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AUTHOR Wait, Glenda J.
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ABSTRACT

Fewer women than men serve on local school boards despite the fact that female volunteers in schools outnumber male volunteers. This paper presents findings of a study that explored the barriers and facilitators to women's participation on school boards, as well as women's motivations. Data were obtained from four focus groups composed of 7-10 women each, distinguished by their different levels of involvement in the school system. The most involved group included women with actual school-board experience, and the least involved group included women who did not volunteer at schools. Indepth interviews were conducted with one woman from each focus group. All groups shared a similar motivation for running for office--the desire to make a difference in the educational system. Barriers to participation included lack of self-confidence, fear of not being taken seriously, socioeconomic factors, and the presence of young children at home. Women most likely to seek school-board office had high levels of self-esteem and personal efficacy, a family income over \$50,000, older children, and previous volunteer experience; they were also between 35 and 44 years of age, well educated with college experience, dissatisfied with the education system, and not employed full-time outside the home. Three figures and the interview guide, and individual interview questions are included. (Contains 27 references.) (LMI)

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WOMEN AND SCHOOL BOARDS: MOTIVATION FOR SERVICE

by

Glenda J. Wait Ed.D.

Superintendent
Belleville Henderson Central School District
Belleville, New York 13611
Phone(315) 846-5411
E-Mail: ggwait@msn.com

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Abstract

Women are becoming more visible on Boards of Education. However, fewer women serve on local boards despite the fact that more women volunteer in schools than men. The purpose of this study was to explore women's motivation for participating on school boards, a form of local government. From a theoretical model based on social psychological perspectives, it explored motivating factors for women in different stages of volunteerism. Information from four focus groups and four open-ended structured interviews was analyzed to determine explanatory factors that could lead to increased involvement. Policy implications suggested that understanding barriers and incentives would lead to an increase in the number of women willing to participate in school board service.

Introduction

Women are becoming more visible on Boards of Education. One of the latest national surveys, in January, 1995 found that the percent of women school board members increased from approximately 12% to 42% between 1972 and 1995. (Alvey, et. al., 1986; Gaul, et. al., 1994; Weisenburger, et. al., 1995). The composition of the average board includes five men and two women, with 71% of all board presidents being men. Fewer women serve on local boards despite the fact that more women volunteer in schools than men. If women are to be equally represented on school boards, it is important to understand what factors facilitate board service and what factors inhibit or act as barriers to participation. Policy implications suggest that the more we know about barriers and facilitators to board service, the more we will be able to target women who will make a difference to their local school district.

The purpose of this study was to identify the barriers and facilitators impacting women's motivation for participating on school boards, a form of local government. A secondary purpose was to explore women's motivation for voluntary services in the schools.

The following questions were addressed in the study:

- What economic, social, personal and family issues act as facilitating factors or barriers to women's decision making concerning board service?
- Do women who volunteer in other aspects of the school environment or do not volunteer at all verbalize different motivations for participating or not participating than women who are on the school board?
- Can an explanatory profile be developed that would help predict voluntary participation?

A more complete understanding of these issues would enhance recruitment efforts resulting in a more equal representation of males and females serving on the board. When women are equally represented on local school boards, their strengths will influence policy decisions and reflect a more balanced viewpoint.

Background

To explore motivation for participation in schools or on school boards, it is important to consider the broader context of what constitutes participation and what factors influenced that participation. For example school activists seem to identify strongly with the community, but not all citizens in a community participate. Some community members do not perceive volunteering as their role. Family background and socialization do not seem to affect school participation differently for men versus women (Salisbury, 1980). Thus, other factors entered into women's decisions to become active in the schools.

Social psychological needs play an important role (for people who participate in politics). Aggregate measures of social contact, as well as characteristics of individual social interaction, influence the degree of political participation. In addition, social contexts (i.e. large vs. small, transitory vs. stable) have consequences for some forms of political participation such as running for local government (Leighly, 1990; Kenny, 1992), or by implication, school board membership. In general, social psychological needs can be identified through surveys and interviews, and through analysis, understood as influencing motivation for participation.

Women's perspectives informing existing theoretical frameworks are an outgrowth of feminist phase theory (Tetreault, 1985). Models of educational organization omitted gender and gender related issues (Belenky, 1986; Nowell, 1984). For related fields such as educational administration, the underlying belief system assumes that experiences of men and women are the same and results in the exclusion of women (Shakeshaft, 1981, 1988, 1989). However, women have an "ethic of care" that differs in focus and orientation from male experience. This observation suggests that women's motivation needs consideration from women's perspective. Interest and role obligations may differently shape women's actions and their motivation for political participation, impacted by a desire to relate to others. This "different voice" extends research based on behaviorist, social psychological, or rational choice perspectives (Gilligan, 1982; Belenky, 1986; Van derRos, 1987).

As the history on women evolves, a new emphasis on studying women on their terms is transforming our understanding and opening new possibilities for the future of women and school board service. It is not clear whether any research attempts focused on women and their motivation until the report, Women on School Boards, in 1974. The National School Boards Association polled 532 persons, 320 of whom were women. They found out the major reason women sought office was personal interest, with nine of every ten women choosing personal interest as one of the three most important factors for board service. Friends and neighbors were a primary influence on women, with one out of three seeking office for this reason. One out of

four women was motivated to seek office by other people who were already seated on the board. One of five reported that their families were a primary factor for running. Very few, only one out of ten women, sought office at the urging of school administrators. Most surprising is that only one of twenty women attributed motivation to a desire for political experience. These results pointed to further research needs in this area.

Differences in motivations may be best understood by focusing on relationships: women on boards with men, women with each other, women with children and women in community. A strong factor that may influence motivation in women relates to their perception and sense of community. Two out of three women reported community service as one of their top three reasons for seeking office (Women on School Boards, 1974). In 1986, Carol Tillman wrote a viewpoint editorial for the National School Boards Association Journal entitled "Reflections of a Former School Board Member." In this article she wrote: "my decision to run for the BOCES School Board was part of a firm belief in community service. I hoped to make a contribution and find a role for myself and, at this stage of my life, believed it was where I wanted to give time. It turned out to be everything I believed community service should be (Tillman, 1986, 11)." Community service may be perceived differently by different focus groups of women.

Women who serve on school boards are more likely to have a history of volunteer service to the schools related to their children's activities before running for

the board (Marshall & Heller, 1983). These women are likely to have been members of the local parent organization, room mothers, or active in their churches. Mothers who choose to stay home during school age years may be the women are perceived most likely to volunteer or even to run for the school board. The presence of school-age children encourages participation in local school districts (Jennings, 1979, Salisbury, 1980). There may be very little incentive for women to participate in school activities except from a child-centered motivation.

Many people view school board membership as a logical extension of being involved in the school system. The central purpose of this study was to explore women's motivation for this type of participation. This study explored the hypothesis that women in different stages of voluntary participation in education experienced distinct factors and motivation sources that either enhanced or inhibited participation. This exploration also considered the possibility that discriminating factors and motivation sources that either enhance or inhibit participation were the same for all focus group participants.

Methods

Sample

Four focus groups formed the basis of this study, with seven to ten women in each focus group. One group consisted of women who were presently serving on the Board of Education or who had served in the past. The second group consisted of women who had or were planning to run for the board but had not yet served. The

third group of women were room mothers, members of the Parent-Teacher Organization and other women who responded to requests for volunteers. The fourth group of women resided in the school system but did not volunteer in the schools.

Women were recruited to participate in this study through the local newspapers, personal contacts and both the Monroe and the Four County School Board Association. The churches and the Parent-Teacher Organization were also contacted for a list of women who were willing to be a part of this study. I had expected, wrongly, that I would have difficulty finding a group of women who do not volunteer in the schools. This was not the case. However, these women had fewer or no children than people who volunteered in schools. I contacted these women by telephone and followed up my invitation for them to participate in writing. Ten people were originally scheduled in each focus group. Nine women actually came to the active school board members group. Seven women came to the new or prospective school board members meeting. Interestingly enough, all ten members of the school volunteer group came to the focus group meeting. That was the only group that had ten women taking part. Three women did not show up for the community volunteer group. These three women who did not show up were from an ethnic minority group.

Design

Women were specifically asked within focus groups what factors acted as either motivators or barriers to decisions about participation. In-depth interviews were used to develop and validate themes emerging from the focus group experience.

Insights gained from interviews were used to develop an explanatory profile to predict what target groups of women would most likely run for board election if asked. The types of questions set forth in this study focused on how and why women participate in these activities. Since women easily shared subjective experiences in a group and in the individual interviews, insights emerged from an analysis of responses and interactions with other women.

This research took place in May and June of 1995. A deliberate decision was to use a neutral site to conduct the focus groups and the in-depth interviews. The reason for selecting a site off school property, a centrally located church, was to accommodate women who might not have been comfortable in a school setting. An off school site also tended to minimize class and status differences between and among women.

