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Parent Advocacy in a Gendered Organization: Participatory Research, Action, and Analysis

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Hegemonic gender relationships pervade the organization of schooling in America (Marshall, 1992, 2000; Yeakey, Johnston, & Adkinson, 1986; Young, 2000; Young & Laible, 2000). Men generally occupy privileged roles as administrators. Women ordinarily serve in subordinate positions as teachers and parents (read: mothers). The exercise of authority in schools, then, has come to be associated with the male voice: hierarchical, rule-oriented, dispassionate, and even harsh (Jones, 1988; Shakeshaft, 1989, 1998). Hegemony silences women's voices so that their calls for compassion and connectivity become "non-authoritarian, marginal pleadings for mercy—gestures of the subordinate" (Jones, 1988, p. 121).

Hegemony of gender served as the fundamental premise of this study of four women as they struggled to achieve social justice for their children with disabilities. The mothers created a grassroots organization called Face-to-Face and, for two years, battled the male-dominated school administration and Board of Education. The study examines the gendered organization of schooling in one, small, rural school district in the American Midwest, and serves as a lens for viewing the hegemony of gender in American society.

Methodology, Data Sources, and Research Ethics

Two academic researchers (Andrews and Lee) and the four women of Face-to-Face selected participatory action research as the methodology for this study. Like community organizers, Andrews and Lee collaborated with the mothers to challenge the structures and mechanisms of their oppression (Sohng, 1995). Participatory action researchers engage disenfranchised people as researchers in pursuit of answers to their own questions and solutions to the problems of their everyday lives (Brown, 1985; Fals-Borda, 1979; Freire, 1970, 1974; Hall, 1981; Tandon, 1981). The inquiry process encourages participants to create the changes they want to see in their world (Gaventa, 1988).

Participatory research is a means of putting research capabilities in the hands of deprived and disenfranchised people so that they can identify themselves as knowing actors; defining their reality, shaping their new identity, naming their history, and transforming their lives for themselves.... It is a means of preventing an elite group from exclusively determining the interests of others... (Sohng, 1995, p. 4)

Andrews and Lee, activists for the rights of the less powerful—women and children, made no attempt to create an illusion of objectivity and neutrality while collaborating with Face-to-Face to conduct this study. We openly asserted our bias. In fact, as women and mothers, we saw ourselves as insiders who had privileged access to the worldviews and experiences of the four women (Foley, Levinson, & Hurtig, 2001). Our study is epistemologically valid based on our identification with the four women, our sensitivity to the gendered nature of schooling, and our shared commitment to the aims of improving the learning and life chances of their children (Foley, Levinson, & Hurtig, 2001; Noddings, 1984, 1992).

Both Andrews and Lee are university professors. Andrews was participant-observer, an insider who lived in the rural community where the study took place. The parents regularly sought her advice about how to deal with the schools.

With Andrews and Lee serving as advisors, the women formed Face-to-Face, a grassroots organization of parents learning to advocate for the education of their children with disabilities. Throughout the two-year struggle, Andrews maintained ongoing communication with parents, school board members, the newspaper editor, and district administrators.

Lee, an outsider, assumed the role of observer-participant; conducting interviews, analyzing documents and artifacts, and participating in community activities related to the ongoing struggle. The women of Face-to-Face collaborated recorded field notes, collected documents, took photographs, participated in tape-recorded interviews and conversations, analyzed data, and reviewed and approved written accounts.

We chose to conduct this study from a feminist perspective for four reasons (Foley, Levinson, & Hurtig, 2001). First, we wanted to document and analyze the specific experiences of the four women. Second, gender emerged as an essential dimension of analysis in the study (Hearn, Sheppard, Tancred-Sheriff, & Burrell, 1989). Third, the feminist perspective unmasked patriarchy as a system of social reproduction like racism and capitalism. And fourth, we selected a feminist framework for this study because of the intimate interrelationship of participatory research and women's "ways of knowing" (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Yeakey, Johnston, & Adkinson, 1986).

