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**CONSTRUCTING WOMEN'S STATUS: POLICY DISCOURSES OF
UNIVERSITY WOMEN'S COMMISSION REPORTS**

DISSERTATION

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University**

By

Elizabeth J. Allan, B.S., M.S.

*** * * * ***

**The Ohio State University
1999**

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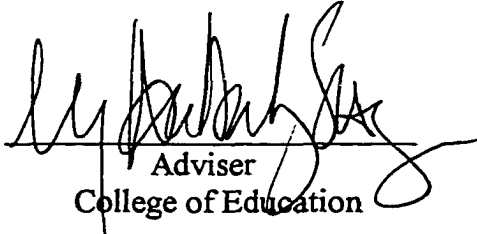
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ABSTRACT

This study examines policy discourses of university women's commission reports issued at four U.S. research universities over a 25-year period. Women's commission reports are the primary means by which women in postsecondary institutions formally articulate concerns and advance policy recommendations to eliminate sex/gender based discrimination. My study investigates and considers limits and possibilities of discourses re/produced in these reports. I explore how policy discourses provided by university women's commission reports position women in ways that may contribute to enhancing equity as well as limit its attainment.

Policy discourse analysis informed by feminist, critical, and poststructural theories was employed to analyze commission reports produced between 1971 and 1996. Institutions were chosen whose commissions issued two or more reports spanning at least a decade in order to examine how the articulation of policy problems and solutions has changed over time. The sample is limited to research universities because they have the longest history of women's commission work and because they tend to set standards for academe. Twenty-one commission reports were examined as well as 150 additional documents including newspaper articles, brochures, meeting agendas and minutes, and supplementary reports. Discursive themes carried in the reports were tracked by hand

and through the use of HyperResearch, a computer application for qualitative data analysis.

Policy discourse analysis was employed to identify discourses provided by commission reports and subject positions constituted by them. My findings indicate that discourses of access and femininity produce the *vulnerable outsider* subject positions, while simultaneously, an *empowered woman* subject position is produced through a discourse of feminism. Further, discourses of professionalism, whiteness and heterosexuality predominate in commission reports. Undergirded by a configuration of women as a unified collective, these discourses operate to shape difference among women and re/produce particular privileged perspectives.

The findings of this study provide insights about how women contribute to constructing their status through policy discourses of university women's commission reports. Perspectives provided from this study can help to inform more effective policy interventions for women's commissions and similar groups seeking to improve the status of women.

Dedicated to my children

Nathaniel and Madeleine

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PREFACE

This study arises out of my positioning as a feminist academic committed to social change. My research interests are motivated by my belief that higher education institutions carry the potential to transform social relations. As producers and purveyors of knowledge, academic institutions are integral to re/producing social norms. Since I align with the contention that knowledge and power are inextricably linked, I see how the academy can be implicated in both supporting and subverting the status quo. Understanding the link between knowledge and power and the role of higher education in knowledge formation led me to the research objectives for this dissertation.

Having worked as a Student Affairs administrator and as a graduate student researcher and teacher in higher education over the past ten years, I have been involved in the design and implementation of policy within the university and at the state level. Motivated by my interest in changing educational institutions in ways that would help to eliminate discrimination, I chose to pursue doctoral study in Educational Policy and Leadership with a focus in higher education. This motivation was fueled by my belief that institutional change within the academy might help to catalyze social change more broadly.

My involvement in the writing and passage of a statewide anti-hazing law in 1993, my service to a university women's commission, my role as an educator and

advocate for a sexual harassment and rape prevention program, and my participation in coordinating and implementing student affairs policy changes for the university at which I was employed were experiences that further sustained my interest in the connections among feminism, social change, leadership, and policy in higher education. As I became increasingly focused on how I might best contribute to social change through my work in the university, I developed more questions about the role of policy in higher education.

At present, I remain interested in definitions and uses of policy and leadership in the academy and beyond. However, my thinking about these concepts has changed dramatically since I first entered the doctoral program. Since that time, my study of feminist, critical and poststructural theories has given me a lens through which to analyze policy and uncover hidden assumptions that inhere in the making of policy. As a result, I have grown increasingly suspicious of modernist ameliorative missions inscribed in policy and have begun to question how the making and implementation of policy might serve to sustain dominant power relations. Nevertheless, I am not willing to wholly abandon the idea that policy interventions can be part of processes that improve the experiences of women and underrepresented groups in academe and as part of larger struggles toward a more equitable society.

This dissertation arises out of a restlessness produced by both confluence and disjuncture of theory and practice as they have taken shape in my own thinking and experience. My study represents a feminist poststructural examination of university women's commission reports that does not entirely relinquish critical research aims of empowerment and emancipation. I *do* want this study to make a difference. It is my hope that this work will contribute to a knowledge base that will be used to disrupt the *status quo*

and in so doing, enhance the lived experiences of those working and studying in postsecondary institutions.

CHAPTER 1

UNIVERSITY WOMEN'S COMMISSION REPORTS AND THE DISCURSIVE SHAPING OF WOMEN'S STATUS

Over the past thirty years, equity issues in higher education have been a focus of public attention and academic research. Much has been written about the status of women in higher education, the promise and problems of affirmative action, and how related policy may enhance or thwart attempts to achieve equity in institutions of higher education. The complexity of the issues is, however, often obscured in highly contentious public debates that situate people in either/or camps, for or against affirmative action and other equity initiatives. Lost in these debates is a discussion of how women themselves have contributed to constructing their status through policy. Further, research rarely considers how well-intentioned attempts to advance equity policy may unwittingly perpetuate discourses and practices that reinforce *inequity*.

In this study of women's commission policy reports at four research universities in the United States, I consider how women contribute to shaping their status in higher education through the generation of equity policy. More specifically, I ask, what subject positions are produced through the discourses of women's commission reports? And, how might these subject positions influence the experiences of women at the university? First, I examine how discourses of access, femininity and feminism provided by commission reports contribute to constructing subject positions for women in relation to

the university. Then, I consider how discourses of difference¹ in the reports contribute to shaping subject positions for women in relation to other women.

The written texts of university women's commission policy reports from four U.S. research universities comprise the data source for this study. University women's commissions represent the primary means by which women in postsecondary institutions formally articulate concerns and advance policy recommendations to achieve equity. My examination of these policy reports is one way of understanding how particular subject positions are shaped by women seeking to change U.S. higher education. These policy reports provide a valuable opportunity for "reading" how women construct themselves in the process of policy-making and, in turn, how these constructions may influence thinking about the status of women and equity policy in postsecondary education.

Since their inception in 1968, numerous university women's commissions have produced reports that are used as benchmarks for documenting the status, conditions, and positions of women, and for making policy recommendations at particular institutions. "Conceptualized within a liberal feminist framework," women's commissions have generally served three related purposes:

- to demonstrate administrative support for the improvement of women's status,
- to give women a collective voice on campus, and
- to serve as a sounding board for women's concerns (Glazer, 1997, p. 66).

Traditionally, commissions have several pragmatic functions including: "clarifying issues, setting priorities, collecting data, making recommendations, monitoring activities and [working to] influence the policy agenda" (Glazer, 1997, p. 68). Among the issues frequently taken up by commissions are the under or overrepresentation of women in

various institutional arenas, sexual harassment, inclusion in the curriculum, safety, personnel policies related to maternity leave and family care-giving issues, pay equity, sex discrimination in promotion and tenure, and the lack of women in upper level administrative/leadership positions.

Commission reports represent a culmination of many months, and often years, of collaborative work (TenElshof, 1973; Blum, 1991) on the part of the committed staff, students and faculty who are typically appointed to serve by university presidents. Often, the genesis of a women's commission on a particular campus can be traced back to both the pressures of grass roots organizing by women and the threat of Executive Order 11246 and Title IX sanctions (TenElshof, 1973). Thus, it is not uncommon to find that university women's commissions are often officially connected to the university's affirmative action officer. Most often, however, they are a formally recognized university investigative committee that reports directly to the institution's president or governing board.

In the next section, I describe how my research is situated in relation to other scholarship focusing on university women's commissions. I then provide an overview of university women's commissions and examine their emergence in U.S. higher education in relation to the second-wave women's movement² and women's commissions at the international and federal levels. Finally, I more fully describe the policy reports generated by these groups.

University Women's Commissions and the Status of Women

“Environment Still Hostile to Women in Academe, New Evidence Indicates” reported an October 1991 headline in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (Blum, p.1). This particular article called attention to findings of university women's commission reports indicating that problems of discrimination against women have persisted since the 1970s. The article describes the situation for women in 1991 and draws attention to contemporary commission report findings that parallel those issued nearly twenty years earlier. For instance, a 1973 study that examined findings of 125 reports generated by university women's commissions across the United States concluded that a pattern of discrimination against women existed in higher education (Robinson, 1973). In 1991, Blum's reporting on women's commission findings concurs. She writes,

In the past few years, institutions such as Middlebury College, Pennsylvania State and Case Western Reserve Universities, and the Universities of Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska and Virginia have appointed [women's commissions] to assess conditions of employment for women and make recommendations for change. . . . Many institutions conducted similar voluntary studies to assess the status of women on their campuses in the late 1960s and early 1970s. But despite the growing number of female students, professors and administrators. . . a number of campuses have recognized that many equity issues raised in those earlier reports have not yet been resolved (p.1).

Even more recently, a study on the status of women faculty at MIT prompted the chair of MIT faculty to write, “the key conclusion one gets from the report is that gender discrimination in the 1990s is subtle but pervasive” (MIT, 1999, p. 3). As these findings and headlines suggest, over the past thirty years, and even today, the work of university women's commissions serves as a vehicle for communicating messages to academics and sometimes the general public about sex/gender discrimination in higher education.

According to Ginsberg & Plank (1995), “the multiple uses to which commissions can be put has made them an integral part of the policy-generating and policy-making process” (p. 4). Commission initiatives in education over the past two decades and resultant reform reports like *A Nation at Risk* (produced by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) and *Tomorrow’s Teachers* (produced by the Holmes Group, 1986) have attracted considerable scholarly attention to the field of educational policy studies (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1995; Ginsberg & Plank, 1995; Weis, 1995). Comparatively little attention, however, has been directed to university women’s commissions and the policy reports generated by these groups. Although women’s commissions in universities have been generating reports for over three decades and have served as the primary vehicle by which women in universities have contributed to policy-making efforts toward equity, historical accounts and governance studies of higher education have largely ignored these groups. When studies have examined university women’s commissions³ they have most often been considered through a feminist lens and treated as an exemplar of a change strategy, a movement, or a political strategy by women (Rossi & Calderwood, 1973; Rosenberg, 1982; Stewart, 1980). More recently, however, commissions have served as a focus for research related to strategies of empowerment for women in U.S. universities (Moore & Sagaria, 1993); affirmative action policy in U.S. higher education (Glazer, 1997); gender equity policies at a South African university (Walker, 1997), and gender equity policies in Canadian educational institutions (deCastell & Bryson, 1997).

These research studies provide varied perspectives about university women’s commissions. One perspective contends that university women’s commissions are

mainly symbolic entities “articulating a commitment to gender equity for women” (Glazer, 1997, p. 71). Another view holds that commission work can provide “a way for women in academe to alter their role from one of petitioners of male decision-makers to conceptualizers and designers of the university itself in their own voice” (Moore & Sagaria, 1993, p. 5). Based on her study of women’s commission policy-making efforts in a South African University, Walker (1997) found that commission-inspired gender equity policies are only a first step in a policy process that requires continual review and revision.

My study of the discourses employed in commission reports is the first to examine women’s commissions in this way. The approach I take aligns with the work of deCastell & Bryson (1997), who apply poststructural perspectives to describe the “paradoxical consequences of institutionalized equity policies” (p. 85). Their study reveals that the goals of gender equity policies may actually be undermined by the uncritical acceptance of concepts (like equity) that carry exclusionary assumptions. They suggest that substantial conceptual clarification is needed for those involved with equity policy efforts and that feminists interested in this kind of work need to operate strategically. The findings of my study parallel deCastell & Bryson’s (1997) assertion that feminists need to find ways to strategically intervene with the means of discursive production in order to avoid subordinating “nominally feminist agendas to the greater ends of orderly and hegemonically controlled institutional reform” (p. 100). My work also aligns with Walker (1997), who uses theories of critical policy analysis (Ball, 1994; Marshall, 1997b) to describe how gender equity policies “enter patterns of power relations, rather than changing them in some linear manner” (p. 53).

While scholarly studies on women's commissions have varied in approach, most employ a case study method and rely on observation and interviews to arrive at their findings. These studies are primarily descriptive and have provided insights on the organization and function of commissions as policy-focused groups of women advocating for institutional change in higher education. My study differs in that I analyze the *reports* produced by women's commissions in order to examine how the discourses offered by them contribute to re/producing particular subject positions and constructing women's status in the context of higher education policy-making.

Historicizing University Women's Commissions⁴

The emergence of university women's commissions in the United States followed a pattern of women's commission development that can be traced to the international level with the formation of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in 1946. Initially, the primary role of the UN commission was that of collecting information and making recommendations related to women's rights globally. In the early 1960s the UN commission undertook the task of promoting women's commissions at the national level. By 1979, sixty-seven countries reported having some kind of women's commission or government division charged with functions similar to women's commissions (Stewart, 1980).

Commissions were established in the United States beginning at the federal level and then moving to state and local levels. In the United States, the development of women's commissions can be linked to the first Presidential Commission on the Status of Women which was established in 1961 by executive order of President John F. Kennedy.

The creation of this commission helped to serve a number of political interests. It served as a reward for the many women who had supported Kennedy's campaign, and as a way to maintain their support for the next election. Ironically, the creation of this women's commission was also a means by which the Kennedy administration could deflect support for the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). This was politically important for Kennedy because he was indebted to labor interests for his success in the Presidential election the previous year, a constituency that strongly opposed the passage of the ERA (Stewart, 1980).

In light of this backdrop, it is not surprising that after 22 months of study, the Presidential Commission on the Status of Women produced a report concluding that the ERA was unnecessary. Despite this position, however, "the facts, in large part, spoke for themselves and called attention to the unfavorable condition of women in American society" (Stewart, 1980, p.7). As a result, the commission report generated institutional spin-offs, including the establishment of statewide commissions on the status of women. Within three years, 45 states implemented women's commissions. Subsequent administrations followed Kennedy's lead and also appointed commission-like groups. These commissions went further than the first in pushing for women's policy concerns, including action on the ERA and enforcement of anti-discrimination legislation, and demanding support for new policies in the areas of employment, education and childcare. The Carter Advisory Committee report echoed the same concerns voiced in the Nixon report, but also included concerns related to women's health, pay equity, housing and sexual harassment (Stewart, 1980). While commissions were met with open hostility at

times, according to Rosenberg (1982), it seemed that their reports were most often marginalized or completely neglected by the administrations that commissioned them.

Women's commissions at the state and local levels emerged in the mid-1960s and proliferated in the 1970s when the Women's Bureau in the United States Department of Labor began to initiate their establishment nationwide (Stewart, 1980). While most of these commissions elected to pursue less contentious matters, like supporting educational functions—sponsoring conferences, developing newsletters and holding hearings—a number have also served in lobbying and administrative oversight capacities (Rosenberg, 1982). State and local commissions also served the vital role of establishing networks among women—a condition that was integral to the growth of the women's movement. By 1980, local commissions existed in 150 communities within the United States (Stewart, 1980).

Commissions were generally developed and promoted as a strategy by those in positions of power within government. According to Stewart (1980), women's commissions “represent the sole governmentally endorsed effort to institutionalize systematically female participation in the United States” (p. 2). Rooted in an ideology of democracy that values citizen participation and representation, the typical mission of a commission or task force group is to focus attention on a pressing problem and to develop new responses and solutions to the problem. Stewart (1980) describes commissions as “institutions” that serve a dual function of providing opportunities for citizens to participate, while at the same time serving as representation inside government.

Largely modeled after women's commissions at the federal and state levels, university women's commissions are generally considered part of a broader women's movement in academe that was influenced by changes in the growth and structure of higher education as well as the momentum of the Civil Rights and women's movements at the national level (Klotzburger, 1973; Cleaver, 1997). The earliest university women's commissions were formed in 1968 at the University of California, Berkeley and the University of Chicago (Freeman, 1973). While they were not limited to research universities, commissions on the status of women were initiated by these institutions in particular as a means of responding to demands made by women and to "demonstrate their good faith efforts" toward enhancing the status of women on campus (Glazer, 1997, p. 66). Commissions were part of a growing number of women-focused higher education groups, including undergraduate and graduate women's caucuses, consciousness-raising groups and academic discipline-related groups for women such as the Committee W of the AAUP (Rossi & Calderwood, 1973).

Working both within and against the formal structure of the institution, university women's commissions occupy an inherently contradictory space. Women's commissions are part of the formal institutional governance structure because administrative officials within the university typically establish them, and hence the commissions maintain formal reporting lines within the administrative hierarchy. Yet the primary focus of their role is to address concerns about the position of women in academe, including the institution's treatment of, devaluation of, and discrimination against women. Thus, women's commissions are also positioned to work against the institutional status quo. The manner in which university women's commissions are established and the

contradictory location they occupy within the institution sets them apart from other types of women-focused groups in universities.⁵

University Women's Commissions in the United States have been established on campuses across the country for over thirty years now. Generally, the major task of a university women's commission is to assess women's status and make recommendations for improvement. This is typically accomplished through the development of policy reports, which have traditionally included a compilation of statistics about women's access to the university and various arenas within the institution, the representation of women in the leadership share of the university, promotion and tenure rates, and salary equity. Climate-related matters are also addressed, including child-care and family-leave concerns, sexual harassment, safety, and the representation of women in the curriculum (Glazer, 1997; Moore & Sagaria, 1993; Robinson, 1973; TenElshof, 1973).

University women's commissions and their reports represent the primary means by which women in universities have worked within/against⁶ the university to identify sex/gender discrimination and make recommendations to influence equity policy at the institutional level. In so doing, commissions draw on multiple and competing discourses to communicate ideas and convey images about the status of women on their particular campus and in higher education in general. In this study, I focus on the discourses of university women's commission reports and examine how they re/produce various subject positions for women in higher education.

Research Questions

I employ feminist perspectives from both critical and poststructural frames to analyze the discourses of university women's commission reports. I chose these

approaches to policy analysis as they provide an imperative for questioning the givenness of social problems and examining antecedents of problems articulated by policy (Ball, 1990, 1994; Fairclough, 1995; Scheurich, 1994). This differs from conventional policy analyses, which generally begin with an acceptance of policy problems and hence are limited to taken-for-granted discursive frames. As a feminist researcher, I was drawn to critical and poststructural approaches to policy analysis for their utility in uncovering assumptions inherent in policies that reinforce the status quo while purporting to change it.

My approach to this study emerges from tensions between critical and poststructural approaches and the ways in which I understand feminism to negotiate these differences. While both perspectives contend that policy research should uncover assumptions hidden in the framing of policy problems, the theories differ markedly and provide for diverse understandings of how hidden assumptions operate through policy and how (or if) policy can serve to subvert the *status quo*. In formulating my research questions, I drew upon the increasing acceptance by social science researchers that documents not only record, but also actively contribute to shaping culture (Fairclough, 1995; Hodder, 1994; Luke, 1995; Smith, 1990a, 1990b; Weiner, 1994)—the “symbolic processes, ideologies and sociohistorical contexts” that influence the ways in which participants make sense of their reality (Tierney, 1993, p. 7). For example, university student handbooks reflect and transmit a dominant interpretation of the culture by explicating relationships, expectations and consequences for behavior among members of the university community. As formal university documents, women’s commission policy reports are part of a larger body of text that provides the official history of institutions.

As such, they not only reflect the culture experienced by women in academe, but they also contribute to the construction of that cultural reality.

An analysis of university women's commission reports cannot fully capture discourses that are inevitably fluid and bound to their historical moment and cultural context. However, it can provide an analytic perspective on the ways in which discourses offered by these policy reports constitute particular subject positions. This study was designed to examine the discursive framing of policy problems, solutions and images of women in the context of university women's commission reports and the ways in which these discourses shape and re/produce subject positions. The following questions were developed as a guide for this inquiry:

- What do women's commission reports describe as problems and solutions for women in universities?
- What are the predominant images of women that emerge from commission reports?
- What discourses are employed to shape these problems, solutions and images?
- What subject positions are re/produced through these discourses?

Significance

The primary goal of this study is to examine policy reports generated by commissions to determine how women contribute to constructing their status in higher education through the discursive shaping of subject positions. According to Blackmore (1995), in order for women to effectively influence policy development, it is necessary to recognize how "they are being discursively positioned in any specific context and then decide upon how and whether they will intervene, interrupt or redefine" (p. 310). By

exposing the discursive shaping of the subject positions produced through discourses of university women's commission reports, I anticipate that this study will provide new perspectives to inform more effective policy interventions for women's commissions and other groups interested in promoting equitable practices in higher education and other institutional arenas.

This study draws attention to the policy initiatives of women's commissions at four research universities over a 30-year time frame. Women's commissions represent the primary means by which women working and studying in universities voice concerns and work together to propose policy recommendations to address these concerns. Yet little is understood about these commissions and the policy reports generated by them. My analysis highlights the work of women's commissions and traces the ways in which women themselves have identified problems, offered policy recommendations for improvement, and in the process, contributed to constructing their own status.

I expect the findings of this study to offer more complicated understandings of policy and women's commissions in higher education. Analyses informed by theories of discourse suggest that even policies designed to promote equity and advance women's status may unintentionally contribute to reinforcing the status quo (Brown, 1995; deCastell & Bryson, 1997; Kitzinger & Thomas, 1995). While this research focuses on sex/gender equity policy primarily, I am hopeful that the approach and methods I have employed will inform policy development for those seeking to eliminate inequitable treatment based on race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, physical ability, and social class as well.

Key Terms

Much of the terminology I use to describe my approach to this study warrants further delineation. Some of the terms I employ are not yet widely used in the field of policy studies, and since this dissertation presents an extension of traditional methods for policy analysis, it is important to carefully explain terms and concepts that are not part of the established lexicon of the field. Additionally, many of the terms and concepts employed in this study require careful explanation because they are widely used across a range of academic disciplines and can be interpreted in ways that reflect slight or even considerable variations in meaning. In the following section, I highlight some key terms in order to clarify their meaning as I use them in this study.

Discourse

Discourse is a term frequently employed yet variously defined in academic contexts. Broadly, discourse refers to both spoken and written language use, and the study of discourse (discourse analysis)⁷ includes the examination of both talk and text and their relationship to the social context in which they are constructed (van Dijk, 1997). The belief that discourses both reflect and shape the culture in which they are situated is central to this study. I concur with Riggins (1997), who contends that discourses “are artifacts of language through which the very reality they purport to reflect is constructed” (p. 2). Thus, discourses might be described as ongoing contestations as they are actively reinforced, resisted and reconstituted.

In this study, I rely on discourse theories informed by the work of Michel Foucault. These theories, which will be described more fully in chapter two, emphasize the discursive shaping of subjectivity (Mills, 1997; McNay, 1992; Weedon, 1997, 1999). This study of

commission reports is rooted in the understanding that “discourse is the key site for the social construction of meaning,” and as such, “what people do in discourse overrides changes initiated at other levels” (Cameron, 1998, pp. 963-964). My research findings highlight women’s commission policy discourses of access, femininity and feminism (chapter four) and discourses of difference (including professionalism, heterosexuality and whiteness) described in chapter five. In chapter four, I examine how these discourses shape subject positions in relation to the university and in chapter five, I consider how discourses shape subject positions for women in relation to other women.

Intertextuality, the ways in which all discourse is interpreted against a backdrop of other discourses (Marshall, 1992; Riggins, 1997), is used to convey the idea that discourse is socially situated. More than just a group of statements, discourse is a constellation of related statements that reflect and reproduce particular points of view (Connolly, 1993; Fairclough, 1995; Mills, 1997; Weedon, 1997). As Luke (1995) writes, “discourses mark out identifiable systems of meaning and fields of knowledge and belief” (p. 15). For example, the social practice of schooling is often described through two predominant discourses. One discourse represents schooling as a force of empowerment and liberation for individuals and society, while another discourse frames it as an effective means of training good citizens and maintaining a well ordered and controlled society. As evidenced by this example, discourses are never neutral; they always “reflect ideologies, systems of values, beliefs and social practices” (Hicks, 1995, p. 53). In my study, I show how the discourses circulating in university women’s commission reports reflect and shape a particular reality for women in higher education.