I brought small groups of women together to generate and stimulate discussion between and among women. This allowed for insights to emerge in a natural way. Women were able to build on insights offered by others. The questions asked defined women's perceptions of barriers and motivators to board service. The focus group interview questions are listed in Appendix A. Questions were standardized to the extent possible, but were somewhat modified for each group. For women who were not school volunteers or who had not made a decision to run for her local board, questions were framed in a hypothetical manner.

As the focus group developed, propositions developed. The procedures involved in focus group research allowed women to discuss their opinions and experiences without imposing a rigid framework on their responses. My role as a moderator and facilitator of the focus groups was to explain the purpose of the discussion, establish rapport between members of the group, ask questions and probe for explanations and further development of individual responses. As moderator of the focus group, I presented a question, elicited responses and allowed for interchange between individuals. My primary task as moderator was to keep the conversation centered around the research questions. Sometimes in a focus group questions generate insights that were not expected. I had to be flexible enough to ask a clarifying question or a question that generated more information. Since the sessions were taped, these unanticipated questions were recorded.

Respondents were assured that confidentiality would be maintained. Identifying references to specific situations or people were not used in the final study report. Thematic insights emerged from an analysis of personal data. Following the focus group meeting, one person volunteered for a follow-up in-depth interview. In order to avoid bias, I chose a person who reflected a balanced viewpoint and insight into the questions being asked. Questions for the in-depth interview were generated after the four focus group interviews were analyzed and summaries were completed.

Procedures

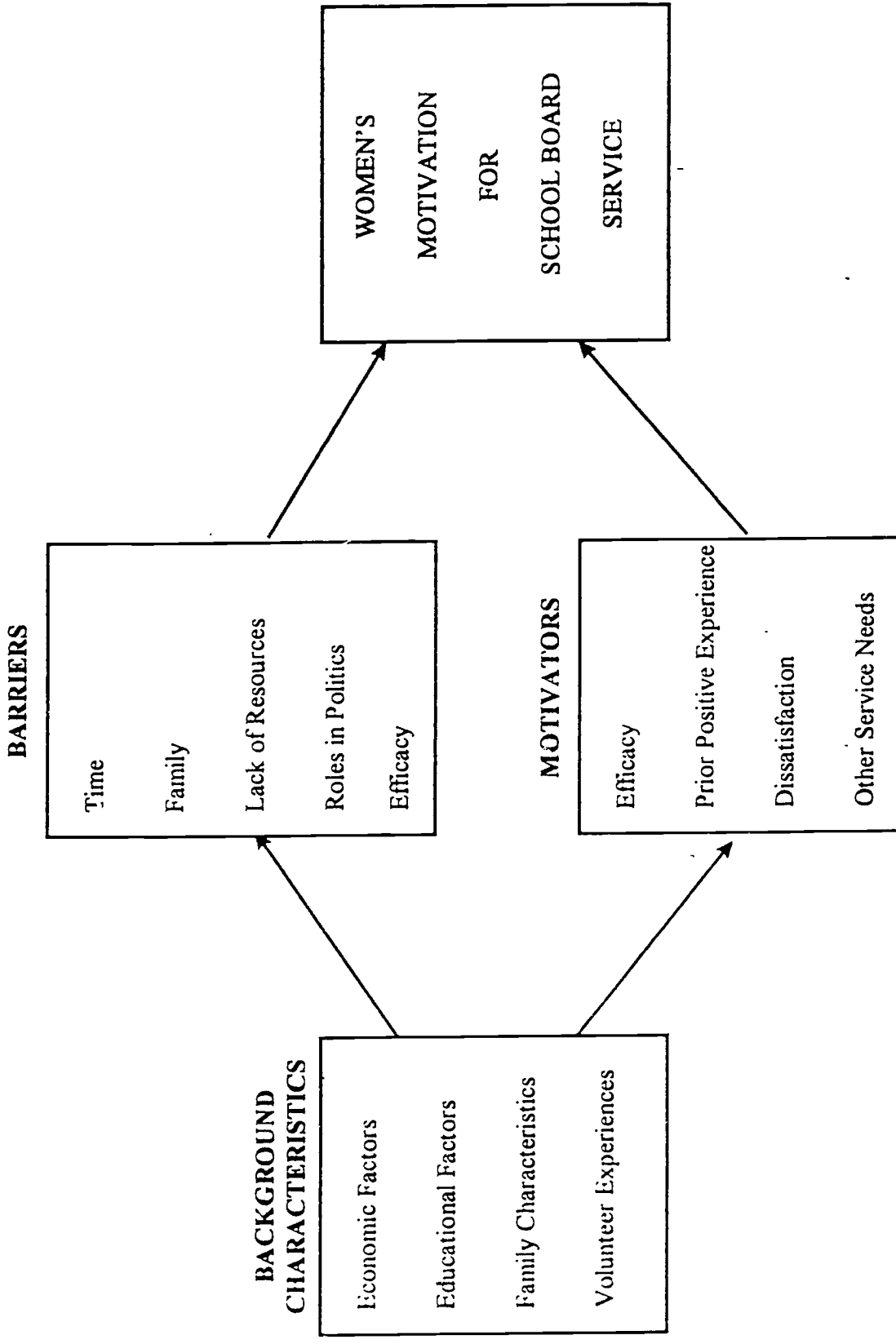
For each focus group, I set up a chart to provide the group with a structure to assess the forces facilitating volunteering and school board participation and the forces restraining or acting as barriers to participation. I drew a line down the middle of each page. On the left side of chart one, I elicited from the group all the forces acting as barriers to volunteering in the local school system. On the right side of the page, I listed all the forces acting as incentives for volunteering in the local school system. I then brainstormed with the group, both the driving forces for participation and the restraining forces for participation.

I repeated the exercise on chart two for the driving and restraining barriers and motivators for running for the local school board. The result of this process allowed themes to emerge that strengthened my conclusions as to why fewer women choose to volunteer in schools or participate on local Boards of Education. Once barriers and motivators were identified, questions were developed for the in-depth interviews of one participant from each focus group (Appendix B).

Analysis

From the brainstorming session, I coded themes that emerged. I used these themes to generate a second set of questions that were verified in a follow-up in-depth interview with one member of each focus group. Weighted factors acted as barriers or motivators to motivation for school board service. Some of these factors had links to classical, normative theories of political participation, and some of these links were

unique to women. Women had different personal interests that had an impact on their chosen level of voluntary participation. Motivation for participation was more complex than duty or obligation would suggest. The following schematic captured the ideas that were explored in this study. Factors emerged as a result of information received from the focus groups and the in-depth interviews of selected women from each focus group.



Results

I gathered background information from the four different focus groups in order to compare similarities and differences. Differences occurred in economic status, social context, personal interests, educational levels and family backgrounds. Figure 1 shows a comparison between the different focus groups for a number of background characteristics. The first column identifies the characteristic in question while the subsequent columns provide information for each of the four focus groups. The rows demonstrate characteristic comparisons. For example, in the second row participants median age range is compared. Subsequent discussion focuses on those differences which appear critically distinct.

Figure 1: Comparison of Background Characteristics by Group

Background Characteristic	Active or Past school board Members	New or Future school board Members	Volunteers in School Setting	Other Volunteers
Number participating	9 women from 8 districts	7 women from 7 districts	10 women from 4 districts	7 women from 3 districts
Median age range	45-54	35-44	35-44	45-54
Political perspective	67% moderate 22% conservative 11% liberal	71% moderate 29% liberal	100% moderate	57% moderate 35% liberal 29% none
Employment History	22% employed full-time away/ from home	29% employed full-time away/ from home	30 % employed full-time away/ from home	14% employed full-time away from home
Home Ownership	100 %	100%	100 %	57 %
Family Income (median range)	\$60-69,000	\$80-89,000	\$40-49,000	Under \$20,000
Educational Levels	11% HS Only 22% Some College 0% BA/BS Only 67% Post Graduate Experience	0% HS Only 14% Some College 14% BA/BS Only 72% Post Graduate Experience	20% HS Only 50% Some College 30% BA/BS Only 0% Post Graduate Experience	29% HS Only 57% Some College 14% BA/BS Only 0% Post Graduate Experience
Marital Status	89% married	100% married	100% married	57% married
Had Children attending school	56%	71%	100%	29%
Median time spent on volunteer activities	8 -10 hours	15-20 hours per week	7 hours per week	10-15 hours per week
Median length of time in district	32 years	14 years	15 years	25 years

Economic and educational issues. Differences emerged in both family income and educational background for the four groups. The average income of the active and prospective school board women appeared to be higher than the average income of the school and community volunteers. Four of the women in these two groups had

family incomes over \$100,000. Only two women in these two groups reported incomes less than \$30,000. However, in the school and community volunteers groups only one woman reported an income over \$100,000. Four women in these two groups reported incomes less than \$30,000. Similarly, two of the community volunteers were retired and one reported being on public assistance. This pattern suggests that socioeconomic status has an impact on who will run for the board. This exploratory conclusion is also substantiated by previous surveys on the characteristics of women who run for school boards (Marshall & Heller, 1983).

