITIQUE OF THE FEMINIST DISCOURSE

Paper Presented at the Eleventh Annual Conference
of the
Women's Consortium
of the
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Empowerment and Feminist Discourse

INTRODUCTION

Issues of gender stratification and the dominance and power relations in patriarchical institutions are concerns of feminist theorists, particularly in schools where these issues often reduce women to subordinate positions.[1] In response to these issues, feminist proponents call for greater empowerment in which women cross the hierarchical barriers and assume leadership positions at all levels in educational institutions.

The feminists' paradigm of empowerment consists of concerns regarding the relationship of gender and sc' ling, patriarchy, hegemony, and androcentrism which feminists believe foster much of the inequalities between men and women.[2] Although these common concerns dominate much of the discourse on empowerment, controversy exists among feminist writers regarding ways in which individuals are to be empowered. Most notably are the distinctions between empowerment as power with or power over, hegemony vs. counter hegemony, gender and/or class or race, independence vs. interdependence, and collaboration vs. competition.

A review of the dominant theoretical frameworks espoused by feminist writers provides a deeper understanding of the distinction among these various groups.

FEMINIST IDEOLOGY: AN OVERVIEW

In reference to Jagger (1977), Tabakin and Densmore (1986) and

Weiler (1988) identify three theoretical frameworks that are representative of contemporary feminist ideology: liberal, radical and socialist. Each theory differs in presentation of the primary oppression and the origins and nature of women's oppression as well as their specific change strategies. Although distinctions exist, each acknowledges the necessity of major transformation as a condition for social justice.

Liberal Feminist

Liberal feminism maintains that equal opportunity is possible within existing educational systems and focuses on sex stereotyping and bias, particularly within curricular materials and school practices. Liberal theory is often criticized for maintaining a narrow focus as it fails to recognize the social and economic conditions that control the ways schools operate.

Radical Feminist

Radical feminists claim that women's situations are dominated by class oppression under capitalism, which must be exposed before their situations can be changed. These theorists maintain that access to power is primarily sexually based, not economically based.

Social Feminist

Conversely, social feminists attend to the social and/or economic analysis which impacts the origins of the practices and other structures of power and control that affect what goes on within schools; however, this group maintains specific emphasis on what actually happens in schools. Individuals are described in terms of their gender as well as

their class or race.

Maher's Model

An alternative to the preceding theoretial foundations is the model espoused by Maher (1987). This model presents a synthesis of the liberation theory. expounded by Freire (1970) and Giroux and McLaren (1986), and the gender models, such as those proposed by Gilligan (1982), Miller (1976) and Martin (1985), in which personal agency and public effectiveness are addressed.

Maher suggests that educators exploring alternative feminist approaches have found themselves drawing upon two bodies of thought; 1) the liberation model of pedagogy, which seeks the classroom empowerment of oppressed and silent groups in opposition to the dominant exploitative ideology and, 2) a gender model based on recent theories of women's development and "connected knowing. This more recent approach holds that women

> experience (namely as nurturers and rearers of children) a different, more expressive, subjective, and participatory mode of learning than is validated by traditional models of education (Maher, 1987, p. 92).

Thus, accord'ng to this model empowerment is viewed as freedom from oppression of the dominant exploitative ideology, with acts f "connected knowing," or "power with" as opposed to "power over."

Consistent among these theoretical frameworks and model is a concern for the ways schools function to reproduce gender divisions and oppression. Basic to their approach is the view that women's oppression in the paid workforce and in domestic work is reproduced through what happens in the schools.

Themes of Empowerment Within Feminist Discourse

A review of the feminist discourse supported by these theories reveals four major themes of empowerment; Collective Action and Critique, Gender and Power, Reform and Feminine Voice, and Caring, Community, Connectedness and Equality. Each theme addresses barriers to empowerment and explores ways in which women can seek greater empowerment and emancipation.

Collective Action and Critique

Social feminists recognize that traditionally education has been organized to encourage isolation and competition among teachers and that teachers and administrators must seek out ways of working collectively and collaboratively if individuals are to become empowered.

Weiler (1988) insists that collective action and collaboration must occur not only in terms of curriculum and the social relationships of the classroom, but also in terms of the hierarchical structures of the schools themselves. Teachers must struggle for critique and democratic relationships with their own colleagues and along with administrators must root out the sexism and racism which are expressed both in institutional structure and in daily practices.