Critical Approaches

Inspired by various oppositional movements, including feminism, Marxism, and race-specific social movements, inquiry positioned in a critical frame can be broadly described as activist (Fay, 1987; Freire, 1973; Giroux, 1981; Gore, 1993; Lather, 1991a; 1992). Critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 1995) and feminist critical policy analysis (Marshall, 1997a, 1997b) are two approaches that apply a critical perspective to the study of discourse and policy respectively. The use of the term “critical” here describes theoretical approaches influenced by critical theory⁸ and “critical social science theory” that provide ways of understanding “the oppressive features of a society such that this understanding stimulates its audience to transform their society and thereby liberate themselves” (Fay, 1987, p. 4). Critical approaches to policy analysis can be described as openly ideological in their explicit intent to critique and construct policy that empowers individuals to understand their social world and to change it in ways that promote justice and equality (Ball, 1994).

Poststructural Approaches

Poststructural and postmodern approaches imply theoretical perspectives that reject “grand narratives” such as enlightenment humanism (Lather, 1991a). Sometimes, the terms are used interchangeably, while at other times they carry more nuanced meanings. For example, Lather (1991a) chooses the term “postmodern to mean larger cultural shifts of a post-industrial era and poststructural to mean the working out of those shifts in academic theory” (p. 4). Poststructural theory is generally characterized by a move away from the structuralist assumptions of unity and sameness that inhere in the revolutionary/grand narrative discourses of Marxism, neomarxisms, critical theory and

many feminisms (Gore, 1993). I have chosen the term “poststructural” to describe one of my theoretical lenses for this study because this approach provides a theory of dynamic, contradictory subjectivity that is discursively produced. Further, poststructuralism “offers very different ways of looking at and beyond the obvious and puts different sorts of questions on the agenda for change” (Ball, 1994, p. 2). For example, instead of being concerned with policy implementation and effectiveness in achieving intended outcomes, a poststructural approach is concerned with assumptions embedded in the naming of the policy problem and unintended consequences of policy solutions.

Subjectivity and Subject Positions

Subjectivity and subject positions are central to the theories of discourse that inform this study of university women’s commission policy reports. According to Weedon (1997), subjectivity refers to “the place where our sense of ourselves. . . is *constructed*” (p. 21) and subject positions are “ways of being an individual”—positions we construct for ourselves through discourse. In this study, I use the term “subject positions” to describe discursively constituted positions that can be inhabited. For example, “high-achiever,” “feminist,” “drug addict,” “soccer mom,” “lesbian,” and “wife” are all subject positions that one might occupy. In a sense, we might think of these subject positions as an invitation of sorts. Subject positions are shaped through discourse—we are invited to assume them, and when we do, we participate in constructing our subjectivity. Sawicki (1994) defines subjectivity as “multiple practices of the self—ways of knowing and governing ourselves that are inherited from historical traditions” (p. 288). Thus, subjectivities are dynamic and socially specific as subject positions take form through multiple and competing discourses. Understood through

these perspectives, our sense of self can be considered to be in flux as we assume complementary and/or contradictory subject positions at once (Mills, 1992, 1997; Weedon, 1997, 1999).

Divergent understandings of “the subject” provide an important distinction between critical and poststructural perspectives. Critical approaches are typically rooted in a liberal humanist view of a rational subject—a unique individual with a fixed core or “true self.” Rejecting this configuration, poststructural approaches often look to discourse as the site of subject formation and theorize a “subject-in-process” or a “subject-in-crisis” (Mills, 1997, p. 34). Thus, poststructural approaches relinquish a unified coherent subject and replace this conceptualization with dynamic subjectivity—a site of instability and conflict as multiple and competing subject positions are inhabited at once. As Mills (1992) writes, “it is by describing discourse in this way that we are able to see ourselves. . . as being in a complex, contradictory process of negotiation with a variety of discourses” (p. 283).

Policy Studies

Policy research on equity in higher education typically has been devoted to understanding policy outcomes. Examples of this include representation studies that examine proportions of men and women in particular locations (e.g. employment categories, academic disciplines), and salary studies designed to assess parity between male and female employees in the same or substantially similar occupations. In the realm of policy analysis, little attention has been directed to examining the discursive framing of “problems” said to be alleviated by policy or the unintended and often undermining consequences of policy intended to be liberatory. Even policy research from feminist

perspectives (Campbell, 1995; Fine, 1991; Fraser, 1989; Fraser & Gordon, 1994; Griffin, 1994) has only recently begun to consider how women have contributed to constructing themselves (and “others”) in policy efforts, and how policy initiatives designed to be emancipatory may not result in the intended effect (Blackmore, 1995; Brown, 1995; Cruikshank, 1995; deCastell & Bryson, 1997; Kitzinger & Thomas, 1995; Walker, 1997).

Moving beyond descriptions of policy outcomes, my study examines how the discursive framing of policy problems and solutions in women’s commission reports re/produces particular subject positions. In order to accomplish this, I merged various aspects of critical and poststructural approaches with policy and discourse analysis to develop a hybrid method that I call *policy discourse analysis*. A more detailed description of conventional policy approaches and alternative approaches to policy analysis, and the methodological components I combined to extend these approaches are provided in chapters two and three.

Overview of Chapters

This study is elaborated in the following five chapters. Chapter two provides the conceptual backdrop where I describe in greater detail the theoretical frames that shaped my research questions and informed my data analysis for this inquiry. Theories of discourse, power and subjectivity are delineated, followed by theories of policy, policy analysis and discourse analysis. Chapter three describes the mechanics of the study. I begin by describing policy discourse analysis, the methodological approach to this study, as a hybrid method—a blending and extension of critical, poststructural and established qualitative research methodologies. I then delineate the methods and rationale used to select the sample of commission reports at particular universities and report my methods

of data collection as well as explicate the method of policy discourse analysis that I developed to analyze and interpret the data for this study. Finally, I discuss issues related to the soundness of my study.

The analytic findings that emerged from the processes detailed in chapter three are presented in chapters four and five. Chapter four delineates how commission discourses of access, femininity and feminism construct seemingly contradictory subject positions—women as vulnerable *and* empowered outsiders in relation to the university. I provide examples of how these discourses are employed by women’s commissions in their construction of policy problems and recommendations, as well as a discussion of the consequences of these strategies. Then, chapter five explicates how discourses of difference provided by university women’s commission reports shape professionalism, whiteness and heterosexuality as dominant subject positions for women in relation to other women. I also discuss how a strand of the femininity discourse interrupts the discourse of professionalism to provide a focus on women as mothers, partners and family care-givers. In chapter six I explore a number of implications related to the findings of this research. Finally, I provide some thoughts on how the findings of my study might help to enhance the efforts of women’s commissions and similar groups working to promote equity through policy-making initiatives.

Notes

¹I use the term “discourse of difference” to describe ways of thinking, talking about and constructing differences among women. I am following the work of Foucault and others who have studied discourse as “recurrent statements and wordings across texts. . .that are specialized to construct meanings for a particular field of relevant knowledge and belief” (Luke, 1995, p. 15). In considering difference, I am following the work of a number of feminist thinkers who have contributed to theorizing difference, including Collins (1995); Ellsworth and Miller (1996); Gordon (1991); Higginbotham (1992); Kaminsky (1994); Lugones (1994); Mohanty (1991); Phelan (1989, 1991); Sawicki (1986); Williams (1991); Weedon (1999); West and Fenstermaker (1995) and Yeatman (1993). See chapters two and five for more detailed discussions of difference.

²Here I use the term “second-wave women’s movement” as it is often used by feminist scholars to refer to the revitalization of the feminist movement in the United States in the 1960s and 70s.

³For the purposes of this discussion, women’s commissions will be used as the general term referring to groups established for the purpose of examining the conditions and status of women at a particular institution of higher education. Often, the groups that produce these types of reports are referred to as women’s commissions, reflecting their formal relationship and charge within that particular institution—i.e. *The Report of the President’s Commission on Women* at The Ohio State University.

⁴I choose the term “historicize” here to indicate the perspective that history is actively constructed and that historical accounts do not represent an objective account of a fixed truth that was waiting to be discovered.

⁵While this study focuses on the active and productive aspects of text, I do not mean to imply that commission reports are always perceived in this way. It is not uncommon for commission members to express their dissatisfaction about these reports being overlooked and underutilized by other policy-makers at the university.

⁶I borrow this term from Patti Lather (1991b), who uses it in the title of her book, Feminist Research in Education: Within/Against, to describe feminist research situated within traditional (post-positivistic) approaches to social science research. This dynamic parallels that of university women’s commissions, whose work may reinforce as well as undermine their own goals. In the case of feminist research within established traditions of social science, Lather explains that “situating such work both within and against traditional approaches to empirical work makes it possible to probe how feminist research reinscribes that which it is resisting as well as how it resists that reinscription” (p. 27).

⁷The study of discourse manifests itself in a variety of forms inspired by fields as diverse as anthropology, communication, history, political science, psychology, sociolinguistics and theology. Modes and styles of analysis vary significantly. Many involve the study of structures and strategies of text and talk (van Dijk, 1993). I am most

interested in the forms of discourse analysis that rely upon Foucault's conceptualization of discourse and power/knowledge (Foucault, 1972, 1978, 1980). These are described in greater detail in chapter two. I situate this study as a *policy discourse analysis*—a methodological approach that has been strongly influenced by work in the areas of feminist poststructuralism and critical discourse analysis (Ball, 1994; Weedon, 1997, 1999; Fairclough, 1995). See chapter two for further elaboration of discourse analysis and chapter three for an explication of policy discourse analysis.

⁸Critical theory is most often associated with the Frankfurt School and social theorists like Marcuse, Adorno, Habermas and others who subscribe to a neo-Marxist theory of advanced capitalism (Fay, 1987). The use of the term “critical theory,” however, has come to imply both a theory of society and a metatheory of social science (Fay, 1987). My approach to this study has been influenced by research methodologies situated in a critical frame. Such an approach has come to be identified as “critical inquiry.” Informed by both critical theory and critical social science theory, these approaches represent “a response to the experiences, desires and needs of oppressed people” (Lather, 1991a, p. 63). See chapters two and three for a further discussion of methodologies informed by critical theory.

CHAPTER 2

DISCOURSE, POWER AND POLICY: THE MAKING OF SUBJECT POSITIONS

This chapter is devoted to elaborating the conceptual framework that guided my formulation of the research questions and my analysis of the discourses of university women's commission policy reports. I begin by describing theories of discourse, power, and policy that have informed my approach to this study. I then delineate how these theories are positioned in relation to critical and poststructural feminist perspectives.

Discourse Theory & the Making of Subject Positions

I begin this chapter with a discussion of discourse theory since discourse is the focus of my examination of university women's commission reports. Discourse theory broadly describes a range of theories that have been largely influenced by the work of Michel Foucault (Mills, 1997). While Foucault did not explicitly position himself as a discourse theorist or a discourse analyst, through his work he explicated particular ideas about discourse that have since influenced methodologies across a range of disciplines. The methodology employed in this study is influenced by poststructuralist discourse theories shaped specifically by Foucault's configuration of power and subjectivity (Weedon, 1997).

Significant to poststructuralist¹ thought is Foucault's departure from structuralist assumptions about language and from the transhistorical subject of phenomenology. Rather than understanding language and discourse as static entities that can stand in isolation and be investigated as such (e.g. a text or collection of words on paper), Foucault presented discourse as dynamic and productive. In other words, discourses produce particular versions of reality and particular subject positions (Mills, 1997; Weedon, 1997). The subject positions offered through discourse serve as a range of possibilities for individuals to occupy. As discourses shift, so too do the subject positions available to us. As delineated in chapter one, individuals assume—or one might say *inhabit*—multiple, contradictory and shifting subject positions. Taken together, these positionings, the conscious and unconscious ways in which we situate ourselves in relation to the social world, constitute our subjectivity (Weedon, 1997).

Discourses can be conceptualized as dynamic constellations of words and images that legitimate and produce a given reality. While theories of discourse contend that realities are discursively constituted, Mills (1997) reminds us that even while making this claim, Foucauldian theories of discourse acknowledge materiality in our daily lives. Rather, these theories assert that the only way we can comprehend materiality is through discourse (Mills, 1997). In other words, “realities” are produced through the discursive structuring of materiality. Foucault contends that “[discourses are] practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (1972, p. 49). This contention is important to my study in that it clearly emphasizes the active properties of discourse—the ways in which discourse *constructs and produces* not only realities but also our sense of self in these realities. In other words, it is through discourse that one learns “to

recognize, represent, and 'be,' for instance a 'rapper,' a 'learning disabled,' a 'loyal American,'" (Luke, 1995, p. 14). According to Weedon (1997), "subjectivity is produced in a whole range of discursive practices—economic, social and political—the meanings of which are a constant site of struggle over power" (p. 21). These discursive practices construct a "hierarchical social grid of the 'normal' categories of gender identity, sexual desire, ethnic identity, class and work, regional solidarity, citizenship and national identity" (Luke, 1995, p. 14). Some theorists would also add sex (one's male or femaleness) and race to this list of identity² markers that are discursively constituted and hierarchized within social relations (Butler, 1990, 1993).

The conceptualization of discourse as dynamic assumes that subjectivity constituted through discourse is unstable, as it is inevitably bound to its historical moment. Each of us then embodies multiple, contradictory subject positions, and as such, we are continually engaged in a process of choosing which discourses to draw upon to represent ourselves. From this perspective, subjectivity is not fixed or essential, as a modernist view of "the subject" suggests. Rather, poststructural discourse theory contends that subjectivities are shaped through multiple discourses that can mutually reinforce and/or compete with one another. Thus, subjectivity is continually revised and reconstituted as discourses are contested and disrupted.

Much of Foucault's work was devoted to decentering liberal humanist conceptualizations of the subject or the "sovereign self"—the rational, thinking, self-contained, unified individual (Mills, 1997). Indeed, Foucault sought to (re)write history in a way that shifted the focus away from the essential subject. Influenced by this work, poststructuralism seeks to destabilize the "humanist essence of subjectivity and proposes

a subjectivity which is precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak” (Weedon, 1997, p. 32).

Therefore, as Mills (1997) writes, poststructuralism seeks to “disintegrate the notion of the unified subject” and replace it with an understanding of subjectivity that is contingent upon discourse (p. 34).

A poststructuralist conceptualization of subjectivity is politically significant to feminist theory because “abandoning the belief in essential subjectivity opens subjectivity to change” (Weedon, 1997, p. 32). While poststructuralist thought contends that subjectivity is constantly revised and reconstituted, it rejects liberal humanist versions of how such change occurs. For example, theories of social change posited by many feminisms, Marxisms and neo-Marxisms remain rooted in an understanding of an individual subject who is capable of “resisting ideological pressures and controlling his or her actions (Mills, 1997, p. 34). In contrast, Foucauldian poststructuralist theories understand the subject as an *effect* of discourse and thus do not provide for a theory of agency in the sense that an individual has control over her actions and can resist systems of domination by strategically taking action against them.

Understandings of “the subject” are inextricably linked to understandings of agency and strategies for social change. From a critical perspective, the subject is oppressed through ideology—systems of thought that serve to reinforce the status quo. In other words, individuals are subject to power through ideological hegemony.³ This perspective contends, however, that the status quo can be changed if individuals learn to see these ideological systems and actively work against/resist them. This model of agency—or political activity—from a critical perspective differs markedly from agency within a

poststructural frame. With a focus on the discursive shaping of subjectivity, models of agency within poststructuralism are necessarily messy and complex (Mills, 1997). While poststructuralist discourse theories do account for political change, they remain uncertain about how much (if any) control one can exercise over one's own actions, and they emphasize the multiple effects of action—and the unintended consequences of political action (Mills, 1997).

Thus, in order to maintain a theory of agency—the capacity to act with intentionality—Foucauldian poststructuralism requires modification. It is at this juncture that feminist and post-colonial scholarship have been instrumental (Mills, 1997). Rather than “bemoaning inconsistency and incompatibility,” some feminist scholars have considered the energy that emerges from the tensions between Foucauldian versions of subjectivity and the “ethic of activism” (agency) that is so central to feminism (Diamond & Quinby, 1988, p. xvi). While Foucauldian theories describe subjectivity as an *effect* of discourse, feminist adaptations work from here to highlight the process by which this occurs, focusing on the ways in which we engage or interact with discourse to construct our selves (Mills, 1997).

For this study, I conceptualize agency as a feminist intervention in poststructuralism. Such an approach provides that women (and men) have the capacity to act and exercise power. As Weedon (1997) writes, feminist poststructuralism

involves understanding how particular social structures and processes create the conditions of existence which are at one and the same time material and discursive. In this process new modes of subjectivity become available, offering the individual both a perspective and a choice, and opening up the possibility of political change (pp. 8-9).

Like Weedon, a number of scholars (Diamond & Quinby, 1988; Lather, 1991a; 1991b; McNay, 1992; Mills, 1997; Sawicki, 1986) have described how conceptual tensions between critical and poststructural approaches can enrich feminist theory. Later in this chapter, I further detail some of these tensions and feminist responses to them.

The interplay between discourse and subjectivity allows for subjects to become agents in their own creation. In her examination of femininity as discourse, Dorothy Smith (1990b) emphasizes this point. She describes femininity as a discursive effect within a complex of social relations that organize people's lives. Reminding us that women are not passively produced by discourse, she contends that her analysis "preserves the presence of women as active subjects" (p. 161). She adds,

While the focus is on social relations extending beyond the reach of any particular individual, women participate actively in them in a characteristic dialectic: people's actual activities as participants give power to the relations that overpower them. Women's work and activities are an integral part of the overall organization of these relations (p. 161).

Drawing upon Smith's work, Mills (1997) writes, "since discourse is something you do, rather than something to which you are subjected, engaging with discourses constitutes an interactional relation of power rather than an imposition of power" (p. 88). My approach to this study of university women's commission discourses was influenced by Smith and the work of feminist poststructuralists who do not subscribe to notions of a foundational self, but seek to retheorize, rather than abandon agency within a poststructuralist frame.

Rather than understanding women as passive products of discursive fields, or as having assumed a false consciousness rendering them victims of male oppression (as in a Marxist interpretation of ideology in language) discourse theory claims that women are

active and can intervene on their own behalf (Mills, 1997). This does not mean that discourse theory implies sexism does not exist. Rather, discourse theory provides a different way of understanding sexism and the positioning of women within that context. In discourse theory, sexism is recognized as a complex system of social relations (Smith, 1990b), discursively re/produced. Mills (1991) writes that while discourses “actively constitute us as subjects; individuals have some part to play in this process, both challenging and rewriting some of the positions within discourse” (p. 68). Through discourse theory, subject positions and subjectivity are understood as constituted through a range of multiple and competing discourses and systems of meaning shaped through discourse, which are further supported by social institutions and discursive practices.

For example, a woman in Western society who has children makes meaning of her experience through discourse, and as a “mother” can assume various subject positions. Weedon (1997) reminds us that we learn to make meaning through discourses that pre-exist us—or “pre-date our entry into language” (p. 32). Thus, a new mother is “inserted in a discourse of motherhood.” (Weedon, 1997, p. 33). As such, she understands her experience through a discourse which claims that she will instantly experience a maternal bond with her child—one that will fill her with joy for this new life that she will continue to nurture and sustain through her love. Many mothers who do not experience these euphoric feelings in the early days and months of motherhood often report feeling inadequate and somehow “abnormal” and are frequently diagnosed with postpartum depression (Taylor, 1987, 1996). However, alternative discourses open the range of subject positions available to mothers and extend the possible interpretations of their reality. Such discourses may offer different understandings of motherhood and

explain the alienation and sense of failure many new mothers experience as an outcome of the stress of pregnancy, childbirth and the pressures and demands on mothers in the context of a patriarchal culture. A new mother's recognition of these alternative discourses offers her other subject positions through which she can interpret her experience (Weedon, 1997). As Mills (1992) describes, our sense of self is produced through "a complex, contradictory process of negotiation with a variety of discourses" (p. 283).

According to Luke (1995), people construct meaning on the basis of their "available stock of discursive resources" (p.15). However, in any society, some discourses are taken up and supported more readily than others. These discourses come to be labeled dominant, while others are considered to provide alternatives to the normative ways of making sense of everyday life in a particular society. It is as a result of these dominant discourses that certain ways of being can become privileged and naturalized in a particular cultural context (Coates, 1996; Mills, 1997). The designation of "dominant discourses" does not imply that alternative discourses are repressed or dominated. Foucault (1978) cautions against imagining "a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse or the dominant discourse and the dominated one" rather, he reminds us that "a multiplicity of discursive elements come into play in various strategies" (p. 100). Some discourses appear to be dominant because they tend to obscure other discourses that may offer alternative interpretations.

While poststructuralist discourse theory does not contend that discourses operate in terms of a dominant/dominated configuration, some discourses are considered dominant because they are assumed more readily than others are. These discourses tend

to be reaffirmed through their institutionalization, and as a result, other discourses may not appear to be as obvious or familiar. Dominant discourses can be identified most easily by the way in which they appear to be “natural.” In so doing, they “make invisible the fact that they are just one among many different discourses” (Coates, 1996, p. 240). For instance, the dominant discourses of masculinity and femininity provide parameters for acceptable behavior on the part of women and men in a particular context. According to Mills (1997), “these discursive frameworks demarcate the boundaries within which we can negotiate what it means to be gendered” (p. 18). As a result, it comes to be seen as normal or natural for women and men to perform in ways that fall within these discursive boundaries. Normalcy and deviancy in a particular cultural context are simultaneously constituted through discourse. Thus, in the case of gender, if a man acts in a way that is discursively constructed as “normal” feminine behavior in contemporary Western society (i.e. wearing cosmetics), his actions will likely be understood as abnormal or deviant.

Humes (1997) uses the concept of dominant and subordinate discourses to analyze educational policy documents in Scotland. Similar to Bensimon (1994), Humes draws on policy initiatives in the field of educational management to highlight multiple and competing discursive threads running through these policy documents. His analysis demonstrates that, while there are at least two distinct discourses taken up to delineate policy related to educational management, they “do not carry equal weight” (p. 26). One discursive thread emphasizes the importance of empowerment, listening and consultation with staff while another highlights leadership, “decision-taking,” and focuses on the rights of managers. Humes argues that the latter discourse is taken up more readily and has thus become dominant, while the consultation discourse that generates a notion of

“participative management emerges as a rhetorical device designed to disarm and secure consent” (p. 26).

Poststructural discourse theory highlights both the normalizing and subversive power of discourse. Feminist adaptations of poststructuralist thought tend to emphasize possibilities for social change through discourse. As Chris Weedon (1997) writes, “it is in language in the form of conflicting discourses which constitutes us as conscious thinking subjects and enables us to give meaning to the world *and to act* to transform it” [italics added] (p. 31). From this perspective, poststructural discourse theory can provide an opportunity to focus on women’s capacity to act within the discursive constitution of hierarchically organized social relations and their subjectivity. A feminist poststructural approach makes sense for my analysis because it offers a way of understanding the subject positions produced by policy discourses while at the same time revealing how this understanding may help women to intervene and extend the range of possible subject positions open to them.

Discourse and Power/Knowledge

A more complete delineation of the ways in which discourse constructs subject positions and subjectivities requires a discussion of power, truth, and knowledge as they operate through discourse. Again, the work of Michel Foucault has been instrumental in reconfiguring these concepts in ways that depart from traditional understandings rooted in a liberal humanist frame. I do not attempt to provide a thorough analysis of Foucault’s concept of power/knowledge here. Rather, I will highlight the major features of productive power in relation to a “juridico-discursive” model of power on which traditional revolutionary theories (i.e. Marxism) are based (Sawicki, 1986, p. 25).

Foucault's explication of power/knowledge and its theoretical implications have been considered among his most notable contributions to feminism (Diamond & Quinby, 1988). In this study, I draw on the work of Foucault (1978, 1980) and others who reconceptualize power as a productive force rather than a primarily repressive one (Butler, 1990, 1993; Fraser, 1989; McNay, 1992; Ransom, 1997; Sawicki, 1986; Weedon, 1997). In contrast to traditional configurations of power as omnipotent, coercive and prohibitive, Foucault (1978) delineates the creative functions of power and its relation to knowledge; power that is produced and transmitted through knowledge and discourse at the micro-levels of society.