Another difference shown in Figure 1 is in the educational levels between the different groups. While all the women had completed high school, most of the women in the active and prospective board member groups had completed four years of college. Three of the women in these two groups had some college, and only one active board member had ended her education following high school graduation. On the other hand, school and community volunteers had somewhat less educational training. Only four women in these two groups had finished college. Four women had completed high school, and nine women reported some college training. This pattern suggests that women who are well educated may be more likely to seek board membership. This is also substantiated by the work of Marshall and Heller (1983).

Finally, many of the women who served on the board either worked part-time or had no employment apart from their home. In addition, except for three community volunteers, all the women in the four focus groups owned their own home. Home

ownership appeared to be a factor for school board membership and volunteering in school. Similarly, women seemed more likely to run for the board if they had lived in the district for a long time. Because of their community experience, these women may have felt more valued as full participants in decision making. Community service appeared more as a consequence of being on the board rather than a precursor to running for the board.

Family issues. Another consideration was whether family issues were associated with participation. Twenty-nine married women, one single active school board member and three separated or divorced women participated in these four focus groups. No pattern existed as to birth order. The majority of the participants were married with children. However, not all women in the active or prospective board members focus group had children attending school. This pattern also held true for the community volunteers, but not for the school volunteers. All the school volunteers had children attending school. This result agrees with the research suggesting that having children in school is a motivation for volunteering in the schools (Salisbury, 1980). More of the women in the active and prospective school board member's group had older children, some of whom were out of school.

Volunteer experiences. An assumption made at the beginning of the study was that women who decided to run for their local Board of Education were prepared due to previous volunteer activities. While all of these women were volunteers, whether in the community or in the school, the median time spent on volunteer activities varied somewhat (see row 10 in Figure 1). Every one of the active and new or prospective

board women talked about current areas of volunteerism. In the follow-up interviews, each woman thought previous volunteer experience prepared her for the board. A former school board member went even farther in her analysis of previous volunteer experience, saying:

I think it's very important that one had served on boards. If someone was to be a member of a school board without previous experience in how boards operate, you are at a distinct disadvantage. And you can tell. You can tell when someone comes in with a misunderstanding as to what the role of a school board member is. Those are usually the people who are under the impression that they are going to have the power and authority to fix something the day after they take office. I think previous board experience and just the culture of boards and the nature of them is invaluable.

Regular volunteer activities were seen by these women as valuable in building confidence and relationships. Leadership activities in volunteer situations also seemed to prepare these women to speak in front of groups and contribute their opinions and ideas.

Except for some of the community volunteers, all the women in the four focus groups had helped in the classroom in some way. Many had been room mothers and had done various projects for all grade levels. Some of these women also reported volunteering in church-related activities. All volunteered in helping professions. As previously stated, prior volunteer activities seemed to prepare women to make the leap to board service suggesting that volunteering was cumulative. Women may have gained knowledge and understanding of the school system when their children were

younger, but this might not have been the best time for them to run for the school board because of the responsibilities that they had with young children at home.

Active and new or prospective board members reported more leadership positions than school volunteers. More of these women had served on Boards of Directors, sat as officers in a volunteer organization, or had taken an active leadership role in different committees. Some of the active school board members also reported leadership positions in community groups. Only a few of the school volunteers reported having held leadership positions. For example, one of the school volunteers was the PTA president. Three of the women in this group were on school planning teams or Committee on Special Education Teams. Only one of the community volunteers reported that she had a leadership position in her volunteer group.

If one looks at volunteering differences as reflecting stages, the transition point from volunteer activities to school board service seemed to have taken place during the school volunteer years. Those who took leadership positions appeared to run for the board more frequently. Women with only school volunteer experience reported having made a decision to run based on the cumulative experiences encountered in the school system. Stability, especially the length of time lived in the district, appeared to contribute to this cumulative experience of volunteering.

Summary. Important sources of differences between the groups appear in income levels, age and employment patterns. Based on the information gathered for this study, women who were on the Board of Education were on average older than women who volunteered in schools, while community volunteers were representative

of all age groups. Home ownership and higher levels of income also appeared more prevalent among board members. The differences in employment history of active and new board women suggested that part-time employment may alleviate some of the difficulties associated with barriers to volunteering, in that women who volunteered were less likely to be employed full-time. In general, differences in backgrounds appeared as anticipated. Women who worked full time were more likely to volunteer in the school setting but were less likely to run for the Board. As expected, some of these differences were expressed as barriers for volunteering in the schools.

Barriers

The perception and definition of a barrier revealed some inconsistencies between focus groups. What one focus group perceived as a barrier was not always perceived as a barrier by another focus group. Barriers that were identified during the focus group sessions and in the follow-up interviews touched on many different themes. Themes noted during the brainstorming sessions are clustered together in Figure 2.

Many of the barriers identified by these women as to why someone might not want to volunteer in schools or on the school board related to their perceptions of economic, social, personal and family issues. In addition, beliefs and values women held about themselves or others appeared to create barriers to participation. These barriers contributed to women's decision making regarding volunteering in the schools, or board participation.

Figure 2 shows a comparison of different barriers for the focus groups. Each group discussed barriers and then each member of the group ranked the barriers from one (strongest) to five (weakest). Using the average rank from each group, I constructed an overarching order of the barriers mentioned. The first number provided in each column shows the position of that barrier relating to volunteering in school for that group. The second number shows the ordering relating to running for the school board. If a barrier was not mentioned by a group, a * is used. For example, efficacy issues (row 1) were the strongest barrier for volunteering in school among active board members. This barrier was third strongest among prospective board members, was not mentioned among school volunteers, and was fifth among community volunteers.

Figure 2: Comparison of barriers to volunteering by groups. The first weighting is for volunteering in school. The second weighting is for volunteering for the school board.

Barrier Characteristic	Active or Past school board Members	New or Prospective school board Members	School Volunteers	Community Volunteers
Efficacy Issues, Having Something to Contribute	1, *	3, *	*, 7	5, 2
Lack of Time	2, 1	1, 1	1, 2	1, 3
Resentment from others or not Feeling Welcome	3, 5	*, *	3, 5	5, *
Traditional Roles	4, 7		0, *	0, *
Fear of students or Bad Experiences in School	5, 4	4, 4	5, *	3, 1
Lack of Family Support	6, 2	*, 2	7, *	8, 8
Philosophical Differences, Lack of Knowledge or Feeling Inadequate	7, *	2, 3	4, 1	*, 2
No Children in School		5, 6		4, *
Different Priorities		6, 5	2, *	2, 5
Lack of Resources		0, *	6, 6	6, 4
Conflict of Interest or Politics	*, *	0, *	*, 8	*, 9
Personal Handicaps		*, 0	9, 9	7, 7
Age				*, 6

* This issue was discussed in the interview or brainstorming session, but did not emerge in the top categories identified as barriers for volunteering for this group.

Time and family issues. A perceived lack of time to be on the board was a major factor in all four focus groups. Although this concern was not enough to keep current or new members from wanting to serve on the board, a perceived lack of time emerged as a major barrier even among active school board members. For example, these women all discussed a variety of experiences they needed to prioritize to make time for school board service. Often, the time involved was more than the women had anticipated. One said:

I do not know if my experience was typical. When I applied for an opening on the school board, I was told two meetings a month. They lied. Very simply, they lied. During the seven years I worked on a school board, it was never two meetings a month.

Often when someone decides to engage in an activity such as school board service, the amount of time the new experience will actually take may be misjudged. This woman and others reported feeling that they did not adequately perceive the demands on their time.

However, time constraints were certainly considered by these women before they ran for the board. A former school board member summarized the time issue:

I think you would have to definitely make sure that you had the appropriate amount of time for the process of the decision. There is the election you have to go through and everything else, but if you do not have time to participate in any of the election functioning, then you probably are not going to have time for the school board, if you get on and elected, and stuff.

These women had made the decision to place priority on volunteering in the schools, but recognized that this could not always be the case.

In general, many women in the four groups mentioned the lack of time as a major barrier to running for the Board of Education. One stated:

I have always been out nights for meetings -- always been extremely busy, more so than anybody else I know, in terms of community service, and volunteer work. I think that this is a dilly, in terms of the time commitment, and it isn't just being out of the house. ...I have already read what would fill a whole file drawer. Every Friday we receive information from the district office....It's going to be probably the largest time commitment, in terms of volunteer work....I feel a pressure there that is beyond any other situation that I have been in as a volunteer.

In most instances, women recognized time constraints, but they made decisions in accordance with the pressure they felt to volunteer and to contribute.

A lack of family support or the extra burdens involved with caring for small children emerged as a related issue in this area. One woman suggested that, if you are a woman with children, caring for young children is definitely very, very difficult. She said:

But in general, I think maybe you have to wait until you have the time or for me because my family has always been a main focus, a main priority. To think that I would give this kind of time consistently any earlier than now, would be a problem for me. And even as it is, my youngest is going to be in 10th grade and I know now after one month, that may be more negative than I thought.