We made three ethical commitments. We would support the parents, offering advice regarding educational law, policy, and change strategies. We would regard the parents as equal colleagues, rather than subjects or informants (Lee, 2000). Parents would collaborate in making decisions about the research, collecting and analyzing data, and reporting findings. We would provide anonymity for the women and their children by replacing each proper name with a pseudonym in published accounts. Only the outside researcher's name is real.

Utilization of participant-observer as well as observer-participant and insider-outsider (Smith & Geoffrey, 1968) techniques enhanced the reliability of data collection. Interviews included open-ended and specifically focused questions as well as narrative conversations among the researchers and interviewees. Both individual and collective interviews were taped (video or audio) and transcribed for subsequent analysis. Data were triangulated, enhancing reliability and validity. For example, interview data was compared to letters, newspaper reports, field notes from observations, and audio and video recordings (Denzin, 1978; Guba & Lincoln, 1985; LeCompte & Schensul, 1999).

Parents, administrators, school board members, teachers, and community members participated in interviews. Other sources of data included: minutes from Board of Education meetings; newspaper accounts of Board meetings; school district policy statements; State Department of Education records; school district financial records; community attitudes, as reflected in letters to the editor in the newspaper; letters; legal documents, including reports from the Office of Civil Rights; and video-tapes of Board of Education meetings.

The following narrative, "Four Bitches and a Prick at the Newspaper," presents vignettes drawn from the data. The analysis, "Confronting Hegemonic Masculinity," follows. The narrative and analysis offer a provocative view of the hegemony of gender in a small, rural school district in the American Midwest.

"Four Bitches and a Prick at the Newspaper"

The narrative begins with a vignette of a public Board of Education meeting that reveals asymmetrical gender relationships between the four women and school administrators and Board members.

The Notorious November 15th Board Meeting

Fifty angry Face-to-Face supporters attended the meeting. To accommodate the crowd, the Board had moved the meeting to the junior high library. Four conspicuous folding chairs and a microphone were strategically placed in the no man's land between the audience and the Board. Six Board members, the Board secretary, the superintendent and assistant superintendent sat at three long, narrow tables, pushed together end-to-end.

"You girls are here. You want to take your seats?" the Board President gestured to the chairs. The women moved to the four chairs, and so began the "notorious November 15th Board meeting," as it came to be known in the community.

The women tried to speak, but Mrs. Blake, the President interrupted them: "Girls, excuse me! If you will let me go on, I think we can address this issue." Mrs. Blake encouraged the "girls" to develop a "spirit of working together" and asked for their suggestions. But she continued without waiting for a response: "This is the way we are going to do it."

Mr. Ford, Vice President, began to speak. The women again tried to respond, but the President interrupted: "Mr. Ford is talking. Do you think it would be a little more polite not to interrupt him until he finishes his sentence?" Mr. Ford went on and on.

"You've never admitted there was a problem!" one of the women snapped, visibly angry.

Vice President Ford admitted, "There is a problem here."

The problem had begun almost a year earlier as each woman transferred her child from parochial to public schools in order to access special education services. Each mother met with resistance from administrators when she asked to participate in educational decisions about her child.

Katie Hahs battled administrators for three years until they consented to evaluate her son and place him in a class for students with learning disabilities. Joan Manson requested an occupational therapist and a master's degree prepared speech pathologist for her son with severe language impairment. An administrator asked her if her son was "walking into walls" and offered the services of a speech pathologist whose master's degree was in school administration. Administrators viewed Sarah Farmer as a real threat to the district because "she had more internet connections than the World Wide Web." In contrast, Natasha Read's daughter received excellent services. The Superintendent had been the best man at the Read's wedding, although he no longer came around much.

Board members and administrators feared these assertive, well-connected women who asked troubling questions and demanded answers. Natasha recalled the Parent Teacher Organization meeting that brought them together: "Nobody talked. Nobody stood up. Nobody said a damn thing. It was a talent show. I resented that... It was cut and dry. The president came up, banged the gavel." That PTO meeting made them aware that there was no legitimate forum for parents to express concerns.