A Foucauldian understanding of power is important to the conceptual framework of my study for several reasons. First, it reinforces the important role of discourse in the shaping of power relations in society. Further, it moves away from dualistic and overly simplistic understandings of the position of women in a patriarchal culture. For instance, in describing femininity as discourse, Mills (1992) writes,

Discourse theory does not locate the origins of femininity in patriarchy, a rather amorphous agentless term. Rather, it sees femininity as a system of discursive frameworks. Although it is obviously in some people's interests for it to continue, men as well as women. . . It is a discursive system within which we operate and each act adds to or questions its constitution; it is always changing, *but it is not controlled by anyone* [italics added] (p. 281).

A poststructural understanding of local, productive, and relational forces of power, challenges a binary powerful/less configuration by contending that power circulates through discourse between and among individuals and groups. From this perspective, the position of women in a patriarchal order is shifted from merely *resisting* dominant and

coercive forces of power to *participating* in the production of power (Diamond & Quinby, 1988; Mills, 1997).

In contrast, juridico-discursive theories of social relations are rooted in a repressive configuration of power that typically positions women activists as resisting the oppressive forces of a patriarchal order. One reading of this configuration is that women activists represent the subjugated power(less) working against the dominant power(ful). Moving away from this dualistic configuration of power provides an analytic advantage in that the potential for women to share in power relations is more clearly recognized. This perspective is important to my research because it provides a greater opportunity to understand women as contributors to the production, maintenance and disruption of the discourses of women's commission policy reports (Weedon, 1997).

Foucault's conception of power/knowledge underscores that power and knowledge are inseparable. Further, "it is in *discourse* that power and knowledge are joined together [italics added] (Foucault, 1978, p. 100). Thus, discourse, power, and knowledge are inextricably linked in structuring our sense of reality as well as our sense of self (Mills, 1997). Also important to Foucault's configuration of power/knowledge is the contention that truth is produced through their interplay. In other words, truth is an *effect* of power/knowledge operating through discourse. As such, there is no singular transcendental truth "out there" waiting to be discovered as a modernist view suggests. Rather, a Foucauldian account asserts that truths are constructed and legitimated through discourse.

This contribution resonates with feminism in that it opens up space for questioning the authority of science and other truth-claims that often position women as

inferior to men. Writing about the areas of convergence between Foucauldian theories and feminism, Diamond & Quinby (1988) say that both “criticize the ways in which Western humanism has privileged the experience of the masculine elite as it proclaims universals about truth, freedom and human nature” (p. x). Thus, from a Foucauldian perspective on power/knowledge, truth claims are discursive effects, and as such are open to re/interpretation.

The Foucauldian conceptualization of power/knowledge in discourse emphasizes how power is dispersed through the social body. In other words, power is “exercised rather than possessed” (Sawicki, 1986, p. 26). Thus, for Foucault, power is not primarily repressive. Rather, power operates through discourse to *produce* certain forms of conduct.⁴ According to Foucault, it is productive power, operating through knowledge formation and the techniques of surveillance and discipline, which is *most potent, and most overlooked* in traditional theories of politics and society (Mills, 1997). The dispersal of power at the micro-levels of society is sometimes described as Foucault’s “bottom-up” analysis of power (Sawicki, 1986, p. 28). This is a significant departure from juridico-discursive theories that tend to view power as a centralized force residing within the State, patriarchy, or white supremacy, for example. Foucault’s understanding of power does not deny the existence of dominant networks of power relations, but rather shifts the focus away from them as the ultimate *source* of subjugation. Instead, Foucault’s work highlights the often-obscured forms of discursive power that operate from innumerable micro-level points in the power network. Accordingly, women’s commission policy documents, as one point in this network, serve to re/produce particular alignments of power and challenge others through discourse.

Together, power/knowledge and discourse provide conditions of possibility—the conditions necessary to think of ourselves, and our world, in particular ways and not in other ways. As Foucault (in Mills, 1997) puts it, “what I have said is not ‘what I think’ but often what I wonder whether it couldn’t be thought” (p. 16). According to Weedon (1997), taking up subject positions and living them through the discursive constitution of subjectivity is a process that is continually repeated and revised throughout one’s life and “has implications for the unconscious as well as the consciously remembered subjectivity of the individual human agent” (p. 109). Thus, discourses produce and circumscribe possible formations of the self in ways we can not fully know.

Foucault’s delineation of productive power operating through discourse to produce subject positions and subjectivities has led to pronouncements of the “death of the subject.” Foucault’s work and poststructural appropriations of it are interpreted to mean that, in this frame of analysis, individuals do not have the capacity to act with any degree of control over the outcome of such actions. Thus, while Foucault’s dynamic and productive configuration of power makes social change possible, revolution—or a planned uprising *against* power—is received with suspicion. Nonetheless, feminist and postcolonial theorists have looked to Foucault’s later work for new ways to conceptualize resistance within an understanding of the discursive constitution of the self.

According to Weedon (1997), productive power, exercised through discourse, “works best to reproduce established hierarchies of social relations when we perceive that the subject positions we assume *are fully identified with our interests*” [italics added] (p. 109). If this is not the case, if there is a gap between the subject position offered and the interest of the individual, resistance can occur.

Discourses exist in the social practices of everyday life. They inhere in the very physical layout of our institutions such as schools, churches, law courts and houses. Some may be part of common sense, some may be dormant in libraries or stately homes, their historical moment past or yet to come. To be effective, they require activation through the agency of individuals whom they constitute and govern in particular ways as embodied subjects (Weedon, 1997, p. 108).

These understandings of discourse, power and knowledge are central to my analysis of the ways in which the discourses of university women's commission reports produce particular subject positions for women in relation to the university and in relation to other women. Since women's commission reports are attempts to influence institutional policy, an understanding of how policy operates within discourse is also important to this analysis. Next, I consider policy theory from conventional as well as critical and poststructural feminist perspectives.

Conventional Policy Studies

My approach to this study was largely influenced by critical and poststructural feminist scholarship related to policy studies. Scholarship from these perspectives points out that traditional policy approaches are insufficient because they fail to acknowledge the *assumptions* undergirding the articulation of policy (Ball, 1990, 1994; Marshall, 1999; Pillow, 1997; Scheurich, 1994). Typically, these critiques suggest that traditional policy is embedded in a modernist frame that implicitly advances particular perspectives about efficiency, productivity, and individuality. Guba (1984) has shown that even the study of policy itself (policy analysis literature) assumes a common understanding of the very meaning of the term "policy." He contends,

The particular definition *assumed* by the analyst shapes (determines, constrains) the kinds of policy questions that are asked, the kinds of policy-relevant data which are collected, the sources of data that are

tapped, the methodology which is used, and, finally, the products which emerge [*italics added*] (p. 3).

Adding to this, other scholars have asserted that conventional approaches to policy-making and policy analysis are constructed through a lens that privileges rational/scientific logic, which often results in policy perspectives that are narrow, linear and managerial in focus (Ball, 1994; Carlson, 1993). For instance, the findings of a higher education policy study in Ohio found that state-level coordinating boards in higher education have the “important [role] of . . . translating state government’s demands into rational public policies for higher education” (Greer, 1991, p. 602). Stone (1988) uses the term “rationality project” to describe how the fields of policy analysis, law and public administration work to conduct policy with “rational, analytical and scientific methods” (p. 4).

According to Cibulka (1994), policy studies is a relatively new field of study (spanning the last two to three decades) and is described variously as policy science, policy research, policy studies and policy analysis. He further suggests that policy studies operate on a continuum from basic (academic/theory development) to applied policy analysis (Cibulka, 1994). Generally, policy analysis in education has been described as an applied form of research. Crosson (1991) describes policy studies as an area of research that is “concerned both with the scientific and empirical techniques for the study of policy and leading to knowledge about policy, and with the use of that knowledge for social problem solving” (p. 610). According to Bogdan & Biklen (1992), the purpose of educational policy research is to “describe, document, and/or assess a planned educational change [and to] provide information to decision-makers” (p. 202).

Prototypical models of policy studies in education follow from systems theory approaches in the social sciences. Policy approaches informed by systems theory are concerned with “the search for universal principles and paradigms to explain the behavior of systems” (Crosson, 1991, p. 609). Other established approaches include “stage models” that examine policy through the process of formulation, adoption, implementation, and evaluation; “multiple decision-making models” that focus on the relationships and power dynamics among policy-makers; and “policy types or arenas models” that work to classify policies according to different contexts, issues, and approaches (Cibulka, 1994). Models of policy study in education were typically offered as a means of examining policy problems and policy consequences for the purpose of maximizing desired effects (Crosson, 1991). Most of the policy work in education over the last decade however has been specifically geared toward education reform and the problems associated with designing policies needed to monitor such reform (Cibulka, 1994).

One of the shortcomings identified in conventional approaches to policy studies is the failure to explicitly acknowledge how the policy process is inherently value-laden. From a critical theory perspective, Ball (1990) asserts that policies are prescriptive statements imbued with values, yet most often construed as objective and apolitical. Others concur with this view. For example, Marshall (1997a) contends that traditional approaches to policy research in education have typically been understood to “calculate the effects of policies with apolitical, objective, [and] neutral methods” (p. 3). Likewise, Carlson (1993) argues that “throughout this century, public educational policy has made claims to stand above politics, to be guided by a technical-rational assessment of what

works to raise educational productivity or standards” (p. 149-150). Stone (1988) contends that the “rationality project” inherent in public policy is undergirded by particular models of reasoning, society and policy-making which have become so pervasive and normalized that we generally fail to recognize there are alternative models available.

According to Stone (1988), the privileged model of reasoning in public policy and policy analysis is that of rational decision-making. In this model, the process of making decisions follows a series of pre-defined steps including: the identification of objectives; identification of possible courses of action for achieving objectives; prediction and evaluation of possible consequences of each course of action; and selecting a course of action that maximizes the attainment of objectives. While this model carries great intuitive appeal, Stone argues that the rational decision-making model of reasoning fails to make sense of the policy paradoxes we witness regularly. For instance, it does not account for the ways in which political leaders “pursue contradictory objectives simultaneously, win by appearing to lose, and attain objectives by *portraying* oneself as having attained them” (p. 6).

The market serves as the privileged model of society in the “rationality project.” In this model, “society is viewed as a collection of autonomous, rational decision-makers” who work to maximize their well-being through rational calculation devoid of community life, emotional bonds or traditions influencing their choices (Stone, 1988, p. 6). Emerging from this model are human capital theories that contend for instance that education, voting patterns, political leadership and even marriage can be explained in terms of maximizing self-interest through the rational decision-making process. This

market-based model of society shapes perspectives about social problems, and according to Stone (1988), is connected to a production model of policy-making designed to address these problems. This production model provides that policy can be formulated in an orderly sequence of steps akin to the rational decision-making process. In contrast, Stone (1988) argues that “ideas are the medium of exchange and a mode of influence even more powerful than money and votes and guns” (p. 7). Accordingly, the failure to account for the struggle over ideas and the formation of shared meanings is where the assumptions undergirding predominant approaches to policy-making and policy analysis fall short.

Critiques of conventional policy studies in the arena of educational policy parallel concerns raised by Stone (1988) and other scholars who study social policy more broadly. For instance, Hawkesworth (1988) examines the “seldom scrutinized. . . beliefs concerning the nature of facts and values, the powers of reason, the structure of science, and the possibilities for scientific knowledge—beliefs so widely accepted by practitioners in the field that they are no longer perceived as issues” (p. 2). In considering policy related to women’s health, Griffin (1994) considers another perspective not typically attended to by conventional policy theorists. She writes,

it is impossible to discuss issues of public policy without reference to the terms in which they are articulated. Such terms have profound symbolic value. When policy issues are imbued with moral meanings, the terms that are used and the symbols that attach themselves to both words and issues can redefine them (p. 205).

Thus, scholars who study educational policy and those who study social policy more broadly have pointed out that traditional theories of policy often don’t call into question the assumptions embedded in conventional approaches to policy analysis. Despite a traditionally held view that policy theory and practice can somehow stand apart from the

political, these critiques suggest that policy study and practice are value-driven endeavors that serve particular political interests (Ball, 1990, 1993; Marshall 1997a).

Relatedly, policy theory has traditionally assumed a lack of agency on the part of those who implement policy as well as those who are acted upon by policy (Griffith, 1992). Critical and poststructural feminist perspectives highlight the ways in which power operates through policy. They further draw attention to the hidden assumptions or policy silences and unintended consequences of policy practices (deCastell & Bryson, 1997; Fine, 1988; Tyack & Hansot, 1988; Sapon-Shevin, 1993). Feminist theory in particular has drawn attention to power dynamics related to gender and other identity categories (i.e. race, sexual orientation, social class) and how these are implicated in social policy (Collins, 1991a; Conway, Ahern & Steuernagel, 1995; Fraser, 1989; Fraser & Gordon, 1994; Smith, 1990b; Williams, 1991, 1997; Winston & Bane, 1993). Policy theories from feminist perspectives point to the absence of gender as a category of analysis as a shortcoming of conventional approaches to policy theory and research (Bensimon & Marshall, 1997; Fine, 1988; Marshall, 1997a, 1997b; 1999, Stivers, 1993)

Research framed from a conventional policy-studies perspective is most often rooted in the acceptance and legitimation of some socially constructed norm of behavior that functions to categorize others based on conformity to or deviance from an assumed norm. In other words, by ignoring assumptions inherent in the policy-making process, conventional policy analysis may reinforce dominant constructions of normalcy and deviance as policy problems become localized in the individual or group. For example, Pillow (1997) notes how the dominant discourse on teen pregnancy has located the social “problem” of teen pregnancy within girls themselves. The acceptance of this problem as

a starting point for related policy initiatives then associates these girls with various deviant behaviors including illegitimacy, delinquency and poverty. This interpretation serves to construct the girls as deviant and ignores the role of fathers in the making of teen pregnancy. Further, Pillow points to how the complexities of race, social class and sexuality are obscured by policy that uncritically accepts the discursive constitution of social problems and the subject positions offered by them.

In this overview of traditional approaches to policy theory and methods of analysis, I have introduced some alternative theories of policy in order to describe some shortcomings related to conventional policy analysis approaches. I have thus delineated theories of discourse and traditional approaches to policy studies in this chapter. Next I provide a more focused discussion on theories of *policy as discourse*. Since feminist, poststructural and critical approaches to discourse and policy analysis shape the methodological approach to this study, an understanding of *policy as discourse* is an important conceptual link. Further, this discussion is intended to serve as a backdrop for my overview of alternative approaches to policy analysis.

Policy as Discourse

We need to appreciate the way in which policy ensembles, collections of related policies, exercise power through a production of ‘truth’ and ‘knowledge’ as discourses. . . .Discourses are about what can be said, and thought, but also who can speak, when, where and with what authority (Ball, 1994, p. 21).

My study follows the work of Ball (1994), Scheurich (1994), Smith (1990b) and others who treat social policies as discursive and/or textual interventions that produce effects within formal organizations as well as across social relations. I rely upon Foucauldian perspectives of power and the discursive production of subject positions to

inform my approach to this study of policy as discourse. While conventional approaches to policy analysis typically position policy as regulating social relations through negative (repressive) means (e.g. proscribing certain behaviors as unacceptable, unwanted and prohibited), an understanding of policy-as-discourse provides that policy regulates social relations primarily through positive or productive means—discursively producing subjectivities, hierarchies and taxonomies for understanding the social world (Ball, 1994; Griffin, 1992; Shore & Wright, 1997). For instance, policy discourses in education support the production of normative behavior through policy initiatives like total quality management, educational standards, efficient use of resources, and faculty productivity. Further, as discourse, policy produces subject positions that collide and collude in producing one’s sense of self. As Ball (1994) relates, “we are spoken by policies, we take up the positions constructed for us within policies” (p. 22).

An understanding of policy-as-discourse is central to the methodology of this study as it moves beyond examining policy as simply a set of prescriptive documents with perceived positive or negative effects on lived experience. As Ball (1994) delineates, policy can be considered both “*as* [discourse] and *in* discourse” (p. 21). A focus on policy *as and in* discourse does not discount or overlook the concrete experiences of daily lives. Rather, it provides an opportunity to place those experiences in a different context—a context that attends to the ways in which policy produces and determines/constrains possible action through the discourses it makes available to us (Ball, 1994). As Marshall (1999) writes,

Debates over education policy are power conflicts over which knowledge is the “truth.” Those who control the discourse discredit or marginalize other “truths.” Thus, debates over required curriculum, the canon and

requirements for professional credentials are power/knowledge struggles (p. 65).

Thus, an understanding of policy as discourse emphasizes the power/knowledge struggles implicated in the policy process.

Policy-as-discourse provides that power invested in policy is not simply prohibitive. Rather, according to Foucault (1978), “power is multiplicitous. . . . Relations of power are not in superstructural positions, with merely a role of prohibition or accompaniment,” (p. 94). Further, an understanding of policy-as-discourse underscores the way in which policies “*enter* rather than simply change power relations” (Ball, 1994, p. 20). In other words, policies are not static entities implemented to shift the balance of power in one direction or another. Policy-as-discourse envisions policies as dynamic—actively circulating, intervening and being intervened upon at the micro-levels of society. Policies are enmeshed in a complex and contradictory process of negotiation. Thus, a focus on policy-as-discourse provides an opportunity to expand traditional approaches to policy analysis by focusing on how policy actively produces subjects, knowledge and normativity.

My interest in understanding the effects of policies related to women’s status in higher education led me to consider policy as discourse. This view of policy-as-discourse provides an opportunity to examine the ways in which policy can both support and subvert dominant discourses that emphasize particular perspectives and obscure other possibilities. However, an approach to policy analysis from this perspective requires a shift in thinking and method. In order to examine what is discursively produced through

the policy reports of university women's commissions—I turned to feminist, critical and poststructural approaches to policy and discourse analysis.

Policy Alternatives: Feminist, Critical and Poststructural Approaches

My thinking about policy theory and policy analysis has been shaped by the influences of feminist, critical and poststructural theories. These theoretical lenses emerged as a result of my research goals, which included: (a) to describe the subject positions produced through the policy discourses of university women's commission reports; (b) to tell a story about how women construct their status through these subject positions; and (c) to provide a new perspective that will help to enhance the work of university women's commissions and other groups involved in equity-related policy initiatives in higher education. A project of this kind called for conceptual and methodological approaches that departed from conventional policy studies frameworks. As I have outlined in the previous section, traditional approaches to policy analysis do not provide for a focus on the discursive shaping of subject positions, or on the assumptions embedded in the naming of policy problems and solutions. Further, they typically do not consider gender as central to the analysis, nor do they specifically focus on the role of policy in the promotion of emancipatory goals (Ball, 1994; Marshall, 1997a, 1997b; Scheurich, 1994). For these reasons, feminist, critical and poststructural approaches to policy analysis served as a guide for my examination of university women's commission reports.

In contrast to conventional policy studies, both critical and poststructural approaches to policy theory insist that policy analysis must attend to the process by which policy problems are defined (Ball, 1994; Marshall, 1999; Pillow, 1997; Scheurich, 1994).

Research from these perspectives demonstrates how policy assumptions may carry exclusionary consequences, hence, limiting policy effectiveness or even reinforcing the very problem(s) the policy seeks to eliminate (deCastell & Bryson 1997; Scheurich, 1994; Marshall, 1997a, 1997b, 1999). Next, I more fully describe the feminist, critical and poststructural approaches to policy analysis that have influenced the design of this study. Throughout these sections, I consider the ways in which critical and poststructural approaches differ from one another, yet are at once suited to the goals I have delineated for this study.

Feminist Influences

Interdisciplinary and exceedingly diverse in focus and scope, feminist scholarship crosses a broad range of disciplines and methodological approaches (Fonow, 1991; Lather, 1991a; 1991b; Reinhartz, 1992). I characterize my research approach as feminist for several important reasons. To begin, a feminist approach is central to my work in that it provides a theoretical imperative for research with a focus toward women and women's agency. Since my study examines how women themselves contribute to constructing their status in the process of policy-making, a feminist approach is implicit. However, a focus on women is not sufficient to constitute a feminist analysis. A feminist analysis also highlights gender as central to the examination.⁵

While feminist theory is itself a contested zone of divergent conceptualizations and approaches to the problems of discrimination and oppression, I draw upon feminist theories for their shared acknowledgment of socially constituted sex and gender-based inequalities in society. Even though there is no singular feminism that can rightfully represent the interests and perspectives of all women, feminist perspectives share in their

embodiment of the following premises: (1) sex/gender inequality exists and is central to social relations and the structuring of social institutions; (2) sex/gender inequality is not “natural” or essential but a product of social relations; and (3) sex/gender inequality should be eliminated through social change.

It is in this third dimension of feminism that feminist approaches can differ, reflecting divergent views of how social change is most likely to occur.⁶ It is also this focus that provides for feminism’s alignment with critical social science theory (Fay, 1987). While research informed by critical social science theory shares with feminism its goals to empower individuals and to work to create more egalitarian social relations, it does not necessarily highlight gender or place a focus on women in its analysis. So, while the methodological approach of this study is strongly influenced by policy and discourse analysis in a critical frame (Ball, 1990, 1994; Fairclough, 1995; Luke, 1995), *feminist* more specifically describes my research approach that seeks social change while also placing an emphasis on women and gender as categories of analysis.

Is it enough that a policy analysis focuses on women for it to be considered feminist? According to Marshall & Bensimon (in Marshall, 1997b), a policy analyst applying a feminist critical perspective engages in policy formulation by asking, “who benefits, who loses and how do females fare here?” (p. 17). More specifically, Bensimon and Marshall (1997) propose the following goals for policy analysis that is both feminist and critical in its approach:

- 1) critique or deconstruct conventional theories and explanations and reveal the gender biases (as well as racial, sexual, and social class biases) inherent in commonly accepted theories, constructs, methodologies and concepts;

2) conduct analysis that is feminist both in its theoretical and methodological orientations. . .reading policy studies with a critical awareness of how androcentrism is embedded in the disciplines, theories of knowledge and research designs that are foundational to policy analysis and which are ostensibly neutral (p. 6).

While feminist theory is most often situated in the context of critical/emancipatory discourses, a number of feminist scholars have explored the ways in which feminist theory can intersect with a poststructural approach (Lather, 1991a, 1992; McNay, 1992; Mills, 1997; Weiner, 1994; Weedon, 1997, 1999). A poststructural approach is significant, in part, because it allows a shift from simple dualisms toward more enriched and complicated conceptualizations of the social world. For example, in relation to feminist configurations of difference, the poststructural shift enables feminism to maintain a focus on the material realities of gendered identities (e.g. the “wage gap”) while refusing to totalize and homogenize women as a category. Poststructural intersections with feminist theory have influenced many feminist thinkers to remain attentive to micro-level practices, contradictions, exceptions and multiplicities in the making of subjectivities (Lather, 1991a). As McNay (1992) writes, “feminists have drawn extensively on the poststructuralist argument that rather than having a fixed core or essence, subjectivity is constructed through language and is, therefore, an open-ended, contradictory and culturally specific amalgam of positions” (p. 2).

Thus, understandings of gender and difference among women have been substantially altered by the influence of poststructuralism. This is evidenced by the work of feminist thinkers across a range of disciplines who have cautioned against discursive dangers associated with bifurcated conceptualizations of difference such as equality/difference, white/other, male/female, masculine/feminine (Collins, 1991b;

Higginbotham, 1992; Nicholson, 1994; Phelan, 1991; West & Zimmerman, 1987; Young, 1994). The poststructural shift in feminism provides an opportunity to disrupt rigid and dichotomous thinking about identity and the various categories that have been used to conceptualize difference. Further, central to feminist and poststructural approaches is a view of discourse as a means for shaping social institutions, ways of thinking and subjectivities. Thus, a feminist poststructural approach makes room for configurations of identity that emphasize the local, specific, and discursive constitution of subjectivity (Weedon, 1997). These theories are further elaborated in chapters five and six, where I detail the discursive shaping of subject positions for women in relation to one another in the university.

Critical and Poststructural Influences and Complications

I describe my study as poststructural because of its focus on discourse and, more specifically, the ways in which power/knowledge operate with/in discourse to produce subject positions and subjectivities (Ball, 1994; Weedon, 1997). A primary task of discourse and policy analysis in a poststructural frame is to describe the process by which discourses become inscribed within individuals and social relations (Smith, 1990b). Thus, a poststructural approach to policy analysis seeks to describe the subject positions produced through policy discourses. Policy analysis in a poststructural frame also provides for a focus on uncovering the assumptions embedded in the framing of policy problems and solutions (deCastell & Bryson, 1997; Humes, 1997; Pillow, 1997; Scheurich, 1994). Further, a poststructural approach is characterized by its critique of modernist ameliorative missions embedded in humanist discourses that inhere in traditional (and critical) policy theory and practice (Ball, 1994; Lather, 1991a; 1991b;

Pillow, 1997). In contrast, policy analysis from a poststructural perspective strives to question modernist missions of emancipation rather than uncritically accepting the inherent goodness of these goals.