These women all tended to put their families first. They recognized the impact of the time they needed to be away from their families.

It was interesting to note that, despite evidence to the contrary, new or prospective board women felt that not having children in school might keep someone from running for the board. They questioned whether one would have the right

enthusiasm for making the decisions for children if you did not have children in school. This conflict posed a dilemma. Some felt that caring for young children gave them the motivation to advocate for their children. However, taking care of young children was a definite barrier due to time commitments. School volunteers readily referred to the lack of time necessary to volunteer in the schools. One woman said:

It takes two years to make a plan and to see it start--not even to finish it -- to see it start. Where I live, my two year goal was to get youth organizations or something going on in town. We have nothing for older kids. It's a crime to see the kids on the streets and it took me two years working with the town, the school district, and finally the Y. And doing latch key programs for older kids and things, but it takes two years just to get started.

These women recognized the need to volunteer their time to establish good things for the children in the community, but did not always see how they could contribute time away from caring for their children.

One strong theme I noticed in these sessions was that these women all expressed a desire to do things right. If something takes two years to plan, planning impacted their decision making. They did not seem comfortable painting a picture with broad brush strokes. They recognized the importance of allowing time for the details, and looked at the whole picture in detail. For example some of the women recognized that family responsibilities were too heavy at certain times in their lives. They were concerned about nurturing their families and attending to the needs of their families. One said:

I think with a woman it is her family. You know you have to take classes, whether it be in Albany, or county wide. You have to have meetings. You have sessions. There is background that you have to

learn. You have to learn your parts-Part 100, Part 200 (*Commissioner's Regulations*). You have to get a background in all that. So I think that takes a lot of time to do it and understand it well yourself, unless you are somebody who is really quick with things like that. I am not. So that would be hard. I would have to take a lot of time from my family. That's something I do not like to do.

She realized that in order for her to feel fully prepared for board service, she needed to take time away from her family to learn about the details of education. This might take time away from attending to the details of her family.

In general, volunteer experiences emulated aspects of board service, but many women still felt that more time would be needed on the board than in their interest areas. One woman said:

If you have to go to Albany, you are talking overnight trips. If you are talking meetings, I have got three children and I'm out maybe three nights a week now, and now looking at four, possibly five nights depending on what week or what's going on. Different activities that the board might be sponsoring and you have to have some response for help with this. Even just planning. This would be taking you away from reading or doing something constructive, especially when you work full-time.

This observation assumes more meaning when recalling (from Figure 1) how few full-time women board members work full-time. The amount of time a woman demands of herself in performing her duties as a school board member could be the reason that she is more likely to work part-time or not at all.

Time was considered a major barrier to volunteering in the schools, and was heavily weighted by all groups of women. These women hesitated to volunteer if they

could not give the school quality time. Lack of family support loomed as a barrier for women who wished to extend themselves beyond the family.

Lack of resources. Practical reasons, such as lack of transportation and personal handicaps, also emerged which could keep women from volunteering such as lack of transportation and personal handicaps. One could have physical disabilities that sap energy or leave one without the necessary stamina to be on the board. Lack of resources made volunteering difficult. Some of these women reported that a personal lack of resources was a barrier to running for the board because of the necessity of running a political campaign. Prospective board members often promoted themselves and paid for their own campaign. Recall that women who were affluent were also more likely to run for the board. If board service must in this way be "paid for," women of more limited means may be intimidated from running.

Political and role barriers. Board service was perceived by school volunteers as a thankless, political job with no reward. In the words of one volunteer: "I think about politics too. Sometimes the politics is too overwhelming." These women resisted putting up with the political frustration that they felt was at the board level.

Another woman stated:

Politics, I think is a barrier. I am not a political person. I hate playing political games. I hate being nice to a person because they are the town supervisor. I hate politics and I get very angry when I see...and things like that -- all this political stuff. So I think that's a barrier because then you are just giving job to someone who may not deserve it. They certainly may not know what they are doing.

One woman felt that a major barrier was "putting up with the crap" that goes on in a school system. These women tended to be more task-centered than focused on getting ahead. This focus negatively affected their perception of people who used politics as a way to achieve personal recognition and be successful in local government. These women may have felt intimidated by their perception of the political situation.

It was also interesting that one group identified a legal barrier to board service. A woman who is employed by the district cannot be on the school board, which is perceived as a barrier to women who taught or worked in their own district. If they lived in a different district, no legal barrier conflicted with their motivation for board service. However, these women could not participate on the board of the district with which they had the most familiarity.

Active school board members recognized the influence of traditional male and female roles. This group reported feeling that many women would not attempt to serve on the board because they generally believed the stereotypes about traditional roles. Some women hypothesized that women might feel that they were not knowledgeable enough or did not have enough information to be on the board. One woman talked about the intimidation factor and how that affected her.

Something else I find is the intimidation factor. Many parents are intimidated if the teacher does not come around and say, please help me....But you have got parents who don't volunteer because of the...you don't feel comfortable asking the principal and saying well, I should be allowed in here to do this. So I think a lot of parents are intimidated and do not find that they volunteer as often.

If women are not made to feel comfortable in their role as a volunteer in the school setting they are not likely to run for the board. Other, less stressful, volunteer opportunities may appear more attractive.

Efficacy. The category of personal efficacy, or the feeling of not having something to contribute, was noted as a barrier to volunteering in all groups. Women felt that, if their contribution was not valued, they would not want to volunteer. Reports falling into this category included not feeling welcome, feeling a lack of respect for what volunteers do in the school, and perceived opposition to their presence. In general, if women in their role as volunteers felt unwelcome, they hesitated to volunteer.

In addition, some women talked about the resentment school personnel felt toward them, particularly relating to a concern that their contributions would cause difficulty in their relationships with school personnel. One woman stated:

There's some resentment, I think, on the part of the teaching staff {being} not necessarily willing to work with the volunteers... I thought it was really so unfortunate because it's supposed to be a coalition. It's supposed to be working together.

These women recognized, and were sensitive to, feelings of not being included or welcome. In a context of not feeling welcome, relationships assumed a greater importance than growth as individuals.

Many women also felt that a perception of differences and conflicts would keep women from volunteering in the school system. Several women concurred with the statement:

I think staff can be a barrier. I mean it's the same kind of thing. I think that some staff really do not want volunteers in the building.

In one of our buildings, the administration is the barrier. He really does not want them (volunteers), even though he is not getting much of a choice. He wants to pick and choose where they go.

The establishment, specifically the administration and staff in the schools, was often cited as obstructing involvement in the schools. Some women were able to see this obstruction as a challenge, while others were threatened by their perceptions or feelings of not being welcome in the schools. This issue was expressed in different ways such as a fear of the election process, feeling intimidated, age (either too old or too young), and a fear of the work that is involved in serving on the board.

Frustration due to upsetting experiences in school was also seen as a major barrier.

My feeling has always been that even as a teacher I notice that when I made things clear for my students, participation was unbelievable, that when you make things very vague and when you say we're going to have shared decisions, but then we put parameters around it and we say you cannot touch this or that, people do not volunteer....People get frustrated and say "I do not want to waste my time in this area".

It is important to recognize how negative experiences in school affect people. Often the feelings associated with these negative experiences start early in the volunteer experience and impact decisions to participate more fully in the school setting.

In general, perceptions of rejection or of conflict would keep some capable women from running. Perceived changes in society impact decisions. The feeling that there were more difficult students to handle even to the point of causing fear for physical safety was perceived as a barrier. For example, one woman said:

Another thing is we have a whole different type of student than we had before. I know a lot of the older people in our community do not want to volunteer because of that. They said they would not have the patience if the students need some help, with the lack of respect that they show. Different type of student, lack of respect.

Women can be afraid of the students presently in our schools. If they feel this fear, and cannot move beyond their perceptions, they may be unwilling to volunteer in the schools.

Women in these focus groups also recognized that some women would not have enough personal interest in education to volunteer in the school system. A lack of confidence or low self esteem was also perceived as a major barrier for volunteering in the schools or running for the board. Women with low self esteem or feelings of their own effectiveness were often intimidated. Perceptions of a personal lack of experience and knowledge acted as deterrents to board service. The active and new board members agreed that intimidation was a barrier. The difference seemed to be the lack of willingness on their part to be dissuaded from service.

I think it takes an amount of risk taking or bravery because I did not necessarily want to run. I was just curious. It would have been kind of frightening if I really happened to be think about it and just go in there with the full intentions and then hearing the stories from the people who are school board members...and I think everybody was a little bit scared to a certain extent.

For this woman and others who serve, self esteem was strong enough to resist feelings of lack of effectiveness or not being able to make a difference.

Perceived inadequacies connected with personal efficacy issues seemed to result in barriers for volunteer service. One woman stated:

It's all a learning process. Before you can go to the school board point, you must go through the entire process of volunteering, in the committee, the town, the schools, whatever it is, and then you can get to the point. Learn the politics. Do not get thrown into the lion's den. All of a sudden, there you are.