During the next six months, the four women, with the researchers' help, established Face-to-Face, a grassroots organization of parents. Their meetings responded to parent concerns and student needs. Face-to-Face invited parents' questions, provided answers, and offered advocacy and support. As they gained strength, administrators' communication and relationships with the parents deteriorated. Administrators stoned-walled parents and publicly criticized Face-to-Face, especially the four leaders. So the women decided to bypass administrators and take concerns directly to the School Board.

In October, they asked to be placed on the agenda. According to district policy, citizens who wanted to speak to the Board must "write up" the presentation and submit it to the superintendent for approval. The Superintendent denied their request, explaining that their written application "was too brief." Refusing to be silenced, the women presented their ten concerns anyway, waiting until the "Patrons" section of the agenda. The women knew that policy prevented the Board from responding to their questions at that meeting. They would have to wait until next month.

At the "notorious November 15 Board meeting" the Board responded to the "ten areas of concern":

1. The need for public reporting of the number of students receiving special services;
2. The use of external consultants to evaluate students to determine eligibility for special services;
3. The disrespectful treatment of parents by district staff;
4. The district's failure to comply with federal and state laws;
5. Testing and evaluation of students with disabilities;
6. Retaining students with special needs in the same grade;
7. Requiring students with disabilities to meet district mastery objectives;
8. The lack of programs available to assist "at risk" students;
9. The need for improved cooperation among special and regular education teachers;
10. The need to add programs to serve preschool youngsters with disabilities.

The President read a scripted response to each item. Vice President Ford criticized the women for insufficient documentation. Audience members volunteered to tell their stories, offer documentation, and answer questions. Donna Baker, agitated and loud, complained about years of difficulty trying to obtain services for her daughter. The President immediately silenced her, citing policy.

Nan Blake ended her response to the women's concerns as abruptly as she started. She moved quickly to the next agenda item. The women retreated awkwardly when they finally realized they had been dismissed.

Public Reaction to the Notorious Meeting

Public concern about the "notorious November 15th Board meeting" quickly mounted. A highly charged community grapevine fueled anticipation of the Board meeting broadcast the next evening. The newspaper publisher wrote an editorial citing the difficulties of Face-to-Face and criticizing the Board's inaccessibility. The editor, Tiffany Lane, attended all Board meetings and provided extensive coverage of Board activities.

The Board of Education could no longer silence the four women once the news media legitimated their voices.

Administrators' control began to unravel: the district lost its first and only due process hearing; the parent of a student with disabilities initiated a complaint with the Office of Civil Rights; OCR found the district guilty of civil rights violations and harassment; administrators lost credibility; and the Board underwent major changes.

A new Board member took the place of one who moved from the district. Two others were elected after campaigning on the issue of special services. A fourth, Natasha Read's husband, was appointed to fill an unexpired term. The Board deposed President Nan Blake and replaced her with a male Board member. The new Board asked the Director of Special Services to leave. Superintendent Jones resigned under pressure. The Board directed him to stay home until his contract expired. Until the "notorious November 15th Board meeting," administrators had insisted that the district had no problems. The Superintendent claimed the real problem was "four bitches and the prick at the newspaper."

Confronting Hegemonic Masculinity

John Codd (1982) contends that "...the field of special education has been especially prone to forms of technical domination and political manipulation in which the underlying ethical dilemmas have remained largely unexamined" (p. 9). We suggest that one of the reasons for this is that the hegemony of gender dramatically affects education generally and special education specifically. Gender emerged as the key factor in this research, exposing the hegemonic relationship between school district and parents. The analysis centers on gendered organizational hegemony as the essential variable in explaining the formal, legitimate, and masculine work of professionals inside the organization and the informal, illegitimate, and feminine work of laypeople outside the organization.

In this study, we examined the hegemony of gender as it was revealed in the words and actions of Board members, administrators, and parents. The powerful sought to preserve their privileged status as decision-makers in the organization. The women contested that privilege. The competition between the dominant and subordinate ideologies was clear. It was also clear that during the struggle the women developed contradictory (Gramsci, 1971) or critical (Giroux, 1988) consciousness about what was really happening.

Board President Nan Blake presented the ideological image that the dominant culture required of an organizational leader. Her image was congruent with traditional organizational values of assertiveness, control, dominance, and power, but her image was inconsistent with gender roles in the organization. We contend that the usually successful dominant ideology failed in this situation, in part, because a woman took on a leadership role traditionally performed by males.