These approaches draw on discourse theory to reconfigure understandings of how power operates through policy. Rather than understanding policies as merely prohibitive strategies, poststructural perspectives position policies as dynamic and productive. Thus, policy is said to “*enter* rather than simply change power relations” (Ball, 1994, p. 20). As policy enters power relations, it produces subjects and shapes social relations. Drawing on Foucault, Ball (1994) argues that “policy ensembles, collections of related policies, . . . can function as ‘regimes of truth’ through which people govern themselves and others” (pp. 21-22). As such, policy analysis from a poststructural perspective contends that policy can produce conditions of possibility for thought and action (Ball, 1994; Walker, 1997). In other words, we may only be able to conceive of possible policy solutions through the knowledge and subject positions that discourses make available to us. Poststructural approaches to policy analysis acknowledge how policy helps reinforce an ensemble of normative judgments about the correct way to solve “social problems” (Ball, 1994; Connolly, 1993; Marshall, 1997a, 1997b; Scheurich, 1994; Shore & Wright, 1997).

Poststructural theory most strongly guides my approach in this study as it provides for a focus on the discursive shaping of subjectivities. However, I acknowledge critical theory as a significant component of the theoretical framework because of my desire to have the findings of this study used toward efforts to promote social and political change. Informed by critical social science theory, a critical approach to policy analysis can be differentiated from conventional policy studies by its investment in

research and practice that has emancipatory intent, "a vision of a moral order in which justice, equality and individual freedom are uncompromised by the avarice of a few" (Prunty as cited in Ball, 1994, p. 2). In relation to conceptual understandings of power, critical approaches to policy analysis differ markedly from poststructural approaches in that they remain rooted in a view that policy can be a source of liberation from the repressive forces of power in society. "Critical policy analysis is a search for improvement of the human condition; it is an emancipatory social science" (Marshall, 1997a, p. 10). Thus, critical theory involves a recognition of dominant structural forces as organizing principles of society (i.e. white supremacy, patriarchy, social class) and contends that these forces need to be resisted and subverted in order to achieve social justice.

As a consequence of their divergent configurations of power and subjects/subjectivities, tensions between poststructural and critical approaches reflect radically different understandings of social change. However, the two may not necessarily be incommensurate, and both are important for my interests in this study. My focus on the discursive construction of women's status, with the goal of providing space for considering the potential for social change is best served through the interplay of these approaches. So, while my approach does not wholly relinquish the critical/feminist desire to empower through "knowledge" gained from this research, poststructural theory offers a lens through which to understand the limits of such desires.

In contrast to a conventional policy studies approach, critical and poststructural perspectives share a common interest in questioning policy assumptions and examining whose interests are served through the ways in which policy takes effect. While there are

some commonalities, tensions between the two approaches are significant. Nevertheless, some researchers have found it helpful to apply both perspectives simultaneously. According to Lather (1991a), some poststructuralisms can become critical theories in their “identification with and interest in social movements” (p. 3). For instance, Ball (1994) articulates a framework of analysis that incorporates both critical and poststructural approaches to educational policy and Weedon (1997) converges with a critical approach when she describes “feminist poststructuralism” as a specific version of poststructuralist thought that is interested in how “social relations of gender, class and race might be *transformed*” [italics added] (p. 20). Thus, poststructural concerns related to critical theory’s liberatory agenda do not necessarily imply that participants in research from a poststructural perspective must abandon the goals of empowerment and social change. A poststructural focus on the dynamic and productive power of discourse does, however, help critical theorists/researchers consider these goals from a different vantagepoint. Poststructuralism asks critical researchers to re/examine the ways in which power operates through discourse and how policy solutions intended to be emancipatory may not result in this desired effect.

Throughout the analyses provided in chapters four and five, I consider how women’s commission policy discourses produce a particular knowledge about women’s status in universities that works both to sustain and challenge dominant power relations. Since multiple and competing discourses exist within each discursive field, my analysis also attends to the conflicts that inhere in commission reports. Foucault (1978) explains that “there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy; they can. . .circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another opposing

strategy" (pp. 101-2). Thus, it is likely that the discourses of women's commission reports may provide discursive interruptions to the status quo while at the same time reinforce some of the very problems they seek to eliminate. As Jennifer Coates (1996) points out, "social and cultural change are possible precisely because we do not use the discourses available to us uncritically, but participate actively in the construction of meaning" (p. 240). In her analysis of a discourse of femininity, Mills (1992) reminds readers that a discourse is "not a coherent text, but rather a collection of disparate statements, some of which can be resisted, some colluded with." She continues, "discourse theory allows for a strategy to change its meaning" (p. 278). Through my investigation of university women's commission reports, I have worked to highlight the complexity of commission policy discourses and their power to *both* re/produce and subvert dominant configurations of women's status in higher education.

Notes

¹I am using *poststructuralist* here primarily as it has been appropriated by feminist theorists who draw largely on theories of discourse and power as informed by the work of Foucault (Diamond & Quinby, 1988; McNay, 1992, Mills, 1991, 1992, 1997; Sawicki, 1986; 1994; Weedon, 1997, 1999). However, the term “poststructuralist,” like “feminist” is plural. As Weedon (1997) clarifies, “it [poststructuralist] does not have one fixed meaning but is generally applied to a range of theoretical positions” (p. 19). Generally, approaches described as poststructuralist may reflect theoretical positions developed in or from the work of Derrida, Lacan, Kristeva, Althusser, Boudrillard, and Foucault (McNay, 1992; Weedon, 1997). My work and use of the term poststructuralist however is informed most prominently by the work of Foucault (1972, 1977, 1978, 1979, 1980) and feminist scholars like Weedon (1997, 1999), Mills (1991, 1992, 1997), Sawicki (1986, 1994) and others who have appropriated his work.

²I use the term “identity” in this context to mean social and cultural aspects of individual and group identities such as race, sex, sexuality, social class and ability. In using these terms however, I do not mean that these aspects of identity are necessarily determined or foundational. Rather, I align my thinking with postfoundational accounts like that of Judith Butler (1993) who, while she describes gender as a repetitive performance, acknowledges the complexity of identity that fails to be conveyed through an either/or constructed or determined logic.

³Ideology is a Marxist-inflected term widely used by theorists across the social sciences and humanities and describes particular ways of looking at the world—sets of perspectives, organized representations of experiences. Ideology is thought to mediate between individuals and the material conditions of their lives (Mills, 1997; Weedon, 1997). In their research on academic women in research universities, Moore & Sagaria (1991) describe ideology as “reality as it is defined by a given society. . . beliefs about how the world functions, and articulates the values, expectations, and standards which are intended to inform and orient people’s behavior” (p. 188).

The concept of “ideological hegemony” draws from Marxist and neo-Marxist perspectives that describe an understanding about how people come to participate in their own oppression by acting in ways that are not in their interest (Mills, 1997). This complicity is sometimes delineated through the Althusserian theory of interpellation, which contends that ideology functions through a very specific process to interpellate individuals—or constitute one’s subjectivity through language (Weedon, 1997). This process relies on the individual’s recognition of herself as a subject, but also the *misrecognition* that she is author of the ideology she is speaking. In other words, “she ‘imagines’ that she is the type of subject humanism proposes—rational, unified, the source rather than effect of language” (Weedon, 1997, p. 31).

⁴Foucault uses the term “repressive hypothesis” to describe power which is taken—or power that infringes on another person’s rights. While Foucault does not deny that power can repress, he contends that power is productive as well as repressive. For

instance, attempts to repress sexuality and regulate sexual practices often serve to produce a greater focus on the very sexual practices that are the focus of elimination (Mills, 1997, p. 37).

⁵I align myself with feminists who consider not only gender as central to an analysis, but also other categories of identity and difference like race, sexuality and social class.

⁶For example, some feminist approaches argue for social change through legal reform, others place an emphasis on women's empowerment through separatism, and others emphasize language as the site of social change.

CHAPTER 3

POLICY DISCOURSE ANALYSIS: A HYBRID METHODOLOGY

In the first part of this chapter, I explicate the methodology¹ of this study of university women's commission reports and how my approach to this inquiry is situated within and against interpretive, critical and poststructural methodologies. The second part of this chapter describes the methods and procedures I employed in my examination of the policy discourses of the commission reports. I review my sampling rationale, data collection, role of the researcher, and data analysis procedures used in this study. Finally, I discuss soundness and limitations of this inquiry.

Desperately Seeking a Methodology

The methodological approach to this study emerges from my feminist interest in the conceptual tensions among the conventional, critical and poststructural approaches to policy analysis delineated in the previous chapter. While I was drawn to particular methodological approaches in each of these analytic frames, no singular established mode of inquiry was specifically suited to meeting the goals of my study. My unrequited search for an appropriate methodological approach led me to develop a hybrid method of policy analysis called *policy discourse analysis*. I use the term "hybrid" to describe this method because I have deliberately selected particular aspects of other methodologies

and merged them to construct a different approach. This hybrid methodology cuts across paradigms of postpositivist inquiry² to incorporate methodological approaches designed to understand, emancipate and destabilize (Lather, 1991a; 1991b). The result is an approach that provides a feminist intervention and extension of conventional, critical and poststructural approaches to policy analysis.

While this study draws upon theories and methods of discourse analysis, the use of that term alone does not convey its particular focus on policy. Further, while my study is a type of policy analysis, my approach does not parallel established traditions of policy analysis in education and social science because these do not typically study policy as discourse. Therefore, to frame this study as simply a policy analysis would not reflect its focus on discourse. Yet, I recognize that if I opt to situate my work outside of the established arena of policy analysis, I then substantially limit an important opportunity for my study to contribute to challenging and adding to conventional approaches to policy theory and analysis in education. Thus, I have intentionally positioned this study as a policy analysis with an emphasis on discourse.

Policy discourse analysis provides an opportunity to extend policy studies through an explicit focus on policy discourses and the discursive shaping of subject positions through policy. The methods I have drawn upon to construct policy discourse analysis emerge from both interpretivist, critical and poststructural approaches to inquiry in qualitative research. Borrowing from Lather's (1991a; 1991b) grid of methodological approaches to inquiry in postpositivism,³ these three approaches can be distinguished from one another by their different interests in generating and legitimating knowledge claims. An *interpretive* approach to inquiry includes methods that are applied to produce

knowledge that provides understanding; a *critical* approach incorporates research methods applied to produce knowledge for the purpose of liberating the oppressed, and methods incorporated in a *poststructural* approach are offered to produce knowledge that destabilizes “totalizing, universalizing ‘metanarratives’ and the humanist view of the subject that undergirds them” (Lather, 1991a, p. 5).

In the following section, I overview the methodological approaches I drew upon to formulate policy discourse analysis. In an attempt to delineate conceptual underpinnings and tensions among them with greater clarity, I have grouped them according to three frames of inquiry as outlined above. However, I acknowledge that any attempt to categorize implies convergence and may result in obscuring important nuances of each approach. In this case, several approaches are actually blends of two or more of the frames I have identified. For instance, I have categorized Smith’s (1990b) textual analysis within the interpretive frame because of its ethnomethodological influences and desire to promote meaning-making and understanding. However, Smith’s approach to textual analysis is inflected with feminism and provides a specific focus on agency and the role of policy in constituting social relations (Smith, 1990b). Thus her approach could be appropriately considered within the critical frame as well. Further, Smith’s textual analysis also provides a focus on the discursive shaping of subjectivity and emphasizes Foucault’s theories of discourse which work to dislodge a stable unified subject. In this respect, Smith’s work could also be considered in the poststructural frame. So, while I offer a category scheme in an attempt to clarify components of policy discourse analysis, I do so with a bit of reluctance based on the acknowledgment that

such a scheme falls short in its capacity to portray the fluidity and complexity of each approach.

A thorough discussion of each approach is not my intended goal here. Rather, in the following sections, I strive to highlight the particular approaches within each frame that I have drawn upon to develop policy discourse analysis. The chart in Table 3.1 provides a summary:

Policy Discourse Analysis: A Hybrid Methodology

Frame of Inquiry:	<u>Interpretive</u>	<u>Critical</u>	<u>Poststructural</u>
Primary Goal:	Understand	Emancipate	Destabilize
Methodological Components:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Textual Analysis (Smith, 1990b) • Established Methods of Qualitative Research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Patton, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 1995) • Feminist Critical Policy Analysis (Marshall, 1997a, 1997b, 1999) • Critical and Poststructural Policy Reform (Ball, 1994) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy Archaeology (Scheurich, 1994) • Critical and Poststructural Policy Reform (Ball, 1994) • Poststructural Document Analysis (McCoy, 1995)

Table 3.1: Theoretical Underpinnings of Policy Discourse Analysis

Desiring Understanding: Interpretive Influences on Policy Discourse Analysis

Each of the three frames I have chosen to delineate the methodological influences on policy discourse analysis reflect different goals for qualitative inquiry. Within the “interpretive” frame, I include approaches that have the primary purpose of promoting understanding through research. While there are other labels that might appropriately convey this focus, I have chosen “interpretive” because I believe it best describes the methodologies designed to promote understanding and meaning-making through interpretation of qualitative data. In particular, I focus on textual analysis in the social sciences and established methods of qualitative data analysis.

Textual Analysis

In the early stages of this study, I looked to textual analysis as a method for this study of university women’s commission reports because my data derives from written texts exclusively. Generally however, the study of text⁴ is most often considered ancillary to research agendas in the social sciences. For example, Silverman (1993) contends that in the discipline of sociology, textual analysis serves “as merely a jumping-off point for the real analysis” (p. 59). Similarly, Smith (1990b), contends that “textual materials have generally presented themselves to the sociologist as sources of information about something else, rather than phenomena in their own right” (p.120). Thus, for qualitative research in social science, there is a lack of scholarly attention to how to proceed with analysis when texts serve as the primary data source. Recognized

exceptions to this general rule are found in the textual investigatory methods of content analysis, semiotics and ethnomethodology (Silverman, 1993).

Feminist sociologist Dorothy Smith's (1990b) work extends these methods of textual analysis through the blending of Foucauldian theory and ethnomethodology. Feminist textual analyses were initially catalyzed by the recognition of texts as a source of rich inquiry with the potential for revealing historically ignored information about relations among women; intersections of race, gender, class, sexual identity; and further understanding about the ideas that have shaped women's lives (Reinharz, 1992). Using an ethnomethodological approach, Smith's work can be distinguished from the other methods of textual analysis in that it pays particular attention to the commonplace micro-level practices involved in assembling and interpreting written records. As such, her work contributes to understanding how everyday organizational discourses and practices inscribe our lives (Silverman, 1993; Smith, 1990b).

Smith (1990b) contends that most conventional textual analysis strategies imply an approach that understands text as detached from the social relations which organize and which it serves to organize. She asserts that the "text does not appear from nowhere"(p. 223). Therefore, it does not make sense to dislodge a text from its local context and assume that it alone can serve as a source of meaning or analysis in itself. Rather, Smith argues for an approach to textual analysis that understands texts/documents as embedded in social relations. In order to accomplish textual analysis from this perspective, Smith explicates the following guidelines that I have summarized from her more extensive discussion:

- Situate texts in social relations thereby avoiding their treatment as ahistorical or detached.
- Insist on the materiality of texts as fundamental to the relations they organize.
- Understand and approach texts as part of a social course of action. Texts are fluid and continually reshaped and reconstituted.
- Be attentive to how the movement, between the textual and the locally historic, influences and patterns social relations of ruling (1990, pp. 221-223).

From Smith's perspective, textual analysis does not strive for detached objectivity as is often the case with traditional approaches (e.g. content analysis). Rather, competent textual analysis is dependent upon the researcher's familiarity with the discourses that produce a text and its interpretation at a particular historical moment. This approach to textual analysis works to explicate the active power of a text.

Borrowing from Smith's work, I approached this study with a view of women's commission policy reports as dynamic textual accomplishments constituted by individuals in everyday local work settings. In my analysis, I worked to situate commission policy discourses in the context of broader social discourses. Further, following Smith, I worked to consider the ways in which these discourses, and the subject positions offered by them, contribute to shaping social relations.

Qualitative Research Methods

Methods of qualitative inquiry have been established for data analysis and interpretation across diverse research methodologies including ethnography, phenomenology, hermeneutics, and naturalistic inquiry (Lather, 1991a; Patton, 1990). An "emergent" design which allows for flexibility and re-design throughout the research process is a common approach to qualitative inquiry (Patton, 1990). According to

Alasuutari (1995), it is not always possible to make a clear distinction between the empirical and theoretical components of a study. “Ideas that surface with empirical data cannot be separated from insights that are gained while reading theories and earlier research” (p.175).

Identifying codes, data categories and concepts in the data are established methods of analysis within traditions of qualitative research (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Patton, 1990). Coding is more than simply data reduction; it can also be considered a means of complicating data. Codes are heuristic devices, linking locations in the data with sets of concepts and analytic ideas (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Generally applied to the analysis of transcribed interview data and/or field notes from observations, coding can follow both an inductive and deductive approach (Alasuutari, 1995; O’Connell, Davidson & Layder, 1994; Patton, 1990; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). Inductively, codes and categories emerge as the researcher sorts through the corpus of data, marks connections among key words, concepts and themes and further exposes patterns that occurred and recurred in the reports (Patton, 1990). Deductively, codes and categories rooted in the theoretical framework and research questions are applied to the data *a priori*. While I describe the coding phase of this inquiry as a twofold process (inductive and deductive), they are not necessarily separate and distinct. Each approach informed the other as coding and categorizing occur in multiple layers that become more focused as the inquiry unfolds. The process by which the researcher moves back and forth between the data, emergent codes, deductive codes and categorizing schemes is common to qualitative inquiry (Patton, 1990).

Following established methods of qualitative inquiry, policy discourse analysis follows an emergent design and reflects an iterative relationship between conceptual frameworks, data analysis and interpretation. Further, borrowing from established methods of coding and categorizing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Patton, 1990), policy discourse analysis utilizes both inductive and deductive methods to “expand, transform, and reconceptualize data, opening up more diverse analytical possibilities” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 29).

A Desire to Emancipate: Critical Influences on Policy Discourse Analysis

Critical influences on policy analysis were discussed in greater detail in the previous chapter. In this section I overview two particular methodologies within a critical frame—critical discourse analysis and feminist critical policy analysis—as elements of each have been incorporated into policy discourse analysis.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is typically invested in the “understanding and critique of social inequality, based on gender, ethnicity, class, origin, religion, language, sexual orientation and other criteria that define differences between people” (van Dijk, 1997, p. 22). Further, the use of the term “critical” here derives from critical theory and critical social science theory (Fay, 1987) and conveys that this approach to the analysis of discourse does not claim to be disinterested or apolitical. CDA is not interested in producing knowledge for its own sake, but rather for the sake of social and political change as well (Fairclough, 1989; 1995).

CDA is rooted in systemic linguistics (Halliday in Fairclough, 1995) and hence requires attention to textual form, structure and organization at a number of levels including vocabulary, grammar, phonology, and exchange systems such as turn-taking in speech. As described by Fairclough (1995), “a working assumption [of CDA] is that any level of organization may be relevant to critical and ideological analysis” (p. 7). Specific methods of CDA reflect its structuralist roots and often focus on quantifying specific types of discourse representations (e.g. direct/indirect mode, primary/secondary discourses) in a text. While I do not utilize these particular methods of CDA, I do borrow from some of the basic premises that underpin this approach.

Summarizing from Fairclough’s (1995) and Luke’s (1995) more extensive discussions, the following components of CDA are those I have drawn upon in developing policy discourse analysis:

- Analysis of discourse is attentive to how texts work within sociocultural practice. A focus on intertextuality works to locate the text with respect to the social network or web of discourses that support it.
- Interpretation of text “is a dialectical process resulting from the interface of the variable interpretive resources people bring to bear on the text” (p. 9).
- CDA considers the ways in which a text “actualizes and extends the potential within orders of discourse” (p. 10). In other words, how a text is embedded (and dependent upon the discourses) in its historical moment, but at the same time can participate in the making of history and (re)making of discourse.
- CDA considers how discourse is implicated in social relations of power and in particular—power asymmetries within these relations. In so doing, CDA works to uncover how discourses can naturalize and disguise power relations that are “tied to the social production and distribution of symbolic and material resources” (Luke, 1995, p. 12).

- CDA attempts to reveal how dominant discourses are political and “sets out to generate agency among students, teachers, and others by giving them tools to see how texts represent the social and natural world in particular interests and how texts position them and generate the very relations of institutional power at work in classrooms, staff rooms, and policy” (pp. 12-13).

As Luke (1995) writes, “critical discourse analysis is a political act itself, an intervention in the apparently neutral flow of talk and text in institutional life that. . . .has the potential to foreground relations of inequality, domination and subordination” (p. 12). However, it is this interest in discourse and the ways in which discourses can support social inequalities that drew me to incorporate its approach into my method of policy discourse analysis. While CDA may indeed attend to the discursive construction of sex/gender inequalities, it is not necessarily a focus of this particular method. My desire for a specific focus on sex/gender led me to explore feminist critical policy analysis.

Feminist Critical Policy Analysis

Blending a critical and feminist approach with a focus toward policy analysis, Marshall (1997a; 1997b; 1999) describes feminist critical policy analysis in the context of primary, secondary and post-secondary education. The basic premises of this approach were delineated in chapter two and center upon researcher awareness and critique of the ways in which sex/gender, race, sexuality and social class inequalities may be embedded in policy problems and solutions. While a specific method or protocol for feminist critical policy analysis is not provided, Bensimon and Marshall (1997) do identify some characteristics of this methodology. Drawing from feminist theories in education and a number of other disciplines, the authors contend that feminist critical policy analysis can be characterized as follows:

- It offers gender as a fundamental category of analysis.
- It attends to the analysis of differences, local context and specificity.
- The lived experiences of women constitute legitimate data for the analysis.
- The goal is to transform institutions.
- It is an interventionist strategy (pp. 9-11).

For policy researchers who align with a feminist approach, this list of characteristics may appear self-evident. However, Bensimon and Marshall's (1997) work provides an important step toward offering and legitimizing a policy analysis orientation for post-secondary education that is specifically feminist. It also explains to those unfamiliar with feminist theory, how a feminist approach can be differentiated from other approaches to policy analysis. As I have explained in the previous chapters, my approach to this study was grounded in feminist theory from the beginning. Thus, policy discourse analysis—the methodology for this study—incorporates the above characteristics and is a feminist approach to policy analysis.

A Desire to Destabilize: Poststructural Influences on Policy Discourse Analysis

I have grouped policy archaeology (Scheurich, 1994) and Ball's (1994) methods for critical and poststructural educational policy reform in a poststructural frame because both are explicit in their alignment with poststructuralism's interest in destabilizing basic tenets of a liberal humanist approach. Further, both acknowledge the prominent influences of Foucault's theories of discourse and power in their approaches.

Policy Archaeology

Desiring to “expand and alter” the conventional policy studies arena, Scheurich (1994) draws upon the work of Foucault to delineate a radical model of policy analysis which he terms “policy archaeology” (p. 297). This approach differs from traditional

policy analysis in that it aims to study the construction of social problems rather than beginning with an uncritical acceptance of the problem to be addressed and ameliorated through policy.

Scheurich offers a poststructural critique of how traditional policy theory is embedded in the ameliorative discourses of Enlightenment humanism. He makes clear how conventional policy analyses call attention to the manner in which social problems are likened to *diseases* which can be cured through policy *treatments*. Typically, policy theory and analysis begin with this assumption and then consider competing policy solutions to address/cure the ‘problem’ at hand. Traditional policy analysis then considers possible concerns about the implementation of the policy treatment and mechanisms for evaluating the effectiveness of the policy under consideration (Scheurich, 1994). In contrast, policy archaeology seeks first to study the social construction of problems. Scheurich (1994) proposes the following model for applying this approach to the policy arena:

- Study the social construction of social problems.
- Identify social regularities-- grids or networks of discourses that constitute categories of thought and ways of thinking. Determine what becomes socially visible as a social problem and how it is understood as solvable.
- Study the social construction of policy solutions.
- Study the social functions of policy studies itself (pp. 300-304).

Through this process, Scheurich contends that policy archaeology can open up the boundaries of the traditional policy arena by questioning and critiquing the assumptive discourses that construct and naturalize social “problems.”