This group of women seemed to feel that, if women have a lack of knowledge of what is going on due to fear or poor communication, they will be less likely to volunteer or feel that they have anything of value to contribute to the process. This sentiment was expressed in different ways such as conflict with administration, not feeling welcome, lack of experience and lack of knowledge. Fear of not being welcome or not being able to understand what was going on was a similar theme across the four focus groups.

Summary. Time is a relative concept. Women appear overextended possibly as a result of self-imposed priorities. Often these priorities conflict with family issues and the amount of support their family is willing or able to provide. These perceptions seem to relate to women's understandings of traditional roles. In the traditional role concept, women's expectations are to take care of their family and meet the needs of their family. Women allow themselves to extend and grow beyond their family only if they perceive the needs of their family met.

It was interesting that poverty concerns would keep women from the schools, but not necessarily from volunteering in the community. Affluence related to the amount of education reported by the different focus groups of women. The perceived lack of resources emerged as a major barrier to board service.

Many women in the four focus groups reported a feeling from the schools of not being needed or wanted. It was not surprising that efficacy issues contributed to decision making concerning volunteering and serving on the school board. What was intriguing was the fear and unwillingness to deal with the conflict that women perceived to be part of the school system. It took a certain degree of courage to move beyond that fear and volunteer. These philosophical differences related to a lack of knowledge or feelings of inadequacy. Analysts often discount social dynamics and esteem issues when looking at factors leading to non-participation. Women attach importance to these feelings. Carol Gilligan (1982) recognizes the importance of relationships and the impact these relationships have on a woman's experience. The social context in which women find themselves shapes their experiences and motivation (Lerner, 1979; Nicholson, 1986; Abowitz, 1990). The study of women and their experiences acknowledges the subjective experiences that are part of their social construction of reality. This research on women developed out of personal experiences, explored and legitimized from women's perspectives (Shakeshaft, 1981). Inadequacy issues extend beyond the scope of the present study and need fuller exploration.

Motivation

Thirty-three women in four different focus groups reported many different sources of motivation for volunteering for their local school system or their school board. Community volunteers as a group generated the fewest reasons for why

anyone would want to volunteer for school board service. All the women expressed an awareness of what it is that motivates women to volunteer. Discriminating factors such as beliefs, values, time, resources, social context, social interaction and personal interests appeared to influence the motivation for school board service. These factors related to perceptions from different focus groups. More similarities were noted than differences. Members from all four groups worked together to identify incentives for board service. Many items identified in both focus group and in-depth interviews related to personal efficacy issues.

Some women in these focus groups said that nothing would motivate them to run for the school board. One woman wrote: "It would motivate me if I thought I would be able to help. The prospect of bickering, dealing with dull policies, being held away from the actual workers, and not being allowed to advocate would keep me from running." She and others saw board service as a negative experience

The major theme found in all four focus groups exploring why women would volunteer in their schools was that of making a difference. The perception of making a difference related to feeling a sense of accomplishment. Community service, while discussed in all four groups only received a high weighting from the community members focus group. Except for the new or prospective board member groups, women mentioned having the time to participate in a positive sense. Time restraints were very much on the minds of new board members. Figure 3 provides a visual

representation of the similarities and differences of motivation across the four focus groups.

Figure 3, like Figure 2, compares the different focus groups using a system of rankings. However, in this case group members ranked motivators rather than barriers. As before, average ranking provides the order of importance for each group. Similarly, the two numbers in each column reflect motivation for volunteering on the school board, respectively.

Figure 3: Comparison of incentives for volunteering by groups. The first weighting is for volunteering in school. The second weighting is for volunteering for the school board.

Motivation Characteristic	Active or Past school board Members	New or Prospective school board Members	School Volunteers	Community Volunteers
Efficacy Issues, Having Something to Contribute	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,1
Wanting to Know What is Going On	2,*	2,*	2,7	7,
Personal Needs and Growth	3,*	*4	8,*	8,2
Family Support	4,2		3,*	*6
Community Service	5,6	4,*	6,*	1,3
Having Time	6,4			3
Political or Personal Advancement	*3	5,6	5,8	
Personal Agenda	*5	*5	*4	4,5
Advocating for Children, Teachers and Administration	**	3,2	**	5,4
Power and Desire to Set Policy	0,*	*3		0,*
Setting Example for Others			*2	
Dissatisfaction with Status Quo	**	**	*5	0,*
Previous Background in Educational or Volunteer Service	0,*	0,*	*6	
Care and Concern about what is Happening in Schools	**	**	4,3	6,*

* This issue was discussed in the interviews or brainstorming session did not emerge in the top categories identified on incentives for volunteering in this group.

Efficacy. As was observed earlier in the discussion of barriers, women reported that it was important to feel welcome in the schools and many of their reasons for volunteering related to personal efficacy, feeling a sense of accomplishment and feeling welcome. One said:

I remember volunteering because I could volunteer in a first-grade classroom and actually be responsible for teaching reading to kids, and I had taught first grade.

Women who feel that they are achieving something visible because of the time they spend in the classroom reported a greater sense of personal efficacy.

A major reason women reported volunteering was to make a difference in the schools. They reported needing to be part of ensuring a quality education for the future. They also felt that wanting to know what was going on in the schools was a motivation for volunteering. They wanted to know the teachers, curriculum, and the inner workings of the school. In general, personal needs as well as personal satisfaction accumulated heavy weightings in determining motivation for volunteering in the schools. Women felt that being recognized as a volunteer would be an incentive for increasing their level of volunteer service.

In addition, personal interest in children and the perception that their service was making a difference seemed to support these women in continuing volunteer activity. Women also felt that understanding the system encourages volunteering. One said:

We have a district-wide planning team and everybody from kindergarten teachers to superintendent and parents and principals and everybody in the whole district sits there and talks over issues every

month. We get reports back from the building planning teams....It's been a real experience, the only place I have ever been where all of these people sit down together and essentially on an equal basis, talk over whatever it is that's bugging you. We have charts. We talk about things. We did a thing on what was wrong with retention of children, why you would not want to hold them back. I think it's been a very rewarding experience. I am leaving it now because I am going to the board.

Women such as this one felt that her service was of value. Perception of value would be dependent on the communication received from the school.

Some of the women felt they received good communication from their particular school. This was not the case for all the participants. One stated:

I think there should be a process to the communication....I am not going to feel good making a decision unless I have gone and gotten all sides and have followed a process. If I make a decision that people do not agree with, I'm going to feel OK about it as long as I have taken the correct avenue and followed the process. People need to be afforded the opportunity within a reasonable amount of time to understand what is going on in school and to be able to respond to it. So I hope I can help in that process.

Women in these focus groups expected school officials to communicate with them. When they did not receive information or received inadequate information, they did not feel welcome. Women who felt that their participation would make a difference and who felt welcome by some faction of the community were more likely to run for the board. Having and recognizing special talents or skills motivated women to participate.

One woman thought that her experience as a mother prepared her for everything. She talked about dealing with the cuts and the bruises associated with

running a household. Dealing with the ups and downs prepared her to cope with local government. She stated:

Being a school board member was a natural progression for me because I have been a volunteer in the school district for so many years, right from the time my son started kindergarten, at least fifteen years. And it was not just through PTA, but also a lot of it through AAUW and a lot of educational work in that regard. It seemed like a normal leap for me. Did it prepare me? Yes, very much so, in terms of what the community knows about me and the kind of input I have had. So there is extra pressure because I think the community perceives me as a person who likes to take on something and do a good job on it -- very much child-centered.

Many of these women wanted to make changes and had the self esteem needed to make those changes. Perceptions of others in the community influenced decisions for participation.

Previous volunteer or educational experience. There was a perception from active board members that volunteer experience prepares one for the Board of Education. Previous volunteer experience, it was felt, may give women the confidence that they need to run for the board. This sentiment suggests that volunteer experience may be cumulative for women.

Previous volunteer experience also was a theme in the active board focus group even though it did not emerge in the brainstorming session. A common theme voiced by participants communicated that: "I ran for the school board because I have been involved in PTA and it is just a natural next step." Women perceived volunteer activities as valuable because of the time, effort, energy and emotion that these consumed.

Active school board members suggested an interest and background in education as a personal motivating factor for running for the board. The women did not feel that it was that important to have this background or knowledge in education.

One woman stated:

It is an interesting question (*background in education or volunteer experience*) because my background is in education and I cannot divorce myself from it. But what I found was I was convinced that I was an experienced teacher and had been involved with school activities and volunteering through the school system and union activities as well. I thought I was quite knowledgeable, and what I discovered was that my perspective was narrow, and so certainly it would be an advantage but one is not as knowledgeable about district-wide activities as you think you are when you are getting involved. That was my biggest surprise, that I was not as knowledgeable as I thought.