In contrast, the roles of parents seeking to participate in decision-making were peripheral to the school precisely because women performed them. Hegemony maintains the marginalization of parents in the gendered organization of schooling. School leaders view parents as mothers: uninformed, illegitimate, and ineffective outsiders. Marginalized persons often attempt *symbolic transvestitism* to reflect the dominant ideology and gain access to power. Symbolic transvestitism occurs when members of one gender group assume or put on the actions, language, and values of the other. We contend that institutional transvestitism cannot successfully present the ideology.

Gender and Gendered Organizations

"Gendered position" (Acker, 1990; Connell, 1987; West & Zimmerman, 1987), an important theoretical construct, indicates that "consciousness" and "the possibilities for experiences" (McLaren, 1989) are fundamentally different for women than men. Gendered position also suggests that differences will endure as long as consciousness and "possibilities for experiences" are part of the substructure upon which those status positions are built. If gender *transcends* the ideological process, we would expect to see it emerge in both the dominant and subordinate ideologies. It did. Acker's (1990) notion of "gendered organizations" provided the analytic tool necessary to understand *gendered positionality* in this study.

Acker (1990) explains that a systematic theory of gender and organizations is necessary for two reasons. First, organizational processes segregate by gender as well as income and status. Second, organizations invent and reproduce cultural images of gender and gender identity, particularly masculinity. We add a third. Organizations are ubiquitous and retain the legal status of individual.

Acker (1990), following Connell (1987) and West and Zimmerman (1987), defines gendered organizations:

To say that an organization, or any other analytic unit, is gendered means that advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, and meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine. Gender is not in addition to ongoing processes, conceived as gender neutral. Rather, it is an integral part of those processes, which cannot be properly understood without an analysis of gender. (p. 146)

Acker (1990) describes five interacting processes through which gendering occurs. These processes serve as lenses for the analysis and interpretation of data in this study. We examine each in the context of this case.

The Construction of Divisions Along Lines of Gender

Acker (1990) suggests that divisions along lines of gender include: labor, allowed behaviors, locations in physical space, and power. In this case, divisions along gender lines were obvious. The entire administrative team was male. One of the administrators is a self-described "mean son-of-a-bitch." Over the course of the previous five years, four female administrators left the district. Males, one of whom was not certified, replaced them. The majority of teachers were female, and in the area of Special Services there were no male teachers.

The four parents who confronted the Board were female, as was the individual who filed the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) complaint. Each of the organizers had supportive husbands but none of them participated in Face-to-Face activities. The Board President was a stay-at-home mom and substitute teacher who also filled in, on occasion, at her husband's veterinary practice. One businesswoman, a female hair stylist, and four local businessmen joined her on the Board.

The OCR sent three women to conduct interviews, review files, and write the final report for the initial OCR on-site investigation. When a second complaint was filed, the OCR sent a male investigator. Other than criticizing the women, no administrator mentioned the situation throughout the two years of the study. The male newspaper publisher wrote critical editorials about the Board's response to the parents but these were gleaned from his female editor's extensive coverage.

Construction of Allowable Behaviors

Allowable behaviors for women do not include aggression. It is unattractive. The women's tenacity and assertiveness and the Board President's aggression put their behavior outside traditional organizational expectations. It was not aggression, per se, that elicited negative reactions; it was female aggression. The women had a distinct advantage, however, over the Board President. They represented their families; Nan Blake represented the organization.

Family is a singular, fixed, and unchanging unit based upon consensual decision-making. Family enjoys the status of "agent" which, in effect, denies women individuality (Glenn, 1985). This shifts attention away from gender while still constructing allowable behaviors. The closest one can come to understanding the idea of *parent*, someone who does the work of the family, is to think of a woman. But families, not women, are the focus of theoretical speculation. The idea of parent denies the explicit gender division that supports the family structure itself. Within the theoretical framework it is easy to understand parents' contentiousness.