Critical and Poststructural Policy Reform

Clearly a blended approach as indicated by its title, Ball (1994) describes a critical and poststructural approach to policy reform. Drawing from critical social science theory, poststructuralism and critical ethnography, Ball (1994) acknowledges the epistemological tensions inherent in an approach that incorporates both critical and poststructural perspectives but contends that the resultant friction can be “purposeful and effective rather than a distraction” (p. 2). The approach outlined by Ball (1994) is critical in its intent to critique asymmetries of power in social relations. However, drawing on Foucault’s (1978) theory of dynamic and productive power, he also acknowledges the need to move beyond the “dominance/resistance binary, Scheurich (1992), not to erase it but to extend it ” (Ball, 1994, p. 11).

Ball (1994) describes policy as discourse and calls for the need to “recognize and analyse the existence of ‘dominant’ discourses, regimes of truth, erudite knowledges—like neo-liberalism and management theory—within social policy” (p. 24). In order to accomplish this, he suggests the application of a trajectory method of policy study that pays particular attention to the following five contexts of policy-making: policy influence, policy text production, policy practice, policy outcomes, and political strategy. The first three contexts are drawn from conventional policy studies while the last two are added out of concern for the issues of “justice, equality and individual freedom. . .and identifying a set of political and social activities” that might more effectively alleviate inequalities (p. 26). Policy discourse analysis does not specifically employ a trajectory method as delineated by Ball (1994). However, I have drawn upon his work by acknowledging interconnections among multiple contexts of policy and maintaining a

special focus on the role of policy in sustaining and destabilizing dominant discourses that may reinforce social inequalities.

Poststructural Document Analysis

In her genealogical study of “teacher encounters with multicultural education,” McCoy (1995) employs poststructural document analysis as both an alternative to the traditional myth of an exhaustive literature review and as a methodological tool for determining the operative discourses in the shaping of multicultural education. McCoy refers to poststructural document analysis as an adaptation of Lather’s (1994) “methodology of the imaginary,” an analytical approach that incorporates the following three stages:

1. fragmenting material
2. brooding over liberated fragments
3. constructing constellations of new meaning (in McCoy, 1995, p. 65)

In contrast to traditional methods of textual and document analysis, this poststructural document analysis employs an embodied approach that McCoy refers to as “active interpretation” (p. 65). Applied to policy analysis, the researcher first seeks to question (or “fragment” the coherence of) the assumptive ‘problems’ that are meant to be solved by the particular policy. Focused through a poststructural frame, the coherence and ‘givenness’ of a particular problem aimed to be addressed by policy is problematized, disrupted and fragmented by the researcher. Stage two can be understood as a critical and intensive culling over the fragmented data from stage one to identify patterns and themes. From here, the researcher moves toward identifying dominant discourses that construct the intelligibility of the policy problem and the counter discourses that seek to disrupt its normalization.

For example, McCoy's poststructural document analysis revealed the dominant discourses of human capital, meritocracy, liberal individualism, inclusion, back-to-basics and cultural capital at play in rendering multicultural education intelligible. These discourses represent fluid forces and relations that produce the possibility for the understanding and naturalization of multiculturalism. The counter-discourses identified through her process of poststructural document analysis included: "structural critiques of dominance, critiques of inclusion, and the interrogation of knowledge, language and representation" (p. 82). By exposing their discursive framing, the identification of discourses provides an opportunity for the analyst to move toward a more complicated understanding of policy and the 'problems' meant to be solved by a particular policy.

Context and Policy Discourse Analysis

The methodologies I have identified as contributing to the development of policy discourse analysis emphasize the importance of situating policy in social context—not treating policy, text, or discourse as isolated or detached from its historical moment. Smith's textual analysis (1990b), CDA (Fairclough, 1995), Scheurich's (1994) policy archaeology, and Ball's (1994) critical and poststructural policy reform all (to varying degrees) provide approaches to policy analysis that attend to the ways in which policy emerges from, and constructs, social relations. This emphasis on contextuality is indeed a marker of critical and poststructural approaches to discourse and policy analysis which share in their desire to question assumptions embedded in the formulation of policy problems and solutions. In order to accomplish this, analyses need to examine the text or policy from the context in which it emerges.

A focus on context indicates a shift away from structuralist assumptions that posit a unity and coherence of language assumed to “be a representation of ideas that either cause material relations or from which such relations follow” (Scott, 1988, p. 34). As delineated in chapter two, conventional approaches to text and discourse analysis typically focus on analyzing a stretch of text, a conversation or some discursive unit. Claims made from such approaches are rooted in thinking that assumes words and texts have fixed or intrinsic meanings that provide a self-evident relationship or “correspondence between language and the world” (Scott, 1988, p. 35). In contrast, the critical and poststructural approaches I draw upon understand language and discourse as socially constituted—fluid and dynamic meaning-making systems that are not rooted in a singular or essential concept of truth (Bensimon & Marshall, 1997).

Like the methodologies I described in the previous section, policy discourse analysis rejects an essential correspondence between language and reality and relies upon an understanding of discourse as productive—moving and shaping subject positions and the material realities in which we find ourselves. Nevertheless, policy discourse analysis provides for a method that focuses on the written text of policy alone. According to Shore and Wright (1997), the analysis of policy discourses that inhere in written policy documents is an essential and little-studied dimension of policy analysis. Unlike conventional approaches however, the emphasis on the policy texts in policy discourse analysis does not imply structuralist assumptions. Policy discourse analysis is offered, not as a replacement for the other methodologies I have drawn from, but rather as an extension to them. Drawing on each of these approaches, I have delineated the following imperatives for policy discourse analysis:

- A focus on written policy documents and policy as discourse.
- Analysis of subject positions constructed through policy discourses that inhere in the written text of policy.
- Questioning the assumptions that undergird the framing of policy problems and solutions.
- Examining subject positions in order to expand possibilities for thinking differently and for advancing efforts to promote equitable social practices.

Policy discourse analysis serves as an extension because it provides a method for in-depth focus on the discourses of policy documents and the subject positions produced by them. The exclusive focus on the written text of policy as a data source does not imply that context is not crucial to meaning-making. Policy discourse analysis does not ignore context, but rather highlights the discursive power of policy by first considering the written text. Policy discourse analysis views policy documents as discursive effects and as such, provides an opportunity to examine discourses and the ways they coalesce to make particular subject positions more prominent than others. Policy documents are used to communicate ideas to mass audiences and as such, the subject positions discursively produced by them may have far-reaching effects. Policy documents serve as one means by which discourses are supplied and subject positions are produced. The ability of policy to support, re/produce and disperse particular discourses and subject positions provides the justification for policy discourse analysis. Since our sense of self is shaped by the subject positions we take up, it is important to consider how policy documents contribute to this process.

Thus, policy discourse analysis is a method specifically designed to focus on the discourses provided by policy documents and identifies subject positions produced through these discourses. While this methodological approach allows for emphasis to be placed on policy documents as data source, it does so with attention to ways in which the

documents are situated in relation to particular social context/historical moment(s). This is accomplished by making connections between discourses of the policy documents and broader discourses and by providing a contextual backdrop from which to understand the policy documents in relation to the organizations and/or institution(s) from which they have been generated. For example, in chapter one, I historicized the emergence of university women's commission reports and in Appendix B, I provide an overview of the missions and histories and prominent issues addressed by the women's commission at each of the four universities studied.

Grounded in Foucault's theory of discourse as described in chapter two and shaped both within and against interpretive, critical and poststructural methodological approaches, policy discourse analysis provides a method of analyzing policy discourses and the subject positions produced by them. Next, I describe the way in which I implemented policy discourse analysis in my study of university women's commission policy reports.

Methods and Procedures

Data Selection and Sampling Criteria

For this study, I selected women's commission reports from the University of Maryland, the University of Michigan, The Ohio State University, and Pennsylvania State University. The following criteria guided the sample selection: (a) Institutions were chosen whose commissions have issued two or more reports spanning at least a decade between them. This approach enabled me to study commission documents over time in order to examine how the articulation of problems and policy solutions has changed. (b)

The sample was limited to research universities because they tend to set standards for academe (Bok, 1990). It was further narrowed to public research universities; these institutions offer more opportunity for data access, since they are subject to public information laws and historically they have emphasized access and opportunity (National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, 1995). Further, due to the extent and magnitude of women's commission efforts at the four focus institutions, these sites were expected to provide the best opportunity for gathering data.

Official reports of women's commissions served as the primary data source while supporting documents used in preparation of official commission reports served as secondary data sources for this study. Official women's commission reports typically include data on the locations and proportions of women in the university, the representation of women in formal leadership roles and positions of institutional influence, promotion rates and salary equity data. Further, climate-related matters are also addressed, including child-care and family leave concerns, safety, health-care, sexual harassment and women's representation in the curriculum (TenElshof, 1973; Moore & Sagaria, 1993). Secondary data sources collected for this inquiry include survey data, newspaper articles, meeting agendas and minutes, letters and memos to and from commission members, journal articles and preliminary research reports used by women's commissions in preparation of official reports.

Included in the category "official reports" is a range of document types. In sum, I analyzed a total of 21 documents as official reports (Appendix A). These included six from the University of Maryland (1974, 1978, 1990a, 1990b, 1993, and 1994), six from the University of Michigan (1972, 1978, 1992, 1993, 1996 and 1994-95), three from The

Ohio State University (1971, 1977 and 1992) and six from Pennsylvania State University (1982, 1985, 1988, 1992, 1993, and 1994). Spanning from 1971 to 1996, these documents are products of policy-making efforts made primarily by women during a time of increased public attention to affirmative action and other equity initiatives. The documents are variously titled “annual reports,” “summary reports” and “status reports” and were selected as primary data sources because they are designed to provide a general summary of issues and concerns for women on a particular campus during a specific time period. Other reports generated by the commissions at the four focus institutions may be “official” or final reports, but are not included as primary sources for this study because they are subcommittee reports about a single issue or they are additional volumes of an extensive study from which the major issues were summarized in the first volume of the report. The length of the selected ‘official reports’ ranges from several to 80 pages per single report, but most average 30-40 pages in length.

Secondary sources included about 150 documents ranging from single newspaper clippings and commission brochures to reports totaling 500 pages in length.⁵ Like the primary sources, secondary sources also span several decades dating from 1971 to 1996. While the secondary sources were not part of the raw data used for coding purposes, they provided contextual information and influenced the study by the ways in which they informed me as the researcher. Secondary data sources provide insights about ways in which commission work was portrayed to readers of university publications. In some cases, data in the form of meeting minutes and memos told a story about how commission members communicated with each other and with university leadership

about the salience of particular policy problems and decision-making related to the production of the policy reports.

While these data are considered secondary because of my focus on the discourses that inhere in the written text of policy reports, they remain an important aspect of this policy discourse analysis because they helped to provide me with contextual insights. Drawing from established understandings of the researcher as an instrument of qualitative inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), it was important for me to immerse myself in both the data *of* the reports and data *about* the reports in order to provide a contextualized analysis. Secondary sources cited in this document are listed in the references and data from them are incorporated into the commission profiles provided in Appendix B.

Data Collection

Data were collected from libraries and archives as well as administrative offices at the four research universities. I began data collection in the winter of 1997 when I spent several weeks reading women's commission reports and secondary sources located in the archives of The Ohio State University. I made notes and requested photocopies of documents that were too lengthy to summarize manually. I obtained copies of official commission reports produced since 1977, as they were available through the university's library system. Through the support of the Elizabeth D. Gee grant for research on Women (The Ohio State University), I was able to travel to Michigan, Pennsylvania and Maryland to visit each of the remaining three universities during the summer of 1997.

In most cases, I was able to locate data from the 1970s through the late 1980s and sometimes the early 1990's on file in the archives of each respective university library. By making advance arrangements, I was able to gain the assistance of librarians who

could prepare the appropriate materials for my arrival and provide me with an indication about the amount of written material pertaining to women's commissions on their campus. At each institution, I worked my way through 12-15 crates of file folders containing preliminary and final reports, memos, agendas, newspaper clippings, brochures, personal notes and other kinds of correspondence. In addition to my time in the archives at each university, I also made visits to various administrative offices associated with each women's commission to inquire about additional materials and to inform commission representatives of my study. Copies of official reports and documents produced since 1995 were typically acquired through personal communication and visits to these offices.

As a result of my advance inquiries with university archives, I discovered that most records associated with the women's commission at the University of Maryland were not archived. Fortunately, I was able to contact the Office of the President's Commission on Women's Affairs to inform them of my study. They generously gave me permission to sort through multiple boxes and cabinets of files housed within that office and in other storage locations.

With the help of a research assistant, I was able to read and identify official reports as well as photocopy material pertinent to my study within a two-day time period at each university. On average, I spent about 12 hours reading and sorting through files at each institution. This process of data collection also marked my first layer of analysis as a brief but intensive reading of the materials helped me to begin to see policy patterns and exceptions within and across institutions.

Researcher as Instrument

I approached this study with an understanding of my role as an “instrument” in the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This conceptualization recognizes the important role the researcher plays in shaping the inquiry and the findings of the study. It also emphasizes that in qualitative inquiry, a distinct line between researcher and research methods is blurry at best. As such, it is important to acknowledge that the choice of methodological approach(es) and methods I employ in this study were very much influenced by my own personal standpoint. In the preface and chapter one of this study I highlighted my personal investments in the research questions and methodological approaches of this study.

Relative to my role as “instrument” for this research, it is also important to note that I have had over 10 years of experience working as an administrator, researcher and teacher at two different universities. Further, I also had an opportunity to serve on a university women’s commission for an academic year. My familiarity with university life as well as the workings of a women’s commission provides me with an “insider’s” perspective for this inquiry. This perspective affects the research process in a number of ways. My insider knowledge base helped me to collect data efficiently by understanding how commissions are typically situated in relation to the administrative branch of the university. Further, I had access to a network of women involved in commission work and/or researching women in higher education. Thus, I could call upon these women for assistance in retrieving documents and discussing my perspectives.

The role of “insider” is not an unproblematic one. While my involvement in commission efforts was brief, my interest in promoting the goals of these groups remains

strong. Attentive to my role as an instrument of analysis and interpretation in this study, it was important to pay careful attention to the assumptions I was bringing to the data and finding ways in which I could destabilize my own investment in these liberatory projects. At the same time, it was important that I did not allow my poststructural leanings to entirely foreclose the change-making potential of these groups. As such, I worked to create a research design that blended interpretive, critical and poststructural approaches to provide a built-in means of sustaining the within/against positioning of this inquiry and my role as the researcher in this endeavor.

Data Analysis

My analysis continued by reading and rereading all the collected documents. According to Altheide (1996), data analysis generally consists of “extensive reading, sorting, and searching through your materials; comparing within categories, coding and adding key words and concepts; and then writing minisummaries of categories” (p. 43). I spent numerous hours working my way through piles of written text, reading and sorting documents according to their status as primary and secondary data sources and then according to the time frame in which they were written. Thus, the data from each university were divided into folders consistent with the decade (1970’s, 80’s or 90’s) in which the document was generated and whether or not it was an official report or secondary data source. According to Glesne & Peshkin (1992), data analysis is “the process of organizing and storing data in light of . . . meaning-finding interpretations that you are learning to make about the shape of your study” (p. 129). As such, a rudimentary coding process begins by sorting data into analytic files. I also made file folders for storing coded text and for storing contextual data related to each commission

in my study. I also had files related to the work of women's commissions at other institutions and scholarly studies on the status of women in higher education. While reading each primary and secondary document, I began to make notes about patterns and irregularities that emerged from the data. These analytic notes helped inform subsequent coding phases of analysis.

Building on insights gained from textual and discourse analysis, my reading and analysis of the documents followed a multi-layered approach that examined presence as well as absence in the text. Using established methods of qualitative inquiry as a guide, I employed coding and categorizing processes that made use of both inductive and deductive approaches (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Patton, 1990). Typically applied to the analysis of transcribed interview data and field notes, I adapted these methods to analyze the written text of policy reports. Loosely modeled after Strauss and Corbin's (1990) design for developing grounded theory⁶ and Miles & Huberman's (1984) system for pattern coding, the flow chart in figure 3.2 delineates the process I followed for data analysis. While I drew on these methods, I want to be clear that it was not my intention to develop grounded theory or engage in a process of data reduction alone. I drew upon these qualitative methods to describe my data analysis because they provide a helpful way of conceptualizing my coding process.

Coding was limited to the text of the selected sample of 21 official commission reports and was accomplished both manually and with the use of HyperResearch, a computer application for qualitative research. In some cases, I scanned entire reports into a database and then read, sorted and coded them using HyperResearch. In the other

cases, I selected portions of text and manually typed them into the database. According to Miles and Huberman (1984), codes can be thought of as “abbreviations or symbols applied to a segment of words. . .they are retrieval and organizing devices that allow the analyst to spot quickly, pull out, then cluster all the segments related to a particular [research] question, concept or theme” (p. 56). The coding processes enabled me to identify key terms and examine how they were deployed within a document, among documents at a single institution and between documents issued at different institutions.

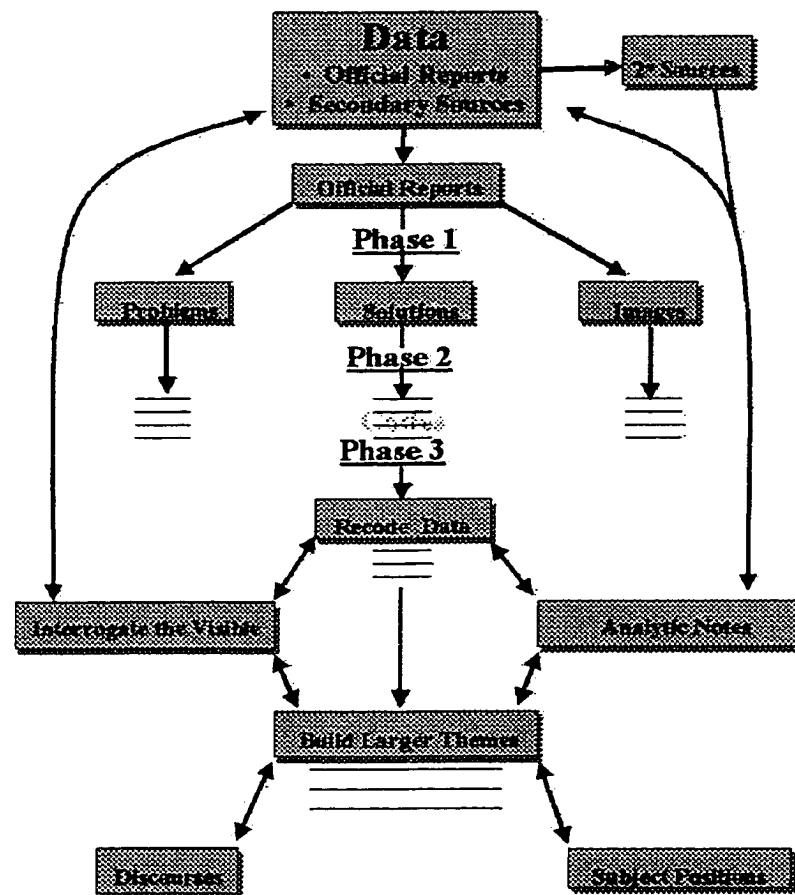


Figure 3.1: Analytic Process for Policy Discourse Analysis

The initial coding phase followed a deductive process in response to the research questions guiding this study. Deductive coding employs an a priori approach. In other words, the analyst approaches the data looking for segments of text that correspond with particular research questions, concepts or themes (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). In order to accomplish this, I used different colored pens to highlight segments of text according to the categories: *policy problem*, *policy solution* and *images of women*. Some segments of text were linked to a single category only, while other segments were linked to all three categories. This deductive process fed a layer of inductive coding as more themes emerged from the data within each category. During this process, I made more analytic notes and began writing up some of the patterns, gaps and disjunctures that I saw emerging from the data.

Next, I used Hyperresearch to generate “reports” for each category—problems, solutions and images. Each report consisted of all segments of text related to that particular category. Thus, the “policy problems” report contained segments of text related to policy problems across all four universities and all official reports from each university. From here, I began the second phase of coding working both inductively and deductively. Inductively, I developed emergent codes from my reading of each HyperResearch report. These codes were both descriptive and interpretive (Miles & Huberman, 1984) and my process of identifying them was similar to what Lincoln & Guba (1985) refer to as “unitizing,” or finding units of information in the text that will eventually be used as a basis for defining categories (p. 344). For instance, within the category “problems” I identified segments of text that were specific to particular issues like sexual harassment, gender-biased language, athletic opportunities, lack of adequate

health care, inequitable salaries, lack of representation, safety, lack of adequate child care and so forth. This process was repeated in a third phase of coding. Thus, the second and third phases of coding resulted in the development of more focused codes sometimes referred to as “subcodes” (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 60). This process was accomplished with the use of HyperResearch, which also enabled me to assign multiple codes to a segment of text if needed. “Coding is a progressive process” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 133). As such, multiple layers of coding enabled me to further refine and focus my coding for the purpose of re-building categories—or bringing together segments of text that apparently relate to the same content (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Appendix C provides a summary of the codes and subcodes I developed throughout the coding process.

Following the second and third phases of coding, I created HyperResearch reports for each code. I then (re)read the data as they appeared in each report and made analytic notes related to patterns and regularities as well as complications and irregularities that I saw emerging. Since each HyperResearch report provided the source document for each segment of coded text, I was also able to make note of how the data reflected changes over time as well as similarities and differences between institutions. Finally, I engaged in a third phase of coding which enabled me to further refine various codes and make connections among them. For example, my preliminary reading and analytic notes revealed that “equity” was a term used to describe policy problems, solutions and images of women across the reports from the four institutions examined in this study. During the first phase of coding, segments of text related to equity were codified according to their correspondence with a policy problem, solution or image of women in the commission

report. Thus, the problem of inequitable salaries between male and female faculty was coded as “problem;” the need to increase women’s salaries to be equitable with male counterparts was coded as “solution;” and the lack of adequate maternity leave and “family-friendly” personnel policies was coded as both “problem” and “image” since data units like this conveyed a problem and also particular images of women as mothers and care-givers. In the second phase of coding, I sifted through the phrases, sentences and paragraphs in each HyperResearch report to develop subcodes. For instance, among the data coded as “solutions,” subcodes were developed directly from the text. These included one or two word descriptions to identify units of text related to issues like improving campus climate, enhancing representation of women, improving women’s athletics. In phase three, codes became even more focused. For example, within the code “climate,” I developed subcodes to identify specific issues related to climate like eliminating gender-biased language, developing sexual harassment policies, enhancing night lighting on campus, and including more women in the curriculum.

As a process of reduction or simplification, coding is provisional at best. In contrast, Coffey and Atkinson (1996) suggest that coding can be conceptualized as a method of “data complication” (p. 29). I approached the coding of the data for this study from this perspective. Complication occurred in a variety of ways. For instance, there was considerable overlap among codes and thus, the process did not provide for a neat and tidy classification scheme. However, this was not my intent. Rather, the process of coding was important to my analysis in that it helped me to “work the data” by examining it on multiple levels. While coding the data provided a means for discerning similarities and patterns, it also provided a mechanism for fragmenting data in ways that allowed for

different kinds of exploration(s). Examining data in its original form (in the context of the 21 official reports) as well as in its fragmented form (as groupings of coded segments of text) provided an opportunity to “brood” over the data (McCoy, 1995) and allow for themes, patterns and stories to emerge on multiple levels. The coding process also enabled me to consider intertextuality—how the texts of different reports spoke to one another. The coding process provided an opportunity to examine particular issues and identify regularities and irregularities across institutions and over time.

Alongside the descriptive coding process, I was also at work deploying my feminist, critical and poststructural lenses throughout the analysis. Informed by my conceptual framework, I re-visited the 21 official commission reports as well as secondary sources and read them with a focus toward interrogating that which is visible and rooted in the question; why does the discourse in these policy documents take the form it does (Burton & Carlen; 1979; Wetherell & Potter, 1992)? I paid careful attention to vocabulary, metaphors, assumptions, conventions, structure, and style (Fairclough, 1995). This approach was particularly helpful for tracking what was made invisible and marginalized in the reports. I made analytic notes in response to questions like: what is taken for granted as “natural” or given (Scheurich, 1994)?; how are various aspects of social relations implicated in the text (Smith, 1990b)?; how is legitimacy constructed? And how is “narrative time” managed and controlled within the text? (Burton & Carlen, 1979). This was accomplished through the use of marginal notes as well as minisummaries I wrote for each document and each set of codes printed as a HyperResearch report (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Rather than accepting the data at face value, these questions helped me to uncover hidden assumptions and expose discursive

power inherent in the reports. For example, in examining images of women in the text, I looked at how the reports used the term “women” or the concept “women’s issues.” I analyzed how these terms were delineated within the context of the document and how they may have been taken for granted as uncomplicated. My conceptual framework helped me to consider how the reports represented difference among women by what was lost or made invisible through the use of such terms and phrases.