Other feminists concur with Weiler and urge educators to think critically about what has gone on in schools during the conservative restoration of the 1980s. Apple (1987), for example, believes that the teaching profession in particular offers a means of illustrating the control education has always experienced from outside social and ideological pressures. He contributes much of the external control and

disempowerment of today's teachers to historic tradition:

> The ways teaching and curricula have been controlled . . . [and] are connected to the fact that, by and large, teaching was constructed around women's labor.. . . Women's work has been particularly subject to the de-skilling and de-empowering tendencies of management.. . . Women have had to struggle even harder to gain recognition of their skills and worth (pp. 62, 68, 69).

In response to this concern Apple suggests teachers attend to history, organize to support their skills and rights, and defend progressive and critical teaching as well as curricular practices. Furthermore, he suggests that teachers form coalitions with other groups, such as nurses, social workers, and clerical and secretarial groups that are experiencing similar situations.[3]

Further evidence of a lack of critical critique and disempowerment is revealed in the inequality occurring in the technological classroom, where a separation of conception from execution, the prepackaged curriculum, continues to contribute to the deskilling of teachers. This inequality is often fostered based upon the fact that teaching is a profession traditionally occupied by women. As Apple (1987) states:

> Many [of the] women, [because of] child care and household responsibilities . . . or women who are single parents . . . have relatively less out of school time to take additional coursework and prepare new curricula. Therefore, when a new curriculum such as computer literacy is required, women teacher may be more dependent on using the ready-made curriculum materials than most men teachers (p. 237).

Thus, within this theme of empowerment, feminist agree that the lack of opportunities for women to work collectively and collaboratively has fostered their sense of disempowerment.

4
Gender and Power

Feminist theorist most often consider issues of gender to be central to the reconstruction of educational theory and the practice necessary for emancipation for all women, not just a few. Lather (1987), a spokesperson for the feminist educational movement, is critical of theorists and writers who marginalize issues of gender in their studies of educators. She argues,

> to disallow gender in our analysis of teacher work is to not tap into the potential feminism offers for bringing about change in our schools. . . . If this 'absence presence,' the invisibility of gender, is maintained there will be little hope for re-structuring the public schools, which have grown up around women's subordination" (pp. 25, 32).

DeLyon and Migniuolo (1989) concur with Lather and suggest that the inequality and discrimination among women teachers is a gender concern which encompasses the larger issue of power. Maintaining a socialist perspective, these authors suggest that empowerment is represented as the need to "experience solidarity," attend to "individual rights," attain "collective understanding that spans class and colour lines," "deal directly with the oppression that resides . . . in the wider social structure," and challenge "power throughout society" (preface xxv). Empowerment as power is the ability of women to relieve themselves from the oppression of low wages, lack of promotion, invisibility, and lack of representation in decisions that affect them. Suggesting that "challenging for equal power in teaching means challeng-ing through society," these authors call for equality beyond just representation in numbers among the workforce (preface, xxv).

In addition, they envision a broad approach which challenges "the suitability of 'male' qualities as the criteria for success in authority teaching, educational management and decisions about educational spending and research" (preface xxv). The result is a new balance of values wherever power is being exercised, thus integrating the two traditional types of teaching into one augmented form wh'ch ends gender inequality in teaching and ultimately liberates and empowers teachers of both sexes.[5]

This balancing of power is reflected in Maher's (1987) theoretical model, which focuses on the exclusion of women from power in education. In reference to Miller (1976), Maher proposes one aspect of empowerment in which "women view power not as 'power over' in a competitive sense, but in terms of empowerment, or 'power with'" (p. 94). She aligns this meaning with Gilligan's theory (1982) that women view the world in terms of "concern for connection relationships, and responsibility toward others rather than a concern for autonomy, achievement, and justice for necessarily competing claims" (p. 94).

Maher also references the liberation models which seek to empower women through "collective, political, and politically conscious resistance experiences" (p. 98). She concludes that both models are necessary in order for women to maintain their subjective sides while recognizing that "feminist teachers reject the idea of one set of roles and qualities for one privileged gender or one privileged class, with the rest of human activities assigned to 'others'" (p. 98).