However, when those bolstered by the dominant ideology want to confront those who represent the subordinate ideology, it does not make sense to attack parents. It makes more sense, as the Board members and administrators discovered, to go after the atypical organizational behavior of these women. Administrators and Board members criticized the women as impolite, assertive bitches. On the other hand, the women were able to capitalize on Nan Blake's behavior in her role as Board president. She too was cast as an unfeeling "bitch" who denied parents the right to voice concerns about their children. On both sides, the contentious issue of parental participation in educational decision-making played out not on defensible, ethical grounds but on the ability of each side to capitalize on gendered expectations of traditional behavior within and around organizations.

Construction of Organizational Logic

Parents [read: women] can advocate for their families but cannot act within the organization of schooling because there is no role assigned for that function. This organizational logic explains how parents' roles are excluded from educational organizations even though their very existence depends, in great measure, on parental satisfaction and support.

In organizational logic, both jobs and hierarchies are abstract categories that have no occupants, no human bodies, no gender The closest the disembodied worker doing the abstract job comes to a real worker is the male worker whose life centers on his full-time, life-long job, while his wife or another female takes care of his personal needs and his children. The woman worker, assumed to have legitimate obligations other than those required by the job, did not fit with the abstract job. (Acker, 1990, p. 149)

Since *job* is an implicitly gendered concept, organizational logic would not recognize any role for parents/women in the organization. Parents/women have no job description, no job, cannot be evaluated, and cannot be part of the hierarchy. Parents/women make no sense in an organizational context since their role is not rationally constructed as part of the organization.

The Board had denied a written request to establish a task force to investigate problems with Special Services. The Board President's justification is a good example of organizational logic. She wrote:

One request of the parents, that of a task force, was denied by the Board on three different occasions. There were valid reasons for this denial. Special Services is a sensitive, emotional area for many parents and children. It would be difficult to create a Task Force of qualified persons who could make intelligent recommendations without a large amount of time and training in the area of Special Services. The most recent committee of this type was that of establishing concepts of Character Education traits to be incorporated into the curriculum. Several years ago, an ad hoc (sic) committee was appointed to evaluate the facilities of the school district. These types of committees have been used and will continue to be used in the future. (Personal communication, Nan Blake)

The reasons for denying the request for a task force were based on obvious, gendered assumptions about parents/women and children -- emotionality, sensitivity, and lack of sufficient intellect. The President's organizational logic presupposes gender neutrality when there is none. That is, tasks or jobs can only be performed under direct control of the organization and meet the needs of the organization. It was logical to form task forces that the Board initiated but to deny one that would undermine its purposes.

Parental/women's involvement "is not usually taken to mean participation in daily school activities, but in PTA work or in home-based support for children's schoolwork" (David, 1989, p. 57). It is women's work -- volunteer work that supports the organization. They serve the organization by supporting schools so that those inside the organization can perform their jobs. When the women acted, they violated the implicit professional/lay boundary and defied the organizational logic that legitimated the gendered organizational structure. The Board and administrators had to stop the parents/women; they used organizational symbolism and imagery to do it.

Construction of Symbols and Images

Symbols and images "explain, express, and reinforce, or sometimes oppose" the division of labor along gender lines (Acker, 1990, p. 146). This study revealed linguistic symbolism that distinguished the school organization from the parents. Distinct techniques promoted vivid images of the organization and parents.

Parental Images

The Board and administrators viewed parents' concerns as trivial, troublesome, and suspicious. They met the women's formal and informal requests with disdain and outright anger. Calling the four women "girls" at the November 15th Board meeting stands out as a blatant example. Referring to the four women as "bitches" also exposes the administrators' gendered perception of the parents. There were other, more subtle, efforts to construct a negative image of Face-to-Face generally, and the four women specifically.

At one point in the November meeting, the only other female on the Board left her chair, walked behind the women, and stood with her back to the audience. She referred to them as "women" and put her hand on the shoulder of one of them. She said to them, "You support each other, and that's what you need -- like Weight Watchers and Alcoholics Anonymous -- you're happy to reach success." Later on, the Board President insinuated that the women were unable to accept the fact that their children function on a "low cognitive level" and are not "LD" (learning disabled).