This practice of examining text for implicit assumptions as well as explicit descriptions follows research from both critical and poststructural approaches to discourse and policy analysis which examine “policy silences,” or what is absent from policy reports (Ball, 1994; Fine, 1988; Lather, 1991b; Pillow, 1997; Scheurich, 1994). This uncovering and analysis of silences can reveal much about how policy reinforces normalcy/deviance as well as constructs normative frameworks about how to solve social problems through policy. For example, Griffith (1992) found that an educational policy designed to promote the equitable distribution of educational resources among city schools of Toronto had the unintended consequence of producing knowledge about families that “reaffirmed a normative relation between mass compulsory schooling and the nuclear, two-parent family. Other family forms, such as single-parent families, were constructed as deviant from the normative order embedded in the educational policy” (p. 415). In this case, the policy began with the intention of redistributing educational resources and “helping” students considered “at-risk” of school failure. However, in formulating this particular policy, “family composition” came to be identified as a factor for determining students’ “risk” for failure, and the policy became “based on and reasserted educators’ everyday working knowledge about single-parent families. . . as

deviant from normal families and inadequate to the tasks of the educational process” (p. 427). Further, Griffith points out, these characterizations have gendered consequences as deviant family forms like “single-parent” families and “broken homes” are commonly understood to be families headed by women. Thus, as a result of a policy silence related to meanings and images of “family,” this policy process reaffirmed the normative positioning of nuclear family forms—those families in which a man is present and considered head of household.

Similarly, Patricia Hill Collins (1989) describes out how Daniel Patrick Moynihan's 1965 United States Department of Labor Report, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* identified African-American family life, and more specifically, "Black matriarchy" as the source of deviancy that "shapes Black cultural deficiency" (p. 877). Collins points to how such a claim rests on an assumption that "white economic privilege is due, in large part, to the superior attitudes and values of white Americans" (p. 876). Further, she examines how various silences in the report (e.g. failure to incorporate middle-class and working-class Black family structures into the analysis and failure to emphasize structural forces such as racism and discrimination) contributed to perpetuating a discourse that framed African-American attitudes and values as the source of blame for Black poverty. As these examples illustrate, feminist researchers have exposed hidden assumptions that shape policy consequences by examining what is absent from policy texts. Using these and other exemplars as a guide for my study, I looked for silences in the texts of commission reports and asked, what do these silences say? How are they helping to make particular images predominant and others less visible? What might be some policy consequences of these silences?

Following the inductive and deductive coding phases and the parallel process of interrogating the visible to uncover the invisible, key concepts were traced within and among documents in order to: (a) make connections among them (Silverman, 1993; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996); (b) develop constellations of meaning (McCoy, 1995); and (c) identify subject positions discursively constituted by the reports. Among established methods of qualitative research, this process has been variously described as categorizing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), integration/theory building (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and generating pattern codes, or “grouping [first level coding] into a smaller number of overarching themes or constructs” (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Informed by my analytic notes, I examined the coded data for conceptual patterns and linkages to identify overarching discursive themes that emerged from the data. As shown in figure 3.2, this was an dialogical process that enabled me to consider how coded text reflected and shaped discourses circulating within each report and how these discourses produced particular subject positions. For instance, after analyzing coded data, I was able to identify *access* as a common theme or discursive constellation undergirding the articulation of policy problems and solutions related to equity. This particular discourse was deployed in such a way that it produced the *woman outsider* subject position that will be described in greater detail in chapter four.

Thus, techniques of data analysis for this policy discourse analysis provided an opportunity to focus on how women contribute to creating themselves through policy discourses offered by university women's commission reports. Drawing on critical and poststructural feminist approaches outlined in chapter two, I describe and analyze subject positions discursively constituted by women's commission policy reports. In chapter

four, I focus on how commission reports produce subject positions in relation to the university, and in the following chapter, I examine how subject positions are produced in relation to other women.

In chapter four, I provisionally accept "women" as a category for analysis (Riley, 1988) and examine how the discourses of commission reports construct women—or, more specifically, subject positions for women—in relation to the university. As Dorothy Smith (1990b) contends, women are not merely passive products of discursive fields, they are active participants in their own creation. By investigating the articulation of policy problems for women, proposed solutions to those problems, and images of women provided by the reports, I was able to understand how particular subject positions are produced through policy discourses provided by commission reports. In the process of examining the shaping of these subject positions, I work to understand what premises underpin the ways in which policy problems are framed and solutions are proposed by identifying systems of meaning that allow for these positions to take form.

In chapter five, I extend my analysis further. I look toward how policy discourses provided by commission reports construct subject positions for women in relation to other women. This aspect of the analysis begins by problematizing "women" as a unified category and investigates some possible unintended consequences of this conceptualization. I then examine how difference among women is discursively framed by the reports. The articulation of problems facing women and the solutions to those problems in the text of commission reports reveals much about whose perspectives are most prominent in shaping the discourses of university women's commission reports.

Designing a Method

Having immersed myself in reading the work of scholars who focused on the analysis of discourse in policy, I felt “ready” to begin the process of analyzing my own data—and, I believe that I was. Yet, as I began the process of writing my methodology chapter, I came to realize that the methods I used in my analysis were far more implicit than explicit. Desiring to share the findings of this study with a broad audience, I felt it necessary to make explicit the process I used to analyze the data and arrive at my findings. Thus, it was the writing of this chapter that helped me to further refine and articulate the specific methods I employed for policy discourse analysis.

Soundness of the Study

Evaluating the soundness or trustworthiness of research claims is dependent upon basic assumptions undergirding the inquiry. Internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity—conventional standards for measuring the strength of research claims, are inappropriate for this particular inquiry as they are rooted in assumptions of a singular truth or material reality that can be discovered (Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Patton, 1990). Since policy discourse analysis is a blended approach of several methodologies that allow for multiple perspectives and “truths,” soundness of the inquiry is evaluated differently. For example, Lincoln & Guba (1985) offer credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability as alternative criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of findings in qualitative research. In this section, I describe limitations for this inquiry as well as the relevant criteria and ways in which I have worked to promote soundness in this study.

Limitations

This study is limited by the number and type of institutions from which I have drawn my data and by my exclusive focus on text. However, I am not claiming to arrive at exhaustive and generalizable conclusions. Rather, the findings from this study are offered as *a perspective* about the discourses of university women's commission policy reports at four research universities. My goal is to open up more space for the possibility to think differently about the liberatory outcomes of women's commission policy reports. Chapters four and five provide my interpretation of how university women's commission reports contribute to shaping subject positions for women in relation to the university and in relation to other women. In chapter six, I focus on how these perspectives about the discourses of women's commission reports may be helpful to future women's commission efforts and to other groups working to eliminate discrimination and to promote more equitable practices (not only sex/gender-based, but race, sexuality & social class as well) in higher education.

Another limitation for this study is the biases that I, as the researcher, brought with me to the inquiry. While researcher bias is acknowledged in established methods of qualitative inquiry (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Lather, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Patton, 1990), it is considered a resource and occasion for reflexivity. The methodological approaches I have blended for this policy discourse analysis are not rooted in a view of a singular essential truth that requires researcher objectivity for its discovery. Nevertheless, the question remains; how much bias is too much? Why should anyone accept the findings of this study as meaningful and on what grounds? There are established measures analysts can take to address anxieties related to

researcher bias and other issues of research credibility in qualitative research (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Patton, 1990). Next, I will describe the specific measures I took in order to produce credible and meaningful research findings.

Credibility

Summarizing from Patton (1990), credibility for qualitative inquiry depends on “rigorous techniques and methods for gathering high-quality data that is carefully analyzed; credibility of the researcher, and philosophical belief in the methodological approach employed” (p. 461). In this study, I have worked to establish credibility by attending to all three of these distinct, but inter-related factors. In this chapter I have described my methods for collecting and analyzing the data for this study. Following the advice of Altheide, (1996); Lincoln and Guba (1985); Miles and Huberman (1984) and others, I engaged in orderly and systematic sorting, filing, coding, and searching of the collected data keeping records of analytic notes, summaries and records of the process by which I followed for analysis.

Additionally, applying multiple perspectives to the interpretation of data can enhance research credibility (Huberman & Miles, 1994). According to Patton (1990), this process is called “theory/perspective triangulation” (p. 464) and is employed in an effort to mitigate researcher bias and enhance transferability (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). As I have described earlier in this chapter, policy discourse analysis is recombinant or blended methodological approach that draws on methods from interpretive, critical and poststructural frames. As such, triangulation in this regard “is less a tactic than a mode of inquiry” (Huberman & Miles, 1994, p. 438). Thus, the

application of multiple theoretical perspectives is inherent in my methodological approach for this. The simultaneous application of methods from each frame of inquiry that I draw upon can be thought of as a system of “checks and balances” of sorts.

Whether or not methods of triangulation are employed in a study, it is important to establishing trustworthiness that the epistemological assumptions undergirding the methodological approach(es) are made clear and that the researcher’s biases are made known. I have worked to accomplish these in this inquiry. In chapter two I discussed the conceptual framework guiding this inquiry and in this chapter I delineated the methodological approaches from which policy discourse analysis is formulated. In the preface to this dissertation and in chapter one, I situated myself as the researcher, providing background information about my personal and intellectual interests that brought me posing the research questions for this study. In this chapter, I acknowledged the role of “researcher as instrument” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and made clear that my own values and subjectivity can not be separated from the interpretations I make from the data.

While my own subject position(s) are inevitably implicated in the findings of this (and any) inquiry, I have worked to challenge my subjective tendencies in a number of ways. Glesne & Peshkin (1992) write, “continual alertness to your own biases, your own subjectivity, also assists in producing more trustworthy interpretations” (p. 147). Self-reflexivity and peer de-briefing are two established ways of aiding the researcher in becoming more attentive to her own biases. Throughout the research process, I met with peer-debriefers on a regular basis to share my analytic findings and receive critical feedback from various perspectives. I also kept analytic notes to assist me in

foregrounding and challenging my own interpretive biases. This process was inherent in the design of policy discourse analysis that juxtaposes critical and poststructural theories and methods to both seriously consider the goals of liberatory projects and place them under suspicion at the same time.

Reconfiguring Validity

Traditionally, validity in research has indicated a mechanism for measuring the truthfulness/accuracy of one's research findings. This understanding reflects the assumption that the research study is focused toward discovering an essential truth and that this process can be measured via some type of imposed standard. Since postpositivist approaches to inquiry move away from modernist assumptions of essential truth, such a configuration of validity is no longer relevant to research goals that consider multiple and competing perspectives of truth.

The concept of validity conventionally serves as a boundary or policing concept that attempts to separate good research from bad. Thus, validity is rooted in a dualistic framework. Scheurich (1996) uses the term "imperial validity" to convey the power dynamics inherent in the concept of validity rooted in a binary configuration of true/false, good/bad research. Scheurich (1996) contends that "validity is the determination of whether the Other has been acceptably converted into the Same" (p. 53). He writes,

Both conventional and postpositivist validity practices (unconsciously) inscribe a two-sided "truth" or "trustworthiness" map; they both enact the same two-sided "regularity." In addition, the first side of the map—the Same—is privileged over or is superior to the second side—the Other (p. 56).

Rather than abandoning attempts to establish trustworthiness of data however, a number of scholars have advanced approaches to validity that more aptly reflect ontological

assumptions of research in postpositivism (Lather, 1993; McCoy, 1995; Scheurich, 1996). Nevertheless, validity claims should be approached with caution.

Reconfiguring validity for feminist poststructural inquiry, Lather (1993) suggests that validity should be “scandalous” and “transgressive” in order to be useful and at the same time disruptive of modernist knowledge projects (p. 685). She advances “ironic,” “paralogical,” “rhizomatic” and “voluptuous” validities as poststructural alternatives to validities configured in a modernist tradition. Seeking discontinuity and fragmentation, poststructural inquiry moves beyond the search for underlying truths and aims to uncover multiple answers through the recognition of multiple realities. As such, validity in poststructural inquiry is measured by the extent to which the research promotes interruption, heterogeneity, and dispersion. Lather (1993) calls this reconfiguration “transgressive validity.” For my study, this was accomplished through efforts to open discursive space by unsettling conventional modes of thinking which inhibit acceptance of difference, multiplicity, paradox and complexity. Scheurich (1996) contends, however, that even attempts to reconfigure validity to allow for multiple truths are likely to fall short. He proposes that, aside from finding a space of emptiness or silence that can not be appropriated into the Same, we work toward “a loud clamor of a polyphonic, open, tumultuous, subversive conversation on validity as the wild, uncontrollable play of difference” (p. 58).

I have discussed a number of criteria and measures I have taken to enhance the credibility of this study of the discourses of university women’s commission policy documents. While I highlight these methods, I must reiterate that this study is not an attempt to arrive at “the truth” about the discourses of women’s commission documents.

Thus, I am not asking readers to accept my findings as the “correct” interpretation. I do believe however that I have provided evidence of my own situatedness, the conceptual frameworks guiding my approach, the established methodological underpinnings of policy discourse analysis, and the systematic and thorough approach I undertook for data collection and analysis. In so doing, I hope that I have accomplished my goal of encouraging readers to seriously consider the findings I present in chapters four and five and the implications I discuss in chapter six. The ultimate test of the credibility of this study will be how well it opens up space for thinking differently and for considering ways in which university women’s commission policy reports contribute to shaping subject positions for women.

Opening up space for thinking differently will require some additional work. Ideally, I will have the opportunity to continue to share my findings from this study with participants in university women's commissions and similarly situated groups. Opening up space requires that I articulate these thoughts to a broad audience that is not necessarily familiar with the terminology or methods central to my project. I have begun this process by presenting my work at a conference sponsored by a university women's commission and by having members of commissions read my work. Thus, I am hopeful that my research can serve as a catalyst for new types of conversations about equity-related policy development—conversations that will provide for a focus on the *discourses* of policy. We will ask more questions about the assumptions undergirding policy problems that appear to be a matter of common sense. We will identify dominant discourses circulating in our “policy talk” and will consider how these discourses contribute to making particular subject positions more accessible than others. The extent

to which these conversations occur will be a marker of the usefulness of policy discourse analysis.

Notes

¹Sometimes *method* and *methodology* are used interchangeably (Harding in Cancian, 1992). Here, I am using methodology to mean the philosophy of method—the interpretive frame(s) that guide the choice of methods and procedures for the study (Lather, 1992) and “*method* to mean the techniques for gathering evidence” (Cancian, 1992, p. 625). Similarly, Fonow & Cook (1991) use methodology to refer to the “*study of actual techniques and practices used in the research process*” (p. 1), while the techniques and practices constitute the methods of research.

²I use the term postpositivism to refer to research approaches that allow for the use of multiple methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) and do not assume a singular reality that can be captured through the application of “The scientific method” that is the hallmark of positivism. Thus, the distinction between positivism and postpositivism begins at an ontological level with different versions of reality. Postpositivism moves away from positivism’s assumption of a concrete reality that can be discovered and predicted. As Lather (1991a) writes, postpositivist inquiry attempts to move us away from “the lust for absolutes, for certainty in our ways of knowing” (p. 6). “Historically qualitative research was defined in the positivist paradigm,” but today, most positivistic research is quantitative (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 5). Included within a postpositivist paradigm of inquiry are diverse epistemological and methodological frames including: interpretive, naturalistic, hermeneutic, ethnomethodological, constructivist, feminist,

semiotic, phenomenological, deconstructive, critical and poststructural, to name a few (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Lather, 1991a; Patton, 1990).

³Lather's (1991a) heuristic grid displays three frames of postpositivist inquiry that are grouped according to their different approaches to "generating and legitimating knowledge" (p. 7). Compared to positivism's interest in prediction, the "plethora of terms" to describe methodological approaches in postpositivism can be grouped according to common goals (p. 7). While Lather uses the research goals: understand, emancipate or deconstruct as the basis for grouping particular methodologies, I use destabilize rather than deconstruct to avoid any potential confusion between the methodologies informing policy discourse analysis and the method of deconstruction.

⁴Traditionally, the use of the term *text* refers to printed documents. However, it can also be understood more broadly as products or processes of cultural inscription including not only documents or segments of written text, but also words used in conversation, photos, film, music and other artifacts (Altheide, 1996; Silverman, 1993; Smith, 1990b). From a sociological perspective, Dorothy Smith's (1990b) work was instrumental in providing scholarship that specifically focused on texts as constituents of *social relations*.

⁵See for example The Ohio State University Commission on Women and Minorities Vol. III, 1977.

⁶The term “grounded theory” was introduced over 25 years ago. Explicated by Glaser & Strauss (1967), it refers to a general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically collected and analyzed (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Strauss & Corbin (1990) and others have since delineated procedures and techniques related to methods of grounded theory. A central feature of grounded theory is that “data collection, analysis and theory stand in reciprocal relationship with each other” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 23). Thus, theory is generated from the interplay of data collection and analysis.

CHAPTER 4

A VULNERABLE YET EMPOWERED OUTSIDER

Introduction

In this chapter, I examine the ways in which university women's commission reports construct subject positions for women in relation to the university. I am not suggesting that the discourses of commission reports stand alone in constructing this subject. Rather, I approach this analysis from an understanding that women's commission reports provide discursive strategies that circulate and intersect within broader discursive fields (Weedon, 1997). Throughout this chapter and the next, I trace the discourses of women's commission reports, their discursive shifts over time, and examine systems of meaning through which these discourses take form and make particular subject positions intelligible. In this chapter, I uncover and explore dominant discourses of access, femininity and feminism that coalesce in ways that make possible the vulnerable and empowered outsider.

Subject Positions

What are the predominant subject positions discursively produced through the policy reports of university women's commissions? The data from this study reveal that one of the dominant positions is that of a woman attempting to overcome obstacles and

eliminate the "no girls allowed" signs that signal(ed) her exclusion from the academy. One might say she is positioned as a trespasser. However, this description falls short, as it depicts someone who is violating the rules about who is allowed to enter a particular place or participate in a particular activity. The subject position shaped through the discourses of women's commission reports is not that of a trespasser in this sense. The woman who takes up this position is not expressly violating the rules; rather, she is *requesting* that the rules be changed. The subject positions shaped by discourses of commission reports is that of a woman urgently seeking permission to enter a previously male domain and participate in activities that have expressly or tacitly excluded her. Even when women are positioned within institutional structures of the university, as are the women writing the reports, they are discursively constituted as "outsiders/within¹" (Collins, 1991a; 1991b). This positioning of women as outsiders and supplicants is accomplished through discourses of access that link various forms of institutional access with the attainment of equity.

In addition to the outsider status, the discourses provided by commission reports also shape a vulnerable woman subject position. A discourse of femininity shapes images of women as potential victims in need of both physical and emotional support and protection. The vulnerable woman subject position situates women as "fearful," "frustrated," "at risk" and in need of "training," "mentoring" and "advocacy." While discourses of access and femininity re/produce the vulnerable woman and outsider subject positions, they also position women as supplicants dependent on the institution to make change on their behalf. Simultaneously, however, a discourse of feminism intersects these to re/produce an empowered woman subject position. Here, women are

discursively constituted as capable and tenacious—demanding their right to be insiders. Despite their differences, however, both discourses position women as in need of something they lack—something that can only be granted by (typically male) authority. In this chapter, I examine these discourses of access, femininity, and feminism and consider how they construct multiple and competing subject positions.

The Outsider

How do the discourses of access re/produce the *woman outsider* subject position? Most importantly, this occurs because the reports make clear women's desire to be on the *inside*. A major emphasis of women's commission reports is directed toward providing an understanding of the status of women in quantifiable terms. The reports examine numbers of women compared to men in various university arenas and make the case that women remain underrepresented in important aspects of the university, as in the following quote from a report issued in the 1980s: "At a time when nationally women make up more than half the enrollment of undergraduates, 11 departments. . . have no women faculty [and] only three department heads are women" (Pennsylvania State University Commission for Women, 1985, p. 2). Commission reports also urge for improving women's status by adding more women to positions and activities from which they have been marginalized or excluded. This is evidenced in a 1992 report which states: "In fact, asked to name one thing the University could do to improve the status of its women workers, we say **hire more women at every level** (The Ohio State University President's Commission on Women, 1992, p. 15).

The vulnerable woman subject position re/produced through commission reports represents a woman who wants to be welcomed *into* spaces that have actively

discouraged her being there. She desires to be *inside* the university power structure—in leadership positions and on decision-making committees. As a student or faculty member, she wants to be able to locate herself *within* departments that have been dominated by men. She believes the official language of the university should *include* her, as should the curriculum and traditions of the institution. Quite simply, the reports construct the woman outsider in the very process of their appeal for women to become insiders. The focus on promoting women's access—their moving *into*, *inside* and being *included* within different and more desirable locations of the institution and its culture—positions them as outsiders. It is important to note, however, that commission reports do not construct an image of an outsider content to be so. Rather, they contribute to shaping an image of the woman outsider who wants to be granted permission to enter and ultimately to be *welcomed* inside—welcomed into those institutional spaces and practices that have thwarted and/or continue to thwart and exclude her presence and participation.

A Discourse of Access

Women's commission reports contribute to shaping the outsider subject position through a *discourse of access* that is closely tied to understandings of equity. The call for access has been central to research related to women's equal rights initiatives and non-discrimination policies and legislation, including Title IV and Title IX. However, it is not access *per se* which interests me here. Rather, it is the *discourse* of access and how this discourse produces and positions particular subject positions that I examine in this chapter. The access discourse produces the woman outsider subject position and in so doing, shapes understandings of equity that are primarily quantifiable.

Through this study, I have identified three strands of a discourse of access offered by women's commission reports. I have linked the three together because they all describe women's desire for inclusion, yet I consider them separately because each frames the problem of in/exclusion differently. For instance, the access discourse is made most explicit through women's call to *gain access* or entry to university positions and activities that exclude them. Appeals for access are also apparent in the call for greater inclusion of women in arenas where they have gained entry but remain underrepresented (i.e. science and engineering fields, leadership positions). Such appeals are also evidenced in the call for women and women's contributions to be valued and affirmed within the culture of the institution.

The analysis of the data from this study led me to develop three labels to describe these components of the discourse of access. *Entree* is the component that calls for women to be allowed to enter and participate in formal institutional activities as well as the informal social networks that sustain it. *Representation* is the component that appeals for greater involvement of women in institutional arenas dominated by men, and *affirmation* is the component that calls for women to be welcomed and valued by the institutional culture. These varied aspects of an access discourse are portrayed in the following commission report excerpts:

Entree

Many women spoke to the Commission about networks of informal settings and occasions from which they felt excluded-and during which much important decision-making gets done. Specifically noted by a number of women were the "men's business lunch" or the "men's table," "the gym and handball and basketball court" and the "guy's [sic] beer sessions" (The Ohio State University President's Commission on Women, 1992, p. 26).

Representation

It is clear that the University has not made enough progress. Despite the increasing pools of women candidates, the number of women faculty and staff has not increased to satisfactory levels. The retention of women faculty and staff remains a serious concern. Many women faculty, students, and staff experience numerous barriers to their full participation in the life of the university (University of Michigan, 1994, p. 3).

Affirmation

Women perceive that most policies. . . involving employee and faculty benefits, for example—are modeled on what a male worker needed in the past. As a result, such policies are unfriendly to women and women’s work needs and to those of an increasing number of men as well (The Ohio State University President’s Commission on Women, 1992, p. 25).

Next, I take a closer look at these three strands of the discourse of access made evident in the women’s commission reports produced at four research universities.

On Equal Terms—A Discourse of Entree

The entree component of the discourse of access is most pronounced in the reports issued in the 1970s. This strand emerges from commission report recommendations calling for revision and expansion of admissions policies and procedures, guidelines for student employment on campus, and athletic opportunities. For example, a 1971 report warns readers, “as the University moves towards more selective admissions, precautions should be taken to prevent any discriminatory practices from being included in the statement of admission policy.” The report further recommends that “all college catalogues should state ‘open on equal terms to both men and women’” (The Ohio State University, 1971, p. 1). Six years later, a 1978 report from another institution states that “bias against women in. . . admissions, hiring, promotion, access to training, career or academic counseling” (University of Michigan, 1978, p. 2) are continuing concerns for women at that university.