Bricker-Jenkins and Hooyman (1987) expand upon this notion

of sharing power and provide a clear distinction between "the patriarchical lexicon, power," in which "one's power, as a commodity which can be individually 'owned,' is rooted in one's ability to dominate and control others," and that of the feminist meaning "to be able" (p. 37). Maintaining a contrast with the traditional patriarchical meaning of power, these authors suggest "power derives from an ability to realize potential and enable the accomplishment of aspirations and values"; furthermore, they state in reference to Bunch, Ellsworth et al., and Hartsock that "power is rooted in energy, strength, and effective communication, and it is limitless" (p. 37).

Their view of power as limitless suggests the setting aside of competitiveness, a view that all are connected and therefore each responsible for the well being of the whole. These authors suggest, "empowerment takes place as we observe feminist values in the process of seeking common ground and making common cause with each other" (p. 37). However, they caution that their meaning does not intend to "deny the historically and materially rooted power and status differentials which have kept women (and many men) 'in their place'"; rather, it recognizes "the transactive nature of power" (p. 37). Therefore, practices associated with empowerment must include exposing and disavowing

> historical and material conditions that affect our lives and . . .
> redefin[ing] relationships among administrators, faculty, and
> students in the direction of feminist organizational and
> administrative models consistent with the content we hope to convey
> (p. 38-41).

Similarly, Friedman (1985) cautions that feminist empowerment must not, in its "eagerness to be nonhierarchical," participate "in the

patriarchal denial of the mind to women" (p. 207). She asks for a
theory that first recognizes the androcentric denial of all authority to
women, and second, points out a way for us to speak with an authentic
voice not based on tyranny.

The goal of empowering women in educational settings focuses
on issues of gender and power. The discourse of feminists theorists
suggests the goal is not to increase women's status relative to men
but to empower women through a redistribution of power. Furthermore,
it is suggested that this redistribution of power be accomplished by
acknowledging that for women to share power, power structures must be
changed.

Reform and Feminist Voice

The feminist concern for a change in the current gendered power
structures within educational institutions to include women's
experiences and mechanisms for women to speak is echoed by feminist
writers such as; Biklen (1987), Noddings (1989), and Shakeshaft and
Nowell (1984). Their discourse, highly critical of the Holmes Group and
the Carnegie Commission for their acceptance of the masculine
stereotypical notions of professional life, is supported by Maguire
(1984) who suggests these reports have fostered a new and rigidly
defined hierarchy. She suggests that most

> critiques of professionalization . . . have the basic structures
> intact, as they ignore women's experience and the centrality of
> human caring. They take for granted that people enter professions
> with an eye toward advancement in a hierarchy and power over
> others (p. 20).

Similarly, Biklen (1987), in reference to the proposals of the

Holmes Group and Carnegie Commission, writes that neither "grapple[s]
enough with issues of gender.. . . Reports point to problems resulting
from a 'feminized' profession and from the flight of bright women into
other fields" (p. 18). Rather than addressing the analysis of these
issues, Bilken notes that within these reports "the standard male model
of professionalism" is reinforced by "competition" and "elaborated
credentialing systems" (p. 18).

In contrast she offers a model for "feminist professionalism"
in which teachers participate in defining the nature of their particular
school; promote an articulate, participatory workforce that will enable
teachers to interact with each other around decisions that affect their
lives; and view human activity as what both men and women do rather
than what men do.

It is suggested by Shakeshaft and Nowell (1984) that part of the
absence of feminist issues among reformists and theorists reflects their
androcentric bias. They fail to recognize that attention to gender
differentiation may require a reconceptulization of themselves. They
conclude that,

> these critiques ignore an important quality of school
> environments-- their character as predominantly female
> workplaces and the effects of such environments on the
> quality of theoretical arguments derived from male-based
> theories (p. 187).

Gilligan (1982) suggests that these "different voices" with
which women and men communicate are based on how members of each
sex usually reach their own sense of identity. Her research on

language provides evidence of the difference between the meanings
expressed by men and women, even when using the same words. She
suggests these different voices come from "disparate experiences of self
and social relationships"; however, due to an "overlapping moral
vocabulary," male and female application of language may create
misunderstandings which impede communication and limit the potential for
cooperation and care in relationships (p. 173).