She looked directly at them and said, "I know this is hard to understand."

The Superintendent quickly added, "Administrators and teachers have to deliver bad news to parents. They [parents] want to shoot the messenger." The women were repeatedly told they were "wrong" or "not right." One of the businessmen asserted that the community did not need the women to represent them.

He said angrily, "There were people in the community who do have guts enough to stand up and speak their piece."

These instances were systematic attempts to establish dominance. Board members and administrators demeaned them as women. The women were not bright. They needed support. The Board also disparaged them as parents. The parents had handicapped children. Their children cost the district money. They did not accept their children's disabilities. They questioned the school's practices, thereby handicapping their children further. When all else failed, they metaphorically shot the educators who were trying to help. This approach presented the district as blameless, thus avoiding accountability. The Board blamed the parents/women, characterizing Face-to-Face as a support group like AA rather than a grassroots advocacy group. The women had the problem, not the organization.

Organizational Images

Connell (1987) uses the term "hegemonic masculinity" to advance the idea that heterosexual, male sexuality legitimates organizational power formed around a dominance over women and in opposition to other masculinities. "Hegemonic masculinity is typified by the image of the strong, technically competent, authoritative leader who is sexually potent and attractive, has a family, and has his emotions under control" (Acker, 1990, p. 153). This image suited the Superintendent.

Superintendent Jones was an avid hunter. The community viewed him as "a numbers man"; he referred to himself as "the boss." The Superintendent's arrogance angered some community members. During frequent conflicts with the Board or community, Mrs. Jones and their four children were visibly at his side. Two female administrators resigned and Jones replaced them with men, leaving no women on his administrative team.

The Superintendent visibly demonstrated his disdain for the four women of Face-to-Face and the local newspaper publisher. Natasha Read's husband overheard Jones' conversation with a Board member at the Dew Drop Inn. The Superintendent remarked that his problems were instigated by "four bitches and the prick at the newspaper." Casting the parents as "bitches" and the publisher as a "prick" demonstrated the role of male heterosexuality in legitimating organizational power through domination of women and opposition of other masculinities (Connell, 1987).

Superintendent Jones appeared to be building a Board that reflected the image of hegemonic masculinity, a pervasive theme in this study. The Board presented itself as strong, knowledgeable. Members experienced intense pressure for unanimity, avoidance of public dissent, and suppression of divergent views.

The Board also used language and physical space to dominate. While the table arrangements were different at the November Board meeting, the "hot seat" retained its symbolic power. The four women sat in armless chairs with no table for their notes. The control of language was evident from the beginning of the meeting when the President called the women "girls." The Board worked from a typed script. The President's use of the first person plural was condescending: "Now we know our first step is to *not* call the State Department," or "Had we taken the proper channels." The Board members also ignored the women in order to suppress their challenge.

The Board Vice-president used linguistic negotiation (Bates, 1981) to mask issues. For example, he changed the language contained in the written list of concerns in an effort to control perceptions. "Corrected" became "addressed"; "problems" became "allegations"; "tested" became "evaluated." Ironically, the newspaper had quoted the Vice-president months earlier: "We need to convey to the community a sense and perception of openness. The community views this Board as very closed."

Administrators and the Board of Education used linguistic negotiation to recast the problem in the eyes of the public. Instead of confronting the issue as a breakdown in communication, the administration and Board painted the parents/women as problematic. The paternalistic district leaders would help the parents/women deal with *their* problems. When the parents rebuffed their help, the women became gendered "bitches." When the newspaper publisher wrote editorials sympathetic to the parents, he became a gendered "prick at the newspaper."

Interactions

Interactions make patterns of dominance and submission manifest, maintaining hegemonic organizations. This study revealed a number of important gendered interactions, particularly the relationship between the Superintendent and the Board President. Community members dubbed Board meetings, "The Harry and Nan Show." Nan Blake took her cues from Superintendent Jones, who was always obviously in charge. At the November 15th meeting, Dr. Jones made only three brief statements; two invited by the President. This was a substantial deviation from typical interactions at Board meetings.