Contributing in large part to the entire discourse in the commission reports are extensive discussions of affirmative action policies and Title IX implementation. In fact, it is often these policy initiatives that provide women's commissions their *raison d'être*. In two of the four universities studied, women's commissions began as grass roots organizations and later became official university bodies when the President or Board of Trustees appeared to be concerned about access to women—and more specifically, the institution's compliance with affirmative action policy and Title IX legislation. This dynamic is illustrated in the following excerpt:

In January of 1971, President R.W. Fleming appointed twelve University employees to the Commission for Women, which was charged with the review of the Affirmative Action Program, the study of policies and procedures which may contribute to discrimination, and the education of the University community in the subtle nuances of sex discrimination (University of Michigan, 1972, p. 16).

The entire component of the discourse of access is particularly apparent in commission report discussions about athletics. A 1974 report describes exclusionary practices in the area of physical education, documenting how facilities and services available to women were “grossly deficient when compared to those available to men” (University of Maryland Chancellor’s Commission on Women’s Affairs, 1974, p. 19). For example, men received free athletic uniforms and free laundry, while women physical education majors had to pay for these. Another common entire problem cited in many commission reports is the lack of (adequate) athletic facilities and funding for women. For instance, “access to the first-aid room, which included a whirlpool and other medical aids, was also denied to women because of its location [in the men’s locker room]” (p. 20). Further,

What facilities are designated for use by women are sometimes preempted when men want to use them. For example, permission to use the Ritchie Coliseum for a women's basketball tournament game was suddenly revoked because men wanted to use the facility for practice (University of Maryland Chancellor's Commission on Women's Affairs, 1974, p. 18).

Likewise,

The swimming pool at Cole Fieldhouse is set aside almost exclusively for use by men. . .Free swim hours for men far outnumber those for women. Women complain frequently that they have been turned away at the door of the swimming pool during recreational hours scheduled for them because nude males were swimming and refused to get out (University of Maryland Chancellor's Commission on Women's Affairs, 1974, p. 21).

Access to athletic facilities remains a focal point of a discourse of access provided in reports from the 1980s and occasionally in the 1990s as well. However, access to the institution itself is not identified as a problem in reports issued after 1980. In fact, most of these reports acknowledge "progress" made in this area and turn attention toward other concerns, as exemplified in the following excerpt from a 1994 report:

Today, women comprise 48 percent of undergraduate enrollments and 40 percent of graduate enrollments. Many of the University's professional schools are making rapid progress in increasing the participation of women students. More women have assumed important roles in middle and upper management and in administration (University of Michigan, p. 4).

While the prominence of the entree component of the discourse of access seems to fade in commission reports from the 1990s, it strongly influences the shaping of the representation and affirmation components and contributes to understandings of equity provided by the reports. This strand of the access discourse supports conceptualizations of equity that are quantifiable. In other words, the entree discourse provides that the attainment of equity is typically assessed by the presence of women within the institution

or within various activities of the university. Thus, proportional representation studies are often used as a measure of progress toward equity.

An Outsider/Within—A Discourse of Representation

A second component of the discourse of access is evidenced by a focus on the issue of representation. Unlike entree, representation remains in the spotlight of commission reports throughout the three decades in which these reports were written. The issue of representation is crucial to women's commissions in that it expands the equity = access configuration. The focus on representation tends to shift attention away from entree as the only determinant of equity and toward women's need and desire for "full participation/inclusion" in the university as students, athletes, committee members, faculty, administrators and leaders. For example, a 1994 report contends that the university needs to "create a climate which permits and develops opportunities for the *full participation* of women staff, faculty and students in decision making processes" [italics added] (University of Michigan, 1994, p. 4). Similarly, a 1977 report explains:

Women are being hired primarily in traditional jobs-as clerks and secretaries, nurses and librarians, janitresses and food service workers. There are relatively few women in executive, administrative and managerial positions. Although there has been some progress in the past 5 years, there still is a dearth of women "at the top"(The Ohio State University Commission on Women and Minorities, 1977, p. 40).

Commission reports typically talk about representation in two ways. Most often it is from the perspective of women's *underrepresentation* in male-dominated fields and positions as in the following excerpt:

The findings of this report suggest that more effort is required to increase the numbers of women faculty hired, and the numbers of women appointed to upper-level administrative positions, particularly the heads of

academic departments, and as Deans (University of Maryland at College Park President's Commission on Women's Affairs, 1993, p. 32).

The issue of representation is also evidenced in talk about the *over*representation of women in some fields, occupations and appointments. For example, a 1993-94 report explains that "in nearly all colleges, the percentage of women in non-tenure track appointments exceeds the representation of women in tenured or provisional-tenure appointments" (Pennsylvania State University Commission for Women, 1994, p. 10). In both cases, the discourse situates women as outside of a desirable location. Whether the problem is framed as underrepresentation or overrepresentation, the focus remains the same—women are outsiders to positions of leadership, as students and scholars in science and engineering fields, on decision-making committees, and in various activities traditionally dominated by men.

In the case of both underrepresentation and overrepresentation, the discourse often centers on the "problem" of women not having the necessary qualifications for particular positions. In this way, the discourse tends to construct the "problem" as a lack/deficiency located in women themselves. For instance, a 1977 report claims, "one of the reasons that women continue to be hired in traditional jobs is that women continue to pursue traditional career paths." In order to remedy this, the report suggests that "women certainly have to rethink their roles in society, as well as develop a new sense of self-worth" (The Ohio State University Commission on Women and Minorities, 1977, p. 41). This same report recommends that the university "increase its pool of persons eligible for promotion" by "strengthening its management training program and gearing some specifically to women and minorities" (The Ohio State University Commission on

Women and Minorities, 1977, p. 47). More recently, a 1992 report from the same institution suggests that the university “provide mentoring, education and training programs, and professional development programs to address women’s needs and issues” (including assertiveness training, fiscal management education and leadership training) (The Ohio State University President’s Commission on Women, 1992, p. 33). A 1993 report at another university claims that a top priority for their commission is to “foster professional development opportunities for women by sponsoring professional development programs open to the community and . . .encouraging University-wide informal mentoring opportunities” (Pennsylvania State University Commission for Women, 1993, p. 3). Similarly, a 1994 report from another institution urges the university to “develop a program of career development and training for those faculty and staff with potential for academic or administrative leadership roles” (University of Michigan, 1994, p. 4). These examples help to illustrate how the representation component of a discourse of access might contribute to some unintended consequences. As conveyed in these commission excerpts, proposed solutions to the problem of women’s overrepresentation or underrepresentation tend to obscure dominant power relations and focus attention toward women themselves who, according the reports, need to be “trained, professionally developed, mentored” and improve their “self-worth” in order to become *insiders*.

When it is recognized that many women do have appropriate credentials and training deemed necessary for attaining insider status, then the problem of inadequate representation turns to issues of recruitment and retention. Commission reports begin to ask questions about how to attract qualified women and keep them in particular locations

so that the proportion of insider women will continue to increase. These kinds of concerns are evidenced in reports across the institutions and throughout the three decades examined in this study. A 1971 report claims, “a need exists for recruitment policies and guidelines for introducing more women into high ranking Administrative and Professional roles” (The Ohio State University, 1971, p. 2). And more than twenty years later, a 1992 report from the same institution urges the university to “aggressively recruit women for faculty and senior administrative positions. . . .foster and promote advancement for women internal candidates. . . .and establish an environment which values internal women candidates” (The Ohio State University President’s Commission on Women, 1992, p. 32). A 1994 report from another institution states that “the development of an array of recruiting and retention programs” has been central to ensuring “that underrepresented groups participate fully in the life of the institution” (University of Michigan, 1994, p. 2). Similarly, a 1988 report recommends that the university “increase the number of women in senior faculty positions by improving the retention of well-qualified women.” Further, the report adds that the university should,

Implement the Study Group recommendations regarding the recruitment of women into administrative positions (Recommendation D). Increasing the number of women in administrative positions would significantly alter faculty women’s perceptions of the climate for women at Penn State (Pennsylvania State University Strategic Study Group on the Status of Women, 1988, p. B-9).

Commission reports also make more specific recommendations designed to promote recruitment and retention efforts. Providing job relocation assistance for all spouses or life partners of recruited candidates, holding supervisors accountable for evaluating gender fairness and race sensitivity of their subordinates, and implementing

procedural changes in the posting of university position openings are some of the more common prescriptions offered as a means of achieving equity through increasing the representation of insider women throughout the institution.

The representation component of the discourse of access is significant in part because it represents a shift in thinking about the attainment of sex/gender equity. By the mid-1970s the reports reflect an understanding that it is insufficient to claim that access (entree) alone provides equity. Women's commission reports evidence this shift with statements like, "it is simply not enough that women be allowed entry" (The Ohio State University President's Commission on Women, 1992, p. 10) and in the following:

Recruiting historically under-represented individuals is clearly only the beginning. Gains have been made in the number of women and minorities entering. . . .But women faculty, especially women of color, are more likely than their male counterparts to leave prior to a tenure decision (Pennsylvania State University Commission for Women, 1994, p. 11).

Yet it is clear that the University has not made enough progress. Despite the increasing pools of women candidates, the number of women faculty and staff has not increased to satisfactory levels. The retention of women faculty and staff remains a serious concern. Many women faculty, students, and staff experience numerous barriers to their full participation in the life of the University (University of Michigan, 1994, p. 4).

The shift to understanding the attainment of equity in terms of representation as well as entree suggests that equity can be achieved provided that (a) women are not prohibited from gaining entry to the institution; (b) special efforts are made to recruit qualified women to the university; (c) internal women "with potential" are "trained and developed" so they will be qualified to become *insiders*; and finally, (d) women on the inside are provided with the support and incentives needed to remain in these positions.

Entree and representation, two strands of the access discourse circulating in the text of women's commission reports, contribute to shaping understandings of equity attainment. In so doing, these discursive strategies construct the *woman outsider* subject position by framing equity attainment as a function of women's insider status. Taken together, entree and representation provide understandings of (in)equity in terms of outsider/insider status. This status is one that can be readily quantified and thus documented. For example, a 1993 report claims "patterns of employment gender segregation continue; women dominate the secretarial/clerical category (91%) and continue to be significantly underrepresented in the skilled crafts category, comprising just 3% of those workers" (University of Maryland at College Park President's Commission on Women's Affairs, 1993, p. 4). Across institutions, commission reports document numbers and proportions of women employees and students in various disciplines, occupations, job categories and ranks. Commissions utilize these data to document and legitimate the existence of problems related to equity, as the following example illustrates:

The commission's analysis of the University workforce, for the years 1972 through 1976, shows that the University has reduced overall numbers of University staff, through dismissals and through the practice of not replacing vacant positions. As a result, percentages of women and minorities increase, not due to an overall increase in their numbers, but, rather due to an increase in the total staff (The Ohio State University Commission on Women and Minorities, 1977, p. 41).

At another university, a more recent commission report makes the case that while some positive gains have been made, more work needs to be done to achieve sex/gender equity. Drawing on numerical data, this 1993-94 report informs readers:

Women are concentrated in the lower pay grades, both in staff and technical services employment categories. While the recent improvement in the representation of women in senior faculty and academic administrator positions is encouraging, women held only 6 of 32 of the executive positions and only 9 of 61 of the administrator positions. . .in 1992. Women are clearly not advancing. . .at the same rates as their male counterparts (Pennsylvania State University Commission for Women, 1994, p. 14).

Quantifiable data provide a level of legitimacy and urgency to the problems experienced by women and described in commission reports. Women's commissions rely upon these kinds of data to avoid having their assertions dismissed or minimized as problems of perception only.

Commission report writers want their reports to be read and taken seriously. The potential for these reports to call attention to the problems experienced by women was evidenced recently with the release of one such report at MIT. In introductory comments provided in the report, the institution's president, Charles M. Vest, said that the *Study on the Status of Women Faculty in Science at MIT* report (1999) caused him to "sit bolt upright in [his] chair." Importantly, he further noted that "while he had 'always believed that contemporary gender discrimination within universities is part reality and part perception,' the report caused him to understand 'that reality is by far the greater part of the balance'" (Miller & Wilson, 1999, p. A18). This statement underscores the power of commission report data to communicate ideas and contribute to changing understandings of gender discrimination and equity.

To Respect and Value Women—A Discourse of Affirmation

Affirmation, the third component of a discourse of access, provides another (yet more subtle) way of positioning women as outsiders. Like entree and representation,

affirmation is a discursive strategy that shapes the woman subject and informs understandings of (in)equity at the institution as it circulates. In contrast to entree and representation, the affirmation strand of the discourse of access is identified by the ways in which women acknowledge their outsider status in relation to the institutional culture rather than its structure. This distinction is evidenced in the following excerpts from a 1992 report:

The very fabric of the institution, how we do business, must change in order for women to advance, to be successful, and thus to make their maximum contribution to the university. . . .our most difficult challenge may well be not to change numbers, not even to change structures, but to change the deeply and often unconsciously sexist attitudes that pervade women's experience of those numbers and structures (The Ohio State University President's Commission on Women, 1992 p. 10).

While different from entree and representation, the affirmation strand is an important component of an access discourse because it too works to construct the outsider subject position. For example, in the Introduction to this commission report, readers are informed that one of the major goals of the report is to “recommend practices, policies, and programs that will create an institutional agenda fully *inclusive* of and responsive to women” [italics added] (The Ohio State University President's Commission on Women, 1992, p. 9). The report points out that “women still confront an environment that *ignores* critical gender differences. . .and *fails to recognize* and *respect* women's professional abilities and achievements” [italics added] (The Ohio State University President's Commission on Women, 1992, p. 6). In another call for women to be valued and affirmed, a report produced in 1994 at another institution recommends that funding be established to “enable faculty and departments to restructure existing courses and curricula to reflect the scholarship of women and minorities” (University of Maryland

President's Commission on Women's Affairs, 1994, p. 3). Similarly, a 1993-94 report from yet another university contends that "the absence, misrepresentation or distortion of the perspectives, experiences or history of one's group creates an unsupportive and alienating learning environment" (Pennsylvania State University Commission for Women, 1994, p. 5). The writers of commission reports draw on the affirmation strand of the discourse of access to point out that the institutional agenda excludes, ignores, and fails to recognize and respect women. The curriculum does not adequately reflect contributions by women. Further, the affirmation discourse of the reports recommends that changes need to be made so that women are no longer excluded or relegated to marginal positions within the institutional culture. As these quotes demonstrate, the affirmation component of the discourse of access also contributes to constructing the *woman outsider* subject position by continually positioning women as outside the dominant institutional culture—and, importantly, as desiring to become a valued part of that culture.

Early indication of a discourse of affirmation in commission reports is evidenced in various calls for increased awareness of "women's needs and issues." For example, a 1972 report describes a Women's Information Fair that was organized by the commission "in an effort to sensitize the University community to many of the key issues affecting employed women" (University of Michigan, 1972, p. 17). While the affirmation discourse circulates in reports of the 1970s and 80s, it becomes more pronounced in the reports issued in the 1990s. Advocacy for women's concerns; valuing women's work and contributions; including women in the curriculum; providing adequate childcare and family-friendly policies; salary equity; spousal hiring; and changing the language of the

institution to be inclusive of women are examples of a discourse of affirmation circulating in the text of commission reports.

The affirmation strand of the discourse of access is also set apart from entree and representation in that the issues conveyed through this discourse are not readily quantifiable. This is evidenced in the following excerpts from a 1994 report:

The potential of or commitment to the Michigan Agenda should not and cannot be measured in terms of resource commitments alone. Indeed, perhaps the most important objective of this strategic initiative will be in the culture and life of the institution, since true gender equity will require a profound transformation of the university.

The University of Michigan has the opportunity to emerge as a leader in the role of women in higher education. But to earn this leadership and to achieve the vision. . .it will be necessary to change the University in very profound, pervasive and permanent ways (University of Michigan, 1994, p. 5).

In the 1980s and 90s, commission reports are more likely to provide qualitative data to support their claims. The shift to incorporating more qualitative assessments parallels a shift in thinking about the meaning of equity. The reports issued since 1985 tend to convey equity in terms of both structural *and* cultural aspects of the institution.

Evaluating equity with qualitative as well as quantitative measures represents a significant challenge to commissions since quantifiability tended to lend credibility and legitimacy to the problem of inequity. While a number of reports articulate equity concerns that move beyond numerical assessments, only a few reports actually incorporate the use of qualitative data as a means of articulating problems related to equity. The following excerpt from a 1992 report illustrates an effort to accomplish this:

But numbers--whether negative or positive can never tell the full story of women's experiences at our university, for they do not carry with them the weight of lived experience. The Commission therefore sought to

complement the quantitative information with the voices of women on our campuses, information which suggests, as do a number of the quantitative comparisons, that women have made too little qualitative progress during the last 15 years (The Ohio State University President's Commission on Women, 1992, p. 17).

The affirmation component of an access discourse circulating in women's commission reports provides for the articulation of equity issues with a focus toward the institutional culture and women's experience of that culture. Thus, the affirmation discourse signals a shift in the way in which equity is understood (as more than entree and representation alone) and assessed (qualitatively as well as quantitatively).

Thus far, I have described how discourses provided by women's commission policy reports position the woman subject in relation to the university. Discourses of access (including entree, representation and affirmation) construct the outsider subject position. As such, women are positioned as wanting to be allowed into the institution and its various domains (access); desiring to be more involved in institutional arenas and practices that have excluded or marginalized their participation (representation); and desiring to be included in and valued by the institution's culture (affirmation). While these three components of an access discourse construct the outsider subject position, this is not the only position made available to women through commission report discourses. Discourses of femininity and feminism circulate in commission reports to construct vulnerable and yet empowered subject positions. Next, I turn to examining the shaping of vulnerability through a discourse of femininity provided by commission reports.

The Vulnerable Woman

"Scared," "intimidated," "at-risk," and "in jeopardy" are all words that are used in commission reports to characterize women working and studying in universities.

These characterizations are accomplished through discourses of distress and dependency provided by university women's commission reports. These discourses are produced and supported by a dominant discourse of femininity circulating in a broader social context. This dominant discourse constructs femininity as an outcome of "natural" womanhood and reinforces male dominance and heterosexism by shaping femininity in ways that promote women's appeal to and dependence on men (Brooks, 1997; Coates, 1996; Mills, 1992). Together, the femininity discourses of distress and dependency shape the vulnerable woman subject position produced by commission reports. I have identified the subject position as "vulnerable woman" because these discourses provide that women are "surrounded by fear" and desire protection from the institution. Women are positioned as vulnerable because they are constructed as reliant upon the institution to provide for their "needs."

Dominant discourses like femininity are "powerful precisely because they are able to make invisible the fact that they are just one among many different discourses" (Coates, 1996, p. 240). The dominant discourse of femininity circulating in Western society reinforces white, middle class and heterosexual norms about how women "should" behave. As such, this discourse serves to support sexism, heterosexism and racism (Coates, 1996; Mills, 1992; Smith, 1990b). However, there are alternative discourses available through which to re/interpret normative femininity—or the ways in which women should behave. The findings of my study underscore that multiple and competing discourses exist within a single strategy (Foucault, 1978; Weedon, 1997). For example, women's commission reports are generally considered a women's empowerment strategy, operating through a feminist discourse, which positions them

against patriarchy (and thus in tension with a discourse of femininity). However, my investigation makes clear that this is an incomplete interpretation.

Commission reports draw on competing discourses of feminism *and femininity* to make their case that women's status needs to be improved. While discourses of feminism work through commission reports to interrupt the status quo, discourses of femininity tend to reinforce it. Even while the primary purpose of the reports is to document institutional problems and make recommendations to empower women and improve their status at the university, a discourse of femininity circulates in the reports in ways that contribute to shaping and sustaining the vulnerable and disempowered subject position. A closer examination of the discourse of femininity provided by commission reports reveals how these reports may unwittingly contribute to sustaining the status quo even while they seek to change it.

Discourses of Gender & Heterosexuality

Together, discourses of femininity and masculinity shape cultural constructions of women and men as gendered selves. As Jennifer Coates (1996) explains, "doing femininity can be paraphrased as 'doing being a woman'" (p. 232). In other words, femininity refers to abstract qualities associated with being feminine and masculinity refers to abstract qualities associated with being masculine. Dominant discourses of gender provide that masculinity and femininity are perceived as "natural" outcomes of being male and female respectively. Further, these gender discourses merge with a dominant discourse of heterosexuality that constructs the masculine (man) and feminine (woman) as two halves of a complete whole (Butler, 1990).

In the construction of gendered identities, femininity and masculinity operate as two poles of a gender dichotomy where the masculine (man) is positioned as active and the feminine (woman) as passive. Dominant gender and heterosexuality discourses construct masculinity and femininity as mutually exclusive components of a gender/sex split. In other words, whatever traits are understood to characterize the feminine also serve to connote the antithesis of what is taken to be masculine—or that which is culturally defined as masculine oppositionally defines feminine. This polarity of masculinity and femininity strongly supports a dominant discourse of heterosexuality that privileges the male+female union as the achievement of a complete and balanced whole.

Active/passive, strong/fragile, aggressive/submissive, independent/dependent, invincible/vulnerable are further examples of gender binaries that depict masculinity and femininity as polar opposites of a vast gender divide. Further, this gender configuration is typically cast in ways that privilege masculinity over femininity. An exception to this occurs when women act in ways that are perceived to be *too* masculine. As a result, women find themselves situated in a lose/lose situation where the performance of femininity is often de-valued (and disempowering to them), yet the alternative performance of masculinity often results in negative consequences as well. The dominant discourse of heterosexuality also supports the shaping of this dynamic. For example, a woman whose behavior is interpreted as “overly aggressive” (i.e. masculine), will likely be labeled in ways that are perceived negatively (i.e. “bitch,” “dyke”) in the context of heterosexist/homophobic culture. Thus, women are in a double-bind—disadvantaged when they act in gender appropriate ways *and* when they don’t (Frye, 1983).

Femininity Discourses

A number of scholars have described the shaping of subjectivity through discourses of gender and heterosexuality (Butler, 1990; Coates, 1996; Kimmel, 1987; Messner, 1997; Mills, 1997; Smith, 1990b). Some studies look specifically at the dominant discourse of femininity in Western society and the ways in which it contributes to women's subjective sense of self—the ways in which women experience and act upon their bodies (Bartky, 1988; Brumberg, 1997; Smith, 1990b). Researchers have examined how a dominant discourse of femininity shapes use of make-up, eating disorders, perceptions of menstruation, exercise, dress and adornment. These are examples of what Bartky (1988) describes as “part of the process by which the ideal body of femininity—and hence the feminine body subject—is constructed; in doing this, they produce. . . a body on which an inferior status has been inscribed” (p. 71). In sum, discourse theory supports the contention that a dominant discourse of femininity shapes women's desire to appeal to men in ways that limit their power and sustain male dominance.

Even while discourse theory maintains that subjectivity is discursively constituted, it does not imply that women are passive in the process. As Dorothy Smith (1990b) argues, we all participate as subjects and agents in the social relations of discourse mediated by texts. Smith and other feminist scholars who study discourse are clear that women and men actively participate in the construction of subject positions and subjectivity by choosing to subvert and/or reinforce various discourses. However, it must also be recognized that some discourses are more readily accessible than others. These dominant discourses make what is possible to say or think appear to be self-evident or

“natural” because of what they discursively obscure. Many may be unaware that there are alternative discourses to draw upon for making sense of the world (Mills, 1997).

Dominant and alternative discourses circulate in the text of university women’s commission reports. Some discourses align with and support dominant discourses of femininity and heterosexuality, while others challenge these. As described in my earlier discussion of the discourse of access, the subject positions constituted through commission reports provide that women are outsiders to the structure and culture of the institution. Yet, as I will elaborate later in this chapter, discourses of feminism empower her to demand that she be included in the structure of the institution and valued and affirmed by its culture. At the same time, however, discourses of femininity position her as vulnerable and in need of attention, protection and care from the institution.

In this chapter, I have chosen to describe two discursive strands of the dominant discourse of femininity circulating in Western society. These components of the femininity discourse emerge from commission reports as most prominent in the shaping of a *vulnerable woman* subject position. First, a discourse of **distress** shapes this position by constructing women as fearful, at-risk, scared and intimidated. I have selected the term *distress* to describe this particular discourse of commission reports because it indicates that women are full of fear about their lives due to physical and emotional vulnerability. This discourse is made most apparent in reports issued since the mid-1980s by the ways in which the “problem” of safety for women is described. For example:

The Commission has been somewhat surprised and certainly disheartened at the degree to which *fear in one form or another is a daily fact of life* for many women on our campuses [italics added] (The Ohio State University President’s Commission on Women, 1992, p. 19).