Gilligan (1982) reflects on the voice of women, which is grounded
in "an ethic of care, the tie between relationship and responsibility,"
and she points out the mistaken assumption that "there is a single mode
of social experiences and interpretations" (p. 73).

For the past two decades, feminist scholarship, women's studies
programs, and research on women in educational settings have done a
great deal to capture these experiences, to hear the voices of women,
and to discover the stories of women's lives through their personal
narratives.

Caring, Community, Connectedness and Equality

Connelly and Clandinin (1990), in reference to collaborative
relationships and empowerment, cite Noddings (1986), who stresses the
"collaborative nature of the research process as one in which all
participants see themselves as participants in the community" (p. 4).
They suggest these issues have implications for feminist concerns of
"connectedness, equality, and caring" and empowerment, as previously
6
discussed in this review of feminist discourse. In reference to
Hogan's (1988) research, Connelly and Clandinin write,

empowering relationships involve feelings of 'connectedness'
that are developed in situations of equality, caring and mutual
purpose and intention (p. 4).

Extrapolating from the work of Noddings and Hogan, these authors

emphasize the importance of "the necessity of time, relationship, space,

and voice in establishing a collaborative relationship" (p. 4). In

reading Noddings (1984, 1986, 1989), one discovers further implications

[7]

for women's research, caring and empowerment. Noddings (1989) suggests

that much of the theoretical work on ethics of care is directly derived

from feminist theory, and all of it can be interpreted from feminist

perspectives. However, she suggests that theories and models of caring

have not yet been confirmed into a powerful alternative theory of

education. Rather, she interprets women's power and empowerment as "the

realization of interdependence and the joy of empowering others" (p.

388).

Noddings' interpretation has implications for the discoure of

Berman (1987) and Bolin (1987), who elaborate on empowermment,

meaning making, and caring. Berman (1987) describes caring within the

context of teaching as it involves

assistive, facilitative, and/or enabling decisions of acts that aid
individual(s), group, or community in a beneficial way.. . .
Caring involves liberating persons so that each person is free to
build upon his or her own knowledge" (p. 206).

She suggests that educators place more value on their relationships

and allow a sense of caring to guide their decisions.

Feminist researchers believe most research in the social sciences

reflects the male bias to the exclusion of women's voice and experiences

in our cultural values. For example, Gilligan (1982) writes,

the differences between the sexes are being rediscovered in the
social sciences. This discovery occurs when theories formerly
considered to be sexually neutral in their scientific objectivity
are found instead to reflect a consistent observational and
evaluative bias. We begin to notice how accustomed we have become
to seeing life through men's eyes (p. 6).

She implies that the human qualities which are valued in our society are

different from, and sometimes construed as opposite to, the qualities

deemed desirable in women. Pugh (1989) argues that for a feminist,

the "fundamental act of living and surviving should be inherent attempts

to transform structural constraints, at a minimum, on the individual

level" (p. 14). With regard to empowerment, he emphasizes the

importance in research of empowering participants by validating their

knowledge and experience.

The issues raised by these researchers have made problematic many

of the taken-for-granted meanings held by educators and theorists.

Denizen (1989), in his discussion of the "feminist critique of

positivism," suggests that "the gender stratification system in any

social situation creates dominance and power relations that typically

reduce women to subordinate positions" (p. 27). Furthermore, he writes

that there is no gender-free knowledge, the feminist critique suggests

that objective knowledge is not possible. Rather, it supports the

notion that knowledge should be used for emancipatory purposes.

Researchers must consider ways to "present the phenomenon to be

evaluated in the language, feelings, emotions, and actions of those

being studied" (p. 27).

Denizen's call for studying gender stratification and the

importance of emancipating participants as researchers is echoed by

Childers and Grunig (1989) in their study of feminist research in journalism and communication. These authors conclude that female faculty who secure promotion and tenure in universities "do so largely because of their research productivity" (p. 1). They equate teacher empowerment with power and influence and recommend a restructuring of the patriarchy that would transfer women's frustration at their disempowerment into the energy necessary for research productivity. This is accomplished by "supporting students and colleagues who explore new perspectives, such as feminism . . . [and] includ[ing] feminist scholarship in course readings and lectures" (p. 63).