A few years earlier, Dr. Jones, then Assistant Superintendent, sat silently as another female Board President prevented the former Superintendent's attempt to terminate Jones. Minutes later the Superintendent and two Board members quit in protest, and she moved to appoint Dr. Jones superintendent. Like Nan Blake, that Board President was deposed. Given their status as supporters rather than actors, these women fulfilled their ideological role. The Superintendent efficiently tapped this hegemonic resource when it served his purpose. He was not only a victimizer but, in the long run, also a victim of the "false generosity of paternalism" (Freire, 1970, 1974, 1985). Silence takes on a new interpretation. Hegemony is always operating and it privileges hegemonic masculinities when it simply runs its course.

The interaction between the Board President and the four women was more complex. The President assumed control, using interruption, insult, reprimand, and lecture to maintain control. Joan Manson characterized it as "demeaning and repressive." Nan Blake was boss in every sense of the word. She even acted without her usual deference to the Superintendent. The four women sat, listened, and left defeated, one in tears.

The newspaper ran a large, front-page picture of the Board President. Jaw set, finger pointing like an angry teacher

reprimanding students, she was gesturing to the four women sitting six feet from her. The community hotly debated the issue throughout the week. After viewing a recording of the notorious November Board meeting, two prominent men decided to run for the Board

The fact that the Board meeting worked against the organization seems to defy organizational logic. All the elements necessary for the organization to retain its power were in place and operational. They had control, but a woman exercised that control. Organizational logic does not recognize females as legitimate sources of power. Women as victims is reasonable, a woman as victimizer is not. Symbolic transvestitism failed. No matter how close Nan Blake came to looking and acting like the leader of the school district, she would never be ideologically legitimate (Acker, 1990; Connell, 1987; Kanter, 1975; Reskin & Roos, 1987).

Individual Identity

Individual identity is "consciousness of the other three aspects of gender, such as, in organizations, the choice of appropriate work, language use, clothing, and presentation of self as a gendered member of an organization" (Reskin and Roos, 1987, p. 147). This study demonstrated "consciousness" in a number of individuals. The Board President made a conscious, carefully planned effort to lead the district through the difficult situation posed by the parents.

Her use of symbolic transvestitism, something that the popular literature promotes as necessary for the success of female leaders, failed. Months later, when she reflected upon what had happened, she wrote about trying to establish her individual identity as it related to the organization:

After much deliberation, I have decided to record some of my thoughts regarding the special services issue and my service on the Board of Education. For several months, I have given a lot of consideration to these issues. I have thought about them when I am cleaning house, when I am doing laundry, when I am preparing meals, when I am driving my car, when I go to bed at night, when I am in church -- I say this only to indicate that my views have not come about lightly. I have spent countless hours reviewing the entire situation. (Personal communication, Nan Blake)

Nan Blake's role in the organization was intimately tied to her role as a woman. Her role was to support hegemonic masculinity by deferring to the Superintendent's directives. The editor of the newspaper characterized her as "Dr. Jones' puppet." When Jones recognized it was not in his interest to conduct meetings as usual, he silenced himself, creating the illusion that the President acted alone. This required her to change her image. She had to put on the symbolic *accouterments* that legitimated organizational leadership -- hegemonic masculinity. Her own words revealed a "consciousness" of her identity that was not evident at the time she prepared for the meeting:

After the October meeting, the Board decided that we would answer the questions and "stand up" for the district against the very strong and unfounded allegations stated by Face-to-Face. A change that I would make in conducting the November meeting is that I would be more gentle with my comments. The Board had decided to present a "strong" front in support of the district -- and perhaps I came on too "strong" and should have been less adamant about the insults to the entire district. I guess I am human. I guess I was tired of listening to our administrators being insulted with unfounded allegations. I guess I was tired of the negative press that the entire school was receiving. I did not intend to come across so rude and uncaring, but apparently I was perceived as that way, and I feel badly about that perception... (Personal communication, Nan Blake)

Being "strong", "adamant" and "standing up" for the district made this woman feel "badly" because she was perceived as "rude and uncaring." Brownmiller (1984) provides insight into the ideology that guides assessments of feminine anger.