Another woman suggested that the combination of business and education was important. She said:

I think if you have never spent any time in a school building, or talking with teachers, or understanding what it is that teachers do, it would be very difficult for you to have the kind of insight that you need, even though the business background and all that is so important in the process. The combination of the two is what is vital. I felt that my having just completed a master's degree a few years ago in education was a real plus. And the people in the community saw that as a real plus. I put it very high up on my list when I did an ad in the newspaper. That's one of the first things that I put in the advertisement, that I had an MS in education.

Having an educational background may give some women the confidence they need to grow beyond volunteering in the school and seeking a position on the Board of Education.

Some of the women in the active and new school board member's groups communicated an involvement in education all of their adult life. One woman had been in education for twenty-five years. She felt very strongly that education had declined and the focus was not on academics. Because she had been in education, she felt qualified to run for the board. In fact, having the background and qualifications associated with volunteer or educational experience tendered different reactions from women in the four focus groups. They disagreed whether future board members needed this type of experience. Volunteer experience appeared helpful. One stated:

I think previous volunteer experience got me prepared, ready to go on the board...When I first started out volunteering I didn't have confidence and I can see the gradual changes...I developed a confidence now where I can stand in front of a group with peers, and now I think I can stand up with educators and say OK. I'm not an educator, but I think my thoughts count and I do have something to contribute...I think you have to have people on the school board who are familiar with education to guide you, because there are things we do not know about education. But I think anybody who has a willingness to better the community and the education system can work on a school board. I have virtually no background in education and I think I could do a good job. I think that's a misconception that you need to be employed with a school or have an educational background to be an efficient board member.

The real issue does not seem to be having a background in education or not having that background. It really is about confidence gained in social interactions through volunteering. Cumulative positive experiences in volunteering can compensate for the lack of an educational background.

Dissatisfaction as motivation. Having previous volunteer experience may give women the feeling that they can do the job, but many factors complicate the

relationship between volunteers and the school system. For example, positive experiences may not always be as important as negative experiences as a motivation for service. However, given the earlier discussion of barriers, I think that high confidence and self esteem levels would need to be in place for negative experiences to be motivating factors for participation.

One of the stronger motivations for running seems to be a dissatisfaction with what is happening in the schools. The feeling reported was that, if things were going well, there might not be any reason to become involved. Concerns or issues that motivated women to run for the school board varied. Two of the women recognized a need for more women in leadership roles in the school system. Motivation for running in this area came from problems in the district such as equity issues, problems with administration and perceived imbalance within the system.

Personal agendas, such as too much emphasis on competitive sports, not enough on gifted and talented, costs, and searching for a new superintendent, were also important. Most women thought that the situations were unique to their district. They talked of things that have fallen apart, and about how unhappy they were with the way things were going. This dissatisfaction, along with a perception that the current board members were handling major things that were going wrong, motivated some women to become involved.

Another woman cited her personal agenda as a parent as her major motivation for running for the board saying:

Mine was accountability. My daughter. She is in the seventh grade and has had a straight A grade ever since kindergarten. She gets in the seventh grade. She has a seventh grade science teacher who gave her a 62. There are no books for her to study from. She got little pamphlets, three a day, whether she filled them out or not he did not care. ...It got my concern and I said, well enough is enough. I went to all her other classes too and sat in on some of them. I just watched from the hall on the other ones, and all these other teachers had control of these children except for him. So then I brought it up to the principal. He says, well, let me see what I can do. Well, nothing was done. I did not get a phone call so then...

This woman expressed frustration with the lack of communication from the school.

She realized that change depended on her involvement. The impact of her involvement, she felt, would help all children.

Frustration and dissatisfaction with the "status quo" seemed to be an interesting factor to explore with four representatives of the different focus groups. A major motivation for women to take action appeared in feelings of being upset and frustrated with what was happening in the schools. Something needed changing and only if they participated would they have a chance of changing whatever it is. One woman stated:

I just think that the motivating factor for a lot of women is basically anger and frustration when they finally do run for a school board, because they are afraid that their children are not going to get what they think they should have, or what they felt they had.

I have thought of going on the school board, more of anger and frustration. I do not have the time to do that, but I am tired of being told my taxes will be this and my kids cannot have textbooks because of this reason, and I want to find out why. What are we doing wrong that the system is not working properly. I do not really want to be there, but the answers I am getting are not justifying the results.

The women in all four groups tended to confirm my conclusion that one of the strongest motivations for running for school board would be dissatisfaction with what is happening in the schools. A former school board member put it this way:

My perception is that more people run to fix something. More people run with an agenda than not. It's the situation where if everything is all right, than the people in charge are doing just fine...If everything is OK and the people in charge of the school board or the school administration are doing a good job, why mess with it? Because most people do not have additional time to give away... It is the people with an agenda of one sort or another who are going to get out and do something.

Women from the other groups generally agreed with her perception. Running from a dissatisfied viewpoint might not be best. However, we cannot deny the reality of this motivation.

An additional point of interest appeared in the frustration differences between the active school board members and the new or prospective school board members. Although active school board members talked about agendas motivating people, they did not display the depth of frustration that new or prospective board members expressed. Instead they reported satisfaction from what they were doing in the schools. On the other hand, new or prospective school board members expressed anger and disillusionment at what they perceived to be wrong in the schools. One said:

I have been in this (education) for twenty-five years and I have seen the educational system going downward and downward because we have done more. We have given so many different types of programs for kids and the focus is not on academics. I do agree with having a balance with sports but I think there are other ways of paying for sports, other than through taxpayer's money.

This woman's perceptions were those of an outsider. She implied that change would happen if she became more involved. Active school board members sensed the reality and complexity of the schools. Serving on the board for a time might change or alter a new board woman's perceptions.

Many of these women expressed similar frustration of not being in the inner circle. They felt that they received a certain amount of recognition because they volunteered in the schools:

When you are not on the board, there is some frustration when you attend board meetings and you ask a question, and it's like you do not exist...They always recognize me. I was president of the PTO for three years. I have done a lot of service for the school district, and I was always recognized. I always asked my question and I never once got a response. A typical example. We have no tolerance for sexual harassment. That's our policy--absolutely no tolerance. Last year during football one of our players on the senior football team took his penis out and laid it on a girl's shoulder in the cafeteria. He was not suspended. He was not reprimanded. Her parents were told when they came to the school that their daughter would be a social outcast if they made a big issue out of this. So I said to the board, why do we have this policy?

Her motivation for running for the board stemmed from a need to be part of the inner circle. In her view, she needed to fix the problems within the school. The only way she saw, which would help, involved participation on the board, thus being a part of the inner circle.

Community service. Representatives of all four focus groups reported that getting things done was a part of community service. They felt that they accomplished

something through their service or helped others. The following comment came from the representative from the community focus group:

I like to feel like I am helping and my community service has a number of interpersonal and intrapersonal benefits for me. In the past, I have learned through my community service that it can be definitely a rewarding experience because the times that I have felt that I have helped either individuals or agencies or fulfilled a need in some way or accomplished something. That was more satisfactory than some of the things I have been paid to do. And the things that I felt like it was just a waste of my time that I was just being used as a pawn because of my economic or my sex status or something else like that. That really was not too beneficial.

In general, community volunteers were more likely to talk about the personal satisfaction they received from volunteering. Fulfillment of their needs came from volunteering. This is somewhat different from school volunteers who often volunteered to complete tasks in their children's school.

On the other hand, school volunteers did not speak of volunteering in the schools as community service. They reported that they received satisfaction from helping children and teachers, and they tended to focus more on the projects that needed attention in the school system. One woman said:

I had decided, although I do not think it was a conscious decision. But as it got to be a possibility that there was time for volunteers and because when the children are small there really is not... I found myself focusing in on volunteer work in the immediate community. We live in the village. You can walk to anything in the village of _____. So it was church activities, and I found myself president of the organization and the library and it just seemed to be a natural progression. My interest, my background and my activities, zeroed in on those things that impacted on the children... You ought to give back, and these were the areas that seemed appropriate to me.

Prospective board members did not recognize what they were doing as community service until they had more perspective and were on the board. Community service was more a consequence of their involvement. It did not seem to be a primary motivation.

Focus group members all recognized community service as a facilitating factor for women to volunteer for the school board. They wanted to make a difference for the "betterment of society." Judgment whether community service would be a strong motivation in someone's decision to run for the board divided the women. One school volunteer, in looking at her school board, did not feel that the people on the board did much in the way of community service. She stated:

I look at the school board now -- our district, and I look at the members that are on the school board. I say most of them do not do outside community service. If they do, it's nothing that's really public. Maybe one or two of them might be on the Lioness or Lion's Club or something like that. I have known most of these people for years and years and I do not know of any outside activity that they are doing. So if they are, they are not out there where you see them all the time.

This woman questioned the meaning of community service. Is community service a function of being on the board or is it serving the wider community? This question never received clarification.

Giving back to the community was a theme expressed throughout all four focus groups. The active school board members were probably the most idealistic about community service. This idealism is typified in the following response to the question on community service as a motivation.