Women's studies also make contributions to the consciousness among women regarding issues of gender and oppression. Lather (1984b), in reference to Howe, states, "establishing women's studies was an outgrowth of the consciousness raising of women in the late 1960s" (p. 2). As a result, "women came to see what the social reproduction theorists assert: that the production and legitimation of knowledge through educational institutions is a major instrument of cultural reproduction" (p. 2).

Commentary on Empowerment and Feminist Discourse

The empowerment of women as situated within the discourse of feminist theorists and researcherss is reflected within the paradigms of production and reproduction. Within this paradigm are concerns of gender stratification, patriarchy, hegemony, and androcentrism as feminist theorists emphasize the way in which schools foster inequalities between men and women. Similar to critical educational

theorists, feminists envision empowerment as a "project of possibility"
(Simon, 1987) and as emancipatory, educative, and resulting from
collective action.

Although these central themes are maintained, different meanings
and practices of empowerment are recognized, most notably are the
distinctions between empowerment as "power with" vs. "power over,"
independence vs. interdependence, and collaboration vs. competition.

More recently these theorists have focused on the political, social
and economic aspects of teachers' work. Recognizing that women are
disempowered by the exclusion of the historical role of women as
teachers and their own voice in contemporary educational reform and
research, they have called for collective and collaborative efforts
within and beyond the schools.

Most recognized among the concerns within this discourse is the
exclusion of issues of gender, particularly the historic and social
implications of teaching as women's work. As these authors suggest,
if empowerment of women is to realized we must first seek ways to
include gender in the analysis of our work in educational institutions.
For, it is in our schools and universities that we can teach, train and
model the experiences and share the voices of women for other
generations. Only then can qualities such as collaboration and critical
critique, caring, and the spirit of community become alternatives to
competition and "power over" which dominate many of the current
hierarchical structures present in today's schools.

ENDNOTES

1. For example, Ortiz and Marshall (1987) conclude that "men,
women and minorities are socialized differently so that in fact women
are not provided with opportunities to assume administrative roles" (p.
20). Their article provides a review of historical data and research
findings on hinderances regarding women and careers.

2. Adrienne Rich (1979) defines "patriarchy" as "not simply the
tracing of descent through the father, which anthropologists seem to
agree is a relatively late phenomenon, but any kind of group
organization in which males hold dominant power and determine what part
females shall and shall not play, and in which capabilities assigned to
women are relegated generally to the mystical and aesthetic and excluded
from the practical and political realms" (p. 78). Others, such as
Bricker-Jenkins and Hooyman (1987) and Lather (1987), have quoted
and/or offered narrower definitions.

3. Other feminist theorists have addressed the issues of women as
teachers and administrators; however, they have not referenced the term
"teacher empowerment." For example, Crystal Gips' (1989) research into
women's accounts of their own career development and data regarding
career differences between men and women provides an excellent example
of these issues as experienced within the public schools. Levine (1989)
provides "practitioners reactions" from women as teachers and
administrators (pp. 145-49; 155-59) that are illustrative of the
issues proposed by feminist theorists and writers.

4. Christine Grella (1983) offers a dialectical view of terms
"sex" and "gender" that has contributed to an understanding of the use
of the word "gender" as it appears in both feminist theory and research.
"Gender is both internal and external. Gender is something we carry
around in our heads, such as in gender identity and our beliefs and
expectations about traits and behaviors appropriate to each gender"
(p. 3).

5. Various authors within this text elaborate upon these issues,
but do not reference the term empowerment. It is recommended that the
reader make reference to Chapters 6, 8, 10, and 12. The Journal of
Education Vol, 167, No. 3, 1985, captures the theme "Women's
Development and Education" that illustrates many of these issues.

6. Feminist theorists and writers frequently reference the term
"connected" or "connected knowing." Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger
and Tarule (1986) cite the meaning of these terms as espoused by
Gilligan (1982) and Nona Lyons (1983), who "use the terms separate
and connected to describe two different conceptions or experiences

of the self, as essentially autonomous (separate from others) or essentially in relationship (connected to others). The separate self experiences relationships in terms of 'reciprocity,' considering others as it wishes to be considered. The connected self experiences relationships as 'response to others in their terms'" (p. 102).

7. "Care" and "caring" as used in this discourse among feminist writers connotes development of the whole person and concern for others. Noddings (1986) references Maeroff's (1971) description of this term as it relates to teachers: "caring involves promoting the growth of those for whom we care" (p. 386).

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