[A]nger becomes the most unfeminine emotion a woman can show. Anger in a woman is "unattractive." An angry woman is hard, mean, and nasty; she is unreliably, unprettily out of control... The endless forbearance demanded of women, described as the feminine virtue of patience, prohibits an angry response. (p. 210)

Nan Blake was angry that night in November. The four women in the hot seat were patient and "ladylike."

More compelling was Blake's assumption that she failed because she was "human." This suggests two things. First, there may be, as Acker (1990) suggests, a sense in which the organization employs abstract individuals to fill roles and is therefore beyond "humanness." Second, Nan Blake's humanness required that she *not* "stand up" or be "strong" and that she listen to the insults and the negative press. Nan Blake came to the realization that her individual identity was constructed as a victim not as an agent.

The four women provided another view of "consciousness." Each recognized and worked within traditional ideological parameters. The women appeared before the Board as a group. Their spouses were present. Their demeanor at the meeting was not contentious. Their attempts to speak were abruptly rebuffed or ignored altogether. The women were patient. One of them cried. Another stated softly, "We'll be back." They seemed to understand, like the Superintendent, that they would benefit when hegemony ran its course.

The women were victims. The community rallied *not* to support justice but to *defend* the women against the Board, particularly the Board President. The women were able to use the sexist reaction to convince two prominent businessmen to run for the Board of Education. The men won and the new Board's first action was to depose Nan Blake. This was a symbolic victory against those who defied the hegemony of gender. None of the four women ever considered running for the Board of Education. The spouse of one of them was appointed as a Board member. When asked why she did not consider running for the Board herself she stated:

I don't work well with committees. Because I get up and cuss and I don't, I don't function well with five other assholes sittin' around a table. I would rather be behind the scene and do what I do best and that's agitate. Every organization needs to have that loose cannon. (Personal communication, Natasha Read)

In terms of individual identity and working within the ideological context, she was probably correct in assuming that she would not succeed in the forefront.

Creation and Conceptualization of Social Structures

Gender is a constitutive element in organizational logic that frames relations. Gendering underlies both theory and practice. While organizations appear gender-neutral and use gender-neutral language, they are not. "Four parents and the publisher at the newspaper" is a description emerging from organizational logic veiled by theoretical inconsistency, and practical propriety. "Four bitches and a prick at the newspaper" is a description emerging from gendered organizational logic, theoretical integrity, and practical impropriety.

The language to accommodate the strategies and activities of the four women is limited. Within the organization, individuals who did what the parents/women did would be seen as change agents, decision makers, or educational leaders. But the women were not part of the organization. They were parents/women with no job, no role, no rationale for participation in the organization. They were not part of the social structures that constitute education. Gendering is seldom identified because there are few theoretical tools to explain how it operates in organizations generally. This research examined how it operated in one organization specifically.

Summary

The women from Face-to-Face and the Board President used the only tools available -- the tools of the organization. One of the women said, "What you need to do is to take their stick and beat them over the head with it." The term "bitch" became a rallying cry for those who defied the school system. The "prick" was the "masculinity" that threatened the male administration. Gendering the women and the editor was the only way for Superintendent Jones to describe the relationship of the women and the publisher to the organizational culture. The language that describes and explains organizational dynamics is theoretical. The language that describes dynamics outside the organization's logic is sexual and offensive. This makes it easy to ignore and explains the theoretical underdevelopment of the hegemony of gendered organizations.

It is not surprising that hegemony of gender enabled the women to succeed in changing district leadership. The confrontation would not have taken place had hegemony *not* been a key element in these events. From the "consciousness" that emerged, the women recognized organizational hegemony and used it for their advantage. For Face-to-Face, the goal was to gain a voice in the decision-making process. For the Superintendent and the Board, it was to put the parents/women in their place by relying on hegemony of gender to sway public opinion away from four "bitches." The fundamental mistake was that the Board and Superintendent did not anticipate the full power of the hegemony of gender they confronted. The Superintendent and Board President did not foresee that what was worse than four "bitches" was a symbolic transvestite. Nan Blake simply did not possess the central quality that those who are victims of the hegemony of gender expect in leaders -- maleness.

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