As this quote indicates, a discourse of distress implies that women are chronically fearful, what some might consider “neurotic.” Such a characterization supports the dominant discourse of femininity that shapes the feminine woman as meek and physically as well as emotionally vulnerable. I also found that this discourse is made most apparent in those reports that utilize qualitative data to support their claims. The 1992 report of The Ohio State University President’s Commission on Women utilizes more qualitative data than the other reports examined in this study. Thus, many examples of the distress discourse are drawn from this report.

Second, a discourse of **dependency** shapes the vulnerable woman subject position by providing that women need to be protected and provided for by the institution. This discourse most often emerges through commission recommendations related to safety concerns, child-care, mentoring, advocacy, and policy enforcement. The following commission recommendation made in response to women’s “psychological fear” evidences this dependency discourse:

the massive effort needed to break down such isolation and to exert the leadership necessary to integrate the currently fragmented attention to women’s issues must *come from the top*, and must be identified on an *institutional level* [italics added] (The Ohio State University President’s Commission on Women, 1992, p. 25).

Similarly, a 1988 report makes the following recommendation:

Release a statement from the President regarding the seriousness of the problem of rape and sexual assault and its basis in a set of attitudes toward women that are unacceptable in the University environment (Pennsylvania State University Strategic Study Group on the Status of Women, 1988, p. B-18).

As shown here, the dependency discourse provides that women must rely upon the institution—and most often the predominantly male executive leadership of the

institution—to create change on their behalf. This example and others described later in this chapter portray how this particular discourse positions women as reliant upon the university (and men in positions of power within the university) to provide for, advocate for, and protect them. This reliance supports a dominant discourse of femininity that shapes the feminine woman as passive and thus dependent on a masculine man (or institution) for support and protection. The vulnerable woman subject, then, is accomplished through discourses of distress and dependency—two strands of a dominant discourse of femininity offered by university women’s commission reports.

The Problem of Safety for Women—A Discourse of Distress

I try to find someone to go with me, but this isn’t always possible, and many nights I am very scared. Do you know what it is like to run across campus just hoping to make it home safe? (The Ohio State University Commission on Women, 1992, p. 19).

Commission reports produced since the mid-1980s devote much attention to women’s experience as victims and potential victims of violence on campus. Typically presented as “safety concerns” for women, the reports tend to emphasize the victimization component of the problem more than the violence causal to the victimization. For instance, a 1988 report recommends that the university “Conduct a high quality victimization survey designed to provide reliable information on the extent and nature of the sexual assault problem” and “charge appropriate offices at all locations with developing procedures for responding adequately to the medical and psychological needs of victims of assault” (Pennsylvania State University Strategic Study Group on the Status of Women, 1988, pp. B-19-20). However, the distress discourse is most evident in

reports that use qualitative data to evaluate the status of women on their campus. The following quote highlights some aspects of this discourse:

*Fear in many forms invades the lives of women. . . . Fear for one's physical safety is heightened for women who work or attend classes at night. . . . Entering dark and empty buildings at night, walking down several flights of stairs to reach the only women's restroom, returning to seldom patrolled and poorly lit garages—all provide the *essence of fear for women* who face the reality of rape and assault on this campus [italics added] (The Ohio State University President's Commission on Women, 1992, p. 20).*

Here, a discourse of distress shapes the vulnerable woman subject as it makes clear her deeply rooted anxiety. In fact, she is literally *invaded* by fear and thus victimized by her own fear. This fear has such a grip on her that it has become a “daily fact of life.”

While few of the reports detail women's fear as explicitly as the previous excerpt, the “problem” of safety for women is a theme reiterated in nearly all the reports across the four institutions and over the three-decade time span examined in this study. The reports of the late 1980s and the 90s reflect a much greater emphasis on this issue than do the reports of the 1970s and early 80s. The increased attention to the issue of “safety concerns” for women seems to follow the shift from the exclusive use of quantitative data to the greater incorporation of qualitative data in the reports. It also parallels the shift in thinking about the meaning of equity from access and representation to affirmation that I traced earlier in this chapter. Further it is likely linked to the increased availability of discourses on rape and rape prevention that have become more accessible to the public since the 1980s (Buchwald, Fletcher & Roth, 1993; Koss, 1988; Warshaw, 1994). These discursive shifts afford commissions an opportunity to more closely examine campus climate and quality of life as equity issues and it opens up space for increased attention to concerns related to safety.

However, in order to “make the case” that safety and security are legitimate concerns, women are typically portrayed by commission reports in ways that emphasize their vulnerability. The discourse of distress contributes to constructing this vulnerable subject position by situating women as helpless, powerless, scared, and intimidated about what might happen *to them*. The discourse constructs the vulnerable woman as the fearful object or potential object of male anger, aggression and violence. The vulnerable woman is indeed paralyzed by her fear of becoming an object. The fear is so pervasive that it precludes her from taking any action. For instance, one report describes many women’s experience of “*fear of retaliation for speaking out*, particularly on gender issues.” Bringing this assertion to life, a woman respondent is quoted in this commission report as saying, “I would not like to speak publicly, as I do not need further harassment and must have a job to support my child” (The Ohio State University President’s Commission on Women, 1992, p. 20). Another woman states that “shooting the messenger who identifies any problem regarding equity is common practice at this University” (The Ohio State University Commission for Women, 1992, p. 20). Here, a discourse of distress constructs a vulnerable woman by focusing on her fear about what is likely to happen *to her* should she take action. As a result, a subject is produced who is not only vulnerable due to her fear, but also due to the paralysis caused by that fear. Thus, the discourse of distress contributes to producing the vulnerable woman subject position by providing a focus on women’s fear of victimization *and* their fear of taking action to prevent this victimization.

Commission reports from each university examined in this study reiterate that safety is an important priority when assessing the status of women on their campus. For

instance, in reviewing the past twenty years of women's commission initiatives, a 1994 report from one institution ranks "safety concerns of women on campus" as having always been placed "at the top of the list" of priorities for improving women's status (University of Maryland President's Commission on Women's Affairs, 1994, p. 7). This approach tends to focus attention toward women's concerns about safety (i.e. women's distress) as the problem to be solved rather than the actual violence. Thus, the discourse of distress supports dominant constructions of femininity in that it focuses attention toward women's (in)ability to remain safe as the problem. An example of this is provided in a 1994 commission report that complements action steps taken to rectify the problem of fearful women. The report identifies the following advances:

Improved lighting at University Park, a University Park Night Map, and an expanded after-dark Campus Loop. . . . A Victim/Witness Advocate position is in place at Police Services, and the Escort Service has been improved and expanded (Pennsylvania State University Commission for Women, 1994, p. 3).

As this excerpt indicates, strategies proposed and implemented most often focus on women's fear as the problem to be solved. Solutions then tend to focus on how to alleviate that fear—how to provide reassurance that women can keep themselves out of harm's way.

In contrast, some feminist discourses might provide for the development of recommendations that look toward cultural power imbalances underlying fear of victimization as the problem to be solved. Solutions informed by these discourses are more likely to focus on how women can enhance their personal and cultural power base and mitigate their dependence on men. In my examination, I found very few examples of such an approach. In one report, a recommendation (from a total of 13 offered by this

report) shifted the focus away from victims and toward the problem of gender-based attitudes that may contribute to a climate in which the sexual assault of women is more likely to occur:

Develop educational programs that focus particularly on the all-male settings and organizations that often perpetuate the sort of predatory attitude toward women that contributes to date rape (Pennsylvania State University Strategic Study Group on the Status of Women, 1988, p. B-19).

The majority of the remaining 12 recommendations from this report mirrored those described earlier—improved lighting, maps, escorts, night transportation—policy solutions that typically propose changes to the structural environment rather than addressing cultural power imbalances that contribute to women’s vulnerability. Rooted in a discourse of distress, commission recommendations typically focus on women’s fear as the problem.

I want to make clear here that my analysis is not intended to minimize, or in any way invalidate, the fear that women experience when living in a culture where violence against women is pervasive (Buchwald, Fletcher & Roth, 1993; Greenfeld, 1997). Having worked as a sexual assault victim-advocate and speaker on the topic of sexual violence, I readily acknowledge that the reality of sexual violence creates a climate of fear that can affect our daily lives in ways that are often taken-for-granted (i.e. girls learning not to walk alone at night). While I acknowledge this, my goal here is focus on the ways in which the discourses offered by commission reports may constrain possibilities for action. Clearly, the articulation of policy solutions to the problem of safety for women reveals much about the limiting way in which the problem is conceptualized. The majority of proposed solutions focus on ways to alleviate women’s

fear and obscure dominant constructions of gender that link aggression with masculinity and passivity with femininity. They further obfuscate the structural and cultural power imbalances of race, social class, sexuality and other social identities that are likely to increase an individual's vulnerability. While the reports tend to highlight the gendered nature of victimization (i.e. safety is a special concern for women on campus), they generally fail to acknowledge that violence is also gendered and shaped by other aspects of identity as well.

While research has linked the social construction of masculinity with the problem of sexual violence in our culture (Kimmel, 1987; 1993; Kivel, 1992), commission reports typically fail to acknowledge this. Rather, the problem of violent behavior in men is framed as a problem of safety for women. On the few occasions that reports do identify "violence" rather than "safety" as the problem, they generally do not specifically identify male aggression as an issue. Thus, the vast majority of proposed solutions to "safety concerns" outlined in commission reports reflect and reinforce a discourse of distress that supports a dominant discourse of femininity and constructs women as needing to be *fearful of* and *protected from* strangers lurking in dark corners of the university. This is evidenced in the following excerpts from several reports issued at different universities in the 1990s:

- "Review the scheduling of evening classes *to locate classes near well lighted, central campus locations*" [italics added] (Pennsylvania State University Commission for Women, 1994, p. 5).
- "An early commission study and report led to *better campus lighting, installation of emergency phones, an escort service, and operation of a night shuttle bus*" [italics

added] (University of Maryland President's Commission on Women's Affairs, 1994, p. 7, emphasis mine).

- “An ad hoc group of the Commission has made arrangements for printing a *laminated wallet-sized card with emergency phone numbers* for distribution on campus” [italics added] (University of Maryland President's Commission on Women's Affairs, 1994, p. 7).
- “Assess all campuses for physical safety, including but not limited to *lighting, phones, doors locked on time, adequacy of escort services and security patrols*” [italics added] (The Ohio State University President's Commission on Women, 1992, p. 29).
- “Develop a reasonable number of scheduled runs for the Campus Loop after dark” (Pennsylvania State University Strategic Study Group on the Status of Women, 1988, p. B-19).

Recommendations like these are also problematic for women in that they reinforce many common misconceptions related to sexual violence. While these kinds of proposals may in fact bring a feeling of increased security to some women (and men), they may also be promoting a false sense of security that could ultimately disempower women. Thus, by reinforcing these misconceptions, commission reports may unwittingly contribute to enhancing women's vulnerability. For example, the emphasis on campus lighting, installation of emergency phones and the implementation of escort services reinforces the idea that most women are assaulted by strangers who are waiting behind bushes to prey upon a lone woman moving through dark, isolated parts of campus. While this scenario may indeed occur, research shows that the vast majority (84%) of sexual

assaults on campus are not committed by strangers but rather by someone the victim/survivor knows (Warshaw, 1994). Additionally, sexual assaults on campus are not nearly as likely to occur in dark walkways of the campus as they are to occur in one's personal space. For example, research shows that sexual assault is most likely to occur in a location where the victim ordinarily feels safe—about 60% occur in the home of the victim, friend, relative or neighbor (Greenfeld, 1997).

The improvement of campus lighting, provision of escort services between buildings at night, and the installation of emergency phones on campus may be well-intentioned initiatives. However, they are initiatives that are unlikely to assist the majority of victims who experience violence in their intimate relationships and/or with their co-workers, teachers, supervisors and acquaintances during both day and evening hours in their homes, dorm rooms, offices, classrooms and other places where they are likely to feel most secure. Thus, women's commission policy recommendations shaped through a discourse of distress may reinforce popular misconceptions about sexual assault. Ironically, women may be even more vulnerable as a result of these policy recommendations precisely because they gain a sense of security from them. However, this sense of security is not accompanied by adequate knowledge and preparation for protecting themselves in situations where they are most likely to be victimized.

Over the last few decades many feminists involved in anti-violence movements have shifted from the use of the term "victim" to that of "survivor" in describing those who are assaulted. This move has been posited as a more apt and empowering way of describing those sexually harassed and/or assaulted. The change in terminology was initiated because it portrays women with a focus toward their active survival of an assault

rather than a focus on them as objects of others' violent actions. This discursive shift is an interruption to a femininity discourse that constructs women as passive, submissive, fragile, and in need of protection. No such interruption is provided by commission reports in their descriptions of women's safety concerns. Rather, commission reports generally rely on a discourse of distress which foregrounds women as victims and potential victims. This focus on victimization places women in a passive role that supports a dominant discourse of femininity and contributes to shaping the vulnerable woman subject position.

Not only is the woman subject physically weak, she is also psychologically and emotionally vulnerable. A 1992 report addresses the theme of psychological vulnerability very directly, saying that "*the lack of psychological safety* is expressed most frequently by women who are isolated in all (or predominately) male work environments" [italics added] (The Ohio State University President's Commission on Women, 1992, p. 20). The depiction of psychological and emotional vulnerability is further evidenced when commissions draw on qualitative data to describe quality of life for women on campus. Through these descriptions, a discourse of distress constructs her as weary, discouraged, struggling, void of confidence, and lacking hope for the possibility of improving women's status on campus. Often, the predominant image that emerges through these data is that of a vulnerable woman. For example:

There is *considerable discouragement* about the lack of significant progress for women and *deep skepticism* about the University's commitment to ensuring equitable numbers and treatment of women. Many women across the campus expressed doubt that this current Commission would "make any difference at all." Such *lack of confidence* stems from the fact that women perceive little demonstrable progress since the 1977 Report of the Commission on Women and Minorities [italics

added] (The Ohio State University President's Commission on Women, 1992, p. 22).

While this particular commission report states that “no single theme is necessarily true for all,” the authors add, “we have evidence to suggest, however, that the following statements accurately describe the climate that women experience” (The Ohio State University President's Commission on Women, 1992, p. 18). The report proceeds to quote women who say, “I am not listened to; I am not respected for my knowledge and ability.” “My contributions in class are ignored, cut off, or trivialized” (The Ohio State University President's Commission on Women, 1992, p. 18). Other reports also reflect this discourse of distress that shapes psychological and emotional vulnerability in both overt and subtle ways. In answering the question “What would it be like at the University of Michigan if women achieved their goals and objectives?” a 1978 report provides the following response: “women would be looked at as individuals, human beings first” (University of Michigan, 1978, p. 1). This theme is echoed in other reports as well. For example,

As an African-American student, I have gotten used to being asked by my professors (all white) to provide the “Black perspective.” Now I'm being asked to provide the “Black woman's perspective.” *It's like I don't exist as a person* [italics added] (The Ohio State University President's Commission on Women, 1992, p. 22,).

Such statements indicate vulnerability by conveying that women feel they are considered sub-human. A statement from a 1985 report alludes to women's vulnerability as it describes the difficulty of attracting women to that institution because of its ‘reputation on women’ (Pennsylvania State University Commission for Women, 1985, p. 2). These statements signal that women are “at-risk” and hence vulnerable.

Living with the reality of this vulnerability is a “burden,” a “struggle,” and makes women “weary” according to the reports. For instance, one report describes women of color “as they *struggle* for success in the face of both gender and racial prejudice in society” [italics added] (University of Michigan, 1994, p. 2). Another describes the challenges facing “weary mothers” who were deprived of merit pay because they needed to take earned sick time off to care for children who were ill (The Ohio State University President’s Commission on Women, 1992, p. 20).

These excerpts provide a glimpse of how a discourse of distress circulates in commission reports to construct the physical, psychological, and emotional vulnerability of women. One way that commission reports build their case for institutional change to improve women’s status is through this discourse that portrays the difficulties women must endure in an environment where they are neither physically nor psychologically safe. This discourse also provides a platform from which women can sound a call for change. While this appeal for institutional change is most likely offered as a demand to move beyond the status quo for women, when it is embedded in a discourse of distress, it is more likely to be interpreted as a “cry for help.” Thus, drawing on a discourse of distress contributes to shaping the vulnerable woman subject—a subject position that supports a dominant discourse of femininity in Western society and ultimately disempowers women. Ironically then, commission reports may be undermining their own goals of improving women’s status by supporting a dominant discourse that constructs femininity (and women) as vulnerable and dependent on men.

A Cry for Help—A Discourse of Dependency

A feminine woman, according to the dominant story of femininity, is half of a heterosexual whole. The framing of sex and gender as dichotomous splits between male/female and masculine/feminine is problematic in that it carries with it the connotation that one part of the binary is incomplete without the other, thus reinscribing the inherently heterosexual notion that male + female comprises a complete whole (Butler, 1990; Gordon, 1991). This view of gender as a normalizing and regulating force prompts questions about the ways in which university women's commission reports may limit and constrain thinking about women as the dominant discourses of femininity and sexuality construct women as reliant upon men.

In a contemporary Western context, the dominant version of femininity is that of woman as a nurturing and emotional caregiver reliant upon a masculine provider for physical protection, financial support and guidance. The masculine provider is the leader—the captain of the proverbial ship. Femininity discourses of women's commission reports offer a parallel image. In the reports, a discourse of dependency positions women as reliant upon the university to **protect her, provide** for her, and **enforce** policies that attend to her needs. Alongside the discourse of distress, dependency is the most prominent discourse of femininity circulating in the text of commission reports. Together, these discourses shape the vulnerable woman subject position.

As described in my examination of the distress discourse, commission reports call on the university to address the problem of “safety” for women in ways that construct the university as **protector**. For example, a report from the University of Maryland contends

that “spokeswomen for the diverse campus women’s groups. . .discussed the pervasive fear surrounding women on campus” (University of Maryland Chancellor's Commission on Women's Affairs, 1974, p. 22). Literally surrounded by fear, women are positioned as urgently in need of protection from the institution. A discourse of dependency provides that the University should take “safety concerns” seriously and take immediate action to alleviate these concerns. For instance, a 1992 report implores the university to “create an environment that is physically safe for women” and provides the following action steps to accomplish this goal: “assess the adequacy of campus lighting and availability of campus phones; be sure all doors are locked on time, and that escort services and security patrols are adequate” (The Ohio State University President’s Commission on Women, 1992, p. 29). The same report states that the university must “*protect* affirmative action staff from retaliation” [italics added] (The Ohio State University President’s Commission on Women, 1992, p. 28). Similarly, a report from another institution requests protection for those who pursue particular research agendas:

Faculty choosing to pursue research interests related to gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation need assurance that their academic or professional well-being will not be jeopardized (Pennsylvania State University Commission for Women, 1994, p. 6).

Further, a report from the University of Michigan contends that “students, in particular, urged that *greater action be taken to ensure their safety*” [italics added] (University of Michigan, 1995, p. 4). Drawing attention to “a preventive safety measure particularly important to the welfare of children and pregnant women,” this University of Maryland commission recommendation focuses on the particular vulnerability of pregnant women

by stressing the importance of developing an institutional policy on access to hazardous areas (University of Maryland President's Commission on Women's Affairs, 1994, p. 7).

Thus, commission report recommendations related to safety generally position "the university" as change agent. This is one way in which the discourse of dependency in commission reports shapes the vulnerable woman subject position. As evidenced by many of the recommendations related to safety, the discourse of dependency contributes to constructing the university as protector. Even when the focus is not directed at the issue of safety, the university may be explicitly or implicitly identified as protector. For instance, a 1993-94 report recommends that the university "*protect existing child care programs* in times of tightening resources" [italics added] (Pennsylvania State University Commission for Women, 1994, p.8). Examples like these demonstrate how a discourse of dependency can situate women as dependent upon the university as provider. This effect may serve to undermine commission goals as the discourse they draw upon to make their recommendations often locates agency within the institution and not with women themselves.

The dependency discourse also constructs the university as **provider** for women. Women are positioned as dependent on a male-dominated administration to provide "a bold strategic plan" (University of Michigan, 1994, p. 3) and "strong leadership" (Pennsylvania State University Commission for Women, 1994, p. 2) to advance the status of women on campus. The following excerpt from a 1992 report conveys this theme:

Many women believe that the massive effort needed to break down such isolation and exert *the leadership* necessary to integrate the currently fragmented attention to women's issues *must come from the top*, and must be initiated on an institutional level [italics added] (The Ohio State University President's Commission on Women, 1992, p. 25).

Since commission reports are typically written for the CEO of the university, most of the recommendations are directed toward the President of the institution and his/her staff (all the universities examined for this study had male Presidents or Chancellors who formally charged the Women's Commission on their respective campuses). When report recommendations don't specifically identify other persons, offices or departments as responsible for responding to their recommendations, it can be safely assumed that they are directing their comments to the executive branch of the university administration. However, even while the recommendations may be written in a way that indicates or assumes a specific audience, I do not mean to imply that women's commission members don't expect others to read their reports and learn from them. Indeed, based on the available research and my communications with members of university women's commissions, I would contend that most commissions prefer their reports be widely circulated and that their findings become a matter of public concern (C. Sepulveda, personal communication, July 10, 1998; Glazer, 1997; J. Stapleton, personal communication, April, 1997; Rossi & Calderwood, 1973). Yet, while commissions may prefer that their reports reach and affect a wide range of university constituents, they typically direct their concerns to formally recognized institutional leaders. As a result, commission reports reflect and contribute to sustaining a leadership hierarchy that locates power and control in upper level administrators.

Repeatedly, the discourse of dependency is evidenced in commission reports as policy recommendations are focused toward the upper level administrators as those who

possess the requisite power and control to improve women's status. Here are a few examples of this:

- “The commission have (sic) already recommended the creation at the vice-presidential level of coordinating committees on the problems of women and minority students” (The Ohio State University Commission on Women and Minorities, 1977, p. 68).
- “The Commission has always recommended the appointment of a high-level person whose responsibilities involve advocacy on women's issues” (University of Maryland President's Commission on Women's Affairs, 1994, p. 5).
- “Create an institutional commitment to national leadership in providing significantly expanded roles for. . . women in higher education” (University of Michigan, 1994, p. 3).
- “A clear, precise, well defined policy statement. . . authored and disseminated from the Office of the President, to be administered by the University's middle management is needed” (The Ohio State University Commission on Women and Minorities, 1977, pp. 48-49).
- “The support and commitment of the executive leadership of the University and of the academic and administrative officers have also been essential” (Pennsylvania State University Commission for Women, 1994, p. 1).
 - While the recommendations made in this Report identify those particular administrators who should take the first initiative and leadership in organizing University efforts to implement any particular recommendation, it is assumed that the President and all Vice Presidents must assist in implementing each of the recommendations that follow (The Ohio State University President's Commission on Women, 1992, p. 27).

Thus, a discourse of dependency is reflected in commission recommendations like these that portray women as dependent upon the institution, particularly, the executive administration of the university, to provide the necessary leadership and direction needed to support “women’s needs.”

Commission reports, throughout the three decades examined in this study, identify child-care as a particular area of concern for women. Typically, the reports describe concerns relative to the establishment of child-care facilities and policies that allow for flexible time off so that women (and men) can care for sick children and elders when needed. In both cases, however, the focus is primarily on convincing the institutional leadership that they should exercise their power in the interests of women. Generally, university administrators are called upon to allocate funding for the provision of child-care facilities and to change institutional policies to reflect a more family-centered approach with respect to employee benefits. Here again we see how the discourse of dependency constructs the vulnerable woman subject position by focusing on the university leadership as provider. Women are discursively positioned as reliant upon (primarily male) administrators to listen to “women’s concerns” and then make the necessary decisions to provide for their “needs.”

“Women’s needs” are typically identified as related to child/family care issues, safety and health care concerns. For instance, a 1972 report states that “the Commission has made great efforts to effect changes in Personnel policies and procedures aimed at relieving *unique employment problems faced by women*” [italics added] (University of Michigan, 1972, p. 17). Twenty years later, a 1994 report from the same institution is

more specific and calls for the university to “assess. . . policies, practices, and procedures from *the viewpoint of family responsibilities (e.g, child care, elder care)* and implement appropriate actions” [italics added] (University of