The term noblesse oblige comes to mind, but that sounds arrogant, and it's not meant to be that way. Everybody has talents. Everybody has gifts and they are intended to be shared, with or without any sort of a religious connotation to it. If we are endowed with gifts, my personal opinion is that we are expected to use those and to share those, and share those in the best way they can be. In my mind it was the major decision maker. Is it generally? I do not think so.

This comment could be construed as elitist, in that the obligation of the privileged few in this context encourages a giving-back to the community. On the other hand, women whose needs are met in all other areas may be better able to give to the community.

In the active school board group, women talked about a strong belief in a quality education as a motivation. As one board member put it: "I guess my biggest motivation is because I am a very strong supporter of public education and I think that type of voice needs to be on our school board, not just thinking of dabblers, but thinking of the education of a kid." Several of the women talked about a desire to help children and how their personal needs linked with community service. One said:

When I moved to the district five years ago, they had no PTO, no PTA. It had been disbanded about eight years before because they were quote troublemakers, so it had been disbanded. The only option open for parents was to go on a field trip with your children. If a teacher had three slots, you could be one of them. That was it.

This woman noticed a need in her educational systems and recognized that she needed to advocate for children. Her presence communicated an interest and advocacy on behalf of her children as well as all the children in the community. Community service

gained recognition as a positive reason for volunteering in the schools. Another woman stated:

I want to be on the board to make sure that we stay focused on education. That's where most of our money goes is actual education programs. Over the last several years we had an assistant superintendent who was very much in favor of early education and since she retired two years ago, they have been slowly taking all of those programs out of school. I am concerned about that. So, that's why I chose to run.

This woman became concerned because programs threatened by elimination changed the image of the district as she knew it.

Community service correlated with the perception of family support and increased opportunities for their children.

I have a family that's also committed to volunteering. My husband is super and very understanding and he does a lot. He's supportive and I don't have a problem so I could do it. It depends on your family situation. My kids are all volunteers. They do everything with me. My daughter whose 13 has her own committee in the PTA -- two of them, and my son helps set up. So it's a family issue with us. That's one of the reason of not going to the board. I cannot take them with me. It would be a separate thing for myself and I am not ready to make that commitment away from them.

The desire to give back to the community and the time to give blended harmoniously with having a deep interest in children.

As part of community service one woman recognized the need for inclusion or being on the "inner circle" as motivation for running. One woman stated:

You are not ready until you have had lunch, dinner with the superintendent--until he walks down the hall...in some way -- he knows you, cannot wait to see you smile. You chit-chat in the hall ...about PTA... The superintendent always buys lunch, because the PTA is

coming to lunch. He loves to see us come. They are intimidated and very frightened by people who come from the outside.

Being recognized by someone in power was motivating to this woman. Recognition increased her feelings of self esteem so that she felt ready to extend beyond home and family.

Summary. The major stated motivation for volunteering for the school board was identical across all four focus groups. Making a difference was the top motivation in each group. Not everyone was sure they would make a difference. Women in all four focus groups cited a personal agenda as being a primary motivation for board service. This expression of dissatisfaction regarding what was happening in the schools or on the school board created the desire to fix the problem.

Concerns and issues that motivate women to run for the board varied. Several of the women wrote that they had a desire to ensure quality education for the children in the community. Women often understood their service as that of advocating for the children, teachers and administration. Power issues expressed by the women began at the new or prospective board member level. What seems to happen is that the more power actually invested in the women, the less of an issue it becomes.

Some of these women gravitated towards service because of problems in the district, such as a concern or a perception of mismanaged funds. Through their involvement, they felt that they could fix the problems. Communication was also a high priority for these women. Personal agendas, such as too much emphasis on

competitive sports, not enough on gifted and talented, costs and searching for a new superintendent were also important.

Having a previous background in education or volunteer service related less to skills than to feelings of confidence. Whatever the reason, previous volunteer or educational experience prepared many of these women for board service.

Conclusions and Implications

Women already serving on the board expressed fewer frustrations with the schools than women who had not yet served. Women already serving talked about previous involvement, and appeared to recognize that their participation would make a difference. They often began their participation with an issue that they confronted directly with the local school board. They felt strongly enough to go to the board and protest what they perceived to be a poor educational practice. Experiences of being listened to were self-affirming and led to more involvement. One of the worst things one community member could imagine was not being taken seriously. I asked her if that was important to her as a woman. The answer received was "especially as a woman".

Women who were on the board also tended to be more reflective about their motivation for serving. They talked about how they felt and how they had grown through their experience. They were able to surmount internal barriers to participation. They felt valuable and needed. One woman said:

Mine was a little bit different, too, I think. We did not really have any politics involved. In fact, nobody wanted to be on the school board. And, it was a very quiet time and I had been in the schools. Finally, I

was approached. Can we just put your name on the ballot? So it was not really a political thing at all, and there were not any really hidden agendas that were coming out. It was just a good idea to get another woman on the board, so I ran.

This woman responded to a personal approach. She also recognized the importance of serving her community. She felt her previous volunteer experience psychologically prepared her for more involvement. A former board member talked about how devastating it would be to run and be rejected. Women may have a more difficult time confronting the reality of rejection in order to even consider running.

School volunteers and community volunteers expressed a lack of confidence in their ability to be on the board. One volunteer stated:

There are many times if I attended a board meeting, I would sit there and I thought ... I would make a fool out of my self because I am not aware of the schematics of what is going on. You have to know everything that's going on. You just cannot be effective.

A lack of confidence is a barrier to running for the board. An assumption is that when the timing is right, some of these women will step forward. Despite this fear or perceived lack of knowledge, women who are not on the board espouse status being a board member's lot. They feel that being on the board is impressive and recognize the importance of the job. Internal restraints and a lack of confidence in their own abilities appear to keep them from running. They also talk about their feelings of being unappreciated as a barrier to service. Their perception is if they decide to give time and effort they need some type of appreciation or recognition that they are making a difference.

All the women verbalized that for some a personal agenda motivated them to run for the Board of Education. Women responded differently across focus groups to the reality of personal agendas and perceived needs for change. Active school board women communicated the understanding that they were but agents in the change factor. They recognized that change would come slowly if at all. These women seemed to have the internal confidence in their own ability to make change happen or accept that change does not always happen. They did not appear to dwell on stereotypical beliefs or barriers raised more by school and community volunteers.

With more women entering the market place, the lines continue to disappear between the private and public spheres. Women have participated in public forums much more during the last twenty years. This increase may well be related to increased involvement in all factors of our society. With this blending of roles and increased participation, stereotypical cultural beliefs and values about women's participation have changed. Curiously, the beliefs about limitations of women which remain appear to be more internal to the women themselves.

Economic resources. One finding from this research suggests that socioeconomic factors may limit or enhance women's involvement on local school boards. High social status does relate to the degree of voluntary participation in the schools. For example, women with above average family incomes may not want to work full-time apart from their home, but as their children become older, they may perceive that they have more time available for participating on the school board. Internal perceptions of their obligations to their family make it acceptable for them to

participate. Many women are not willing to share their nurturing role with others, thus shape all volunteerism around their perception of that nurturing role. The factual link between socioeconomic level and political participation on school boards has been consistently observed in research on participation. Active participants in the political process are more apt to be from affluent sectors of society, more interested in political participation, have a greater sense of political efficacy or effectiveness and feel more of an obligation to participate (Verba & Nie, 1972; Nie & Verba, 1975; Verba et. al., 1978). In general, advantaged people actively participate in local government.

However, the perception of advantage or disadvantage can be relative, shaped by one's role and relationship to the community. Women tend to be sensitive to what others think. One woman set the following condition for her to run for the board: "I'd need to feel that if I put something on the table I wasn't going to get criticized". She needed external positive reinforcement to overcome personal feelings of inadequacy. Many of the women communicated that they took criticism personally. Thus for these women, it may be less the physical constraints, and more the effect of those constraints on their willingness to invest which influences participation.

Participation as cumulative. Women talked in the focus groups of "different phases of life" and how this affected decisions for participation. They said it in different ways but they all brought up stages of life or phases. I started this study with the assumption that women with younger children in school would want to be on the board. This assumption may be true for volunteering but not for school board service. Most of the women felt that being older was an advantage. They would not

have to worry about their children at home and they would be more stable in their marriage and in their occupation. One woman communicated the following:

I think through the passages of life...There is this one stage that personally I think everything sort of comes together, inside and situational. I think that a person that is on the school board has somehow come to the conclusion that they are in this stage, whether they realize it or not...They have the goal and the motivation to actually pursue the whole process of becoming a school board member and then actually sitting on the board.

Women may need to move through stages of internal growth and maturity before they will volunteer for board service.

A former school board member expressed the personal characteristics in a different way. She recognized the maturity of the woman who would be most likely to run for and contribute to her local board.

We are talking about a woman--something comes to mind. A conversation between -- on a television movie, I think -- where a woman was described as being past girlishness, and she took offense and her husband said, no you are in full bloom. I think that's where these women are. I think it's when you've gotten your family responsibilities pretty well taken care of and the children are no longer children and they have been launched, and you are a person, not another, and I think at that point you see more and more women getting involved in things. It's one stage of life that is no longer central, because you are no longer the main person in your children's lives. They are off on their own and now you have time to be you, the person that is you. Consequently, it's a mature woman who knows who she is and what is important to her and how she wants to spend her time and puts value into doing it.

Women who may be the most likely to run for the board have solved their identity problems and have focused their energies to what they perceive to have value.

Priorities differ and are related to perceptions of life experiences.

Certain personal characteristics also seemed to be descriptive of women who run for the school board. One woman thought:

I think they [*women who run for the board*] are starting to feel very confident about themselves. I think they are very organized, or pretty organized. I think it's someone that's usually by that stage in her life is caring, has mellowed a bit. They do not get overexcited about things that don't go exactly the way you expect them to. They have learned to improvise. I think by that time you are going to become a good listener, too.

Thus, the most likely time for a woman to run for the school board is when she has recognized her own barriers for service and decided that they will not limit her involvement. Women who are on school boards had a history of volunteer activity. Women seem to begin to volunteer at about the same time they have children in school. Women may then choose to volunteer at the higher level of board service dependent on their school volunteer experience. It does not seem to make a difference whether these experiences are negative or positive. The stimulus for seeking board membership couples with either type of experience.

Often participation follows a time of frustration with what is happening in the schools. The frustration may stem from personal agendas, observations, or feeling that the present system is inadequate. Issues often revolve around management concerns such as finance and transportation. Dissatisfaction with what is happening in the schools seems to be a stronger motivation than satisfaction with the school system. Ironically, women might not feel needed if their perception is that the school is running

smoothly. Women who participate believe that their participation makes a difference.

Community service appears to be a secondary factor of their participation.

Family issues. As stated earlier, political participation in schools usually begins as a consequence of having children in school. Once these people come into the arena, some are activated by issues and become more intensely involved while others remain in a child-centered mode of participation. This suggests a two step mobilization process for school activists (Salisbury, 1980). A woman who was on the board talked about how busy she was with her children when they were little. She lamented that she did not even have time to socialize because of her need to care for her children. She found that the time came when she wanted to extend herself. Having children in school is not always a motivating factor for board membership. In reality, small children may need so much focus and so much energy that a woman does not or cannot see board service as a priority.

Other women, who remain in a child-centered mode of participation, do not want take part in policy development by seeking board membership. This could be a key to understanding why so few women move beyond their child-centered mode of participation to a structural centered mode. Internal beliefs about the importance of their interaction with children and their nurturing role may be more important to women than the administration of the schools perceived as a function of board membership.

Participation and attitudes. The feeling that one has an important contribution to make or (conversely) feelings of being unwelcome or unwanted are both aspects of

one's personal efficacy. These attitudes appeared consistently as the most important factor for participation. In all four focus groups women returned often to the importance of setting priorities where they feel they make a difference. Making a difference received the highest rankings in deciding incentives for service. In efforts to recruit and retain quality women for board service, school administrators need to pay attention to opportunities for volunteer service in the schools. Women who volunteer need to be recognized as having skills so they will be willing to make the transition to board service. Women who decide to serve have gained a certain degree of confidence and know that they can make a difference. One woman said:

At a certain point I just decided that I truly believed that you give back to your community ... but you should be able to choose how you are going to give back. I got involved in the hospital guild and I was a treasurer for the guild for eight years ... I really got to thinking more and more about the school board. My background is education and then I had a minor in math ... It just seemed like the school board might be a good fit.

In seeking women to serve, school officials need to be sensitive to barriers women perceive and nurture those who might be ready to serve.

In general, volunteerism may be more linked for women with the perception that something needs doing, especially if it affects friends, relatives or others where a social bond is identified. Within this conceptual framework, one might suspect that mothers would be more likely to participate in school politics because of their bonds to their own and the children of the community. Their main interest in that case would be their children's welfare, to increase opportunities for children's development as a

result of their intervention. Motivation for school board membership would therefore function as a logical extension of being involved in the school system as parents and volunteers. Women who participate in response to a particular incentive may be more likely to end their participation when the incentive is no longer there. Finding success or recognition at lower levels of participation builds the internal confidence necessary to make the decision to run for the board.

Explanatory Profile.

Women also talked in the focus groups of different phases of life and how these affected their choices in volunteer opportunities. Women with older children who had achieved a certain degree of independence and maturity would be more likely to run for their local Board of Education. These and other factors made it possible to develop an explanatory profile predicting at what point a woman would be most likely to run for the school board if approached. Explanatory factors were complex and related to the stage of life in which the woman found herself and her individual perception of barriers and incentives for service.

Woman most likely to run if approached

High Self Esteem
Believes She Can Make a Difference
Affluent (Family Income Over \$50,000)
Well Educated with College Experience
Older Children
Between 35 and 44 years
Previous Volunteer Experience
Dissatisfaction with What is Happening in the
Schools
Not Employed Full-time Outside of the
Home

This profile gives us some insight how to encourage and even increase participation. Women who feel that their participation makes a difference and have surmounted internal barriers to participation are most likely to make the leap to running for the board. Women, perhaps more than men, need encouragement to extend themselves beyond the family and volunteer in the schools and community. Society is letting down its barriers. It seems more difficult for women to let the barriers go. However, we need the balanced viewpoint of these women. We cannot take satisfaction when only 39% of the participants on our local Boards of Education are women. Women have complex motivations for service that often involve perceptions about their families and their internal belief that it is important to be able to make a difference.

Women have increased their participation in all fields of service. This is more evolutionary than revolutionary. Often, women stand in their own way in their perceptions of barriers and incentives for participation. Barriers to participation are surmountable if women respond to a personal approach and are encouraged to make a difference. Volunteerism is cumulative, but personal interests and priorities determine whether a woman will make the transition from volunteering in her schools and communities to serving on her local Board of Education. Understanding barriers and incentives to board service could lead to an increase in the number of women willing to participate.

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Focus Group Interview Guide

1. Introduction

Women are in the minority on local boards of education. The purpose of this focus group tonight will be to explore the reasons women choose to volunteer in the school system. I am particularly interested in finding out what motivates women to serve on their local school board. At the conclusion of this study, we may better be able to understand what factors either inhibit or encourage participation in your local school system.

II. Access -- Route to Seeking School Board Membership

1. Why would a woman want to be on a school board? Why did you (or would you) decide to run for your school board?
2. What kinds of participation do you think are available in your school district? Of the types of activities available, talk about the types of activities you be most likely to participate in and why?
3. Discuss the types of volunteer activities that have prepared you or might prepare you for membership on the school board?

III. Barriers or disincentives to seeking board membership- Let's take a few minutes to review the rules of brainstorming. (Researcher will review) On this chart you will see two columns. One is labeled barriers to volunteering in your local school system and the other is labeled incentives for volunteering in the

school system. Let's develop a list of these barriers and incentives or facilitators. (Following this exercise, I will ask each woman to individually assign a weighting to each barrier and to each incentive. This will be done on a scale of 1 - 5.)

IV. Facilitators or incentives to service (Can be seen as motivating factors)

Here are two other columns. One is labeled barriers to seeking board membership and the other is labeled incentives or facilitators for seeking board membership. Let's develop both of these lists. (I will repeat the weighting exercise.)

V. As a woman in what ways can you make a difference in your schools? How?

VI. Can you share some ideas that would encourage more women to run for the board?

VII. Within the group here, who would be willing to do a follow-up interview with questions framed from your responses this evening?

VIII. How do you feel about the discussion tonight? What new insights have you had as a result of this focus group? Are there other issues that we might discuss?

Appendix B

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Women who are on their local Board of Education talk about previous volunteer activities preparing them for board membership. Could you comment on your perception of volunteer experience preparing one for the Board of Education?
2. Many of the women interviewed cited a belief that a previous background in education is a motivating factor for running for the school board. How important do you think a background or knowledge in education is to someone who might want to run for the board?
3. One of the motivations for running could be dissatisfaction with what is happening in the schools in contrast to supporting the positive happenings in the schools. Can you discuss your perspective on these two opposing viewpoints? In your mind, which is the strongest motivation and why?
4. What does community service mean to you? How strong a motivation would community service be to making the decision to run for your local Board of Education?
5. Talk about the time restraints that need to be considered when making a decision to run for the board.
6. Many of the active school board members talked about someone identifying their strengths and asking them to run for the board. If you were not or are not on the board at the present time, discuss your reaction to a personal approach.
7. Politics and special interest groups could be perceived as a barrier or a facilitator to board service. Discuss your reaction and opinion to this statement.
8. Women talk in the focus groups of "different phases of life" and how this affects choices in volunteer opportunities. What "phase of life" in your mid is the most likely time for a woman to run for the school board? How does that look? Describe the personal characteristics of a woman in that "phase".
9. What kinds of support system do women who are on the school board need? How can we make them feel welcome or appreciated?
10. Talk about personal recognition and the perception of making a difference as motivating factors for a decision to seek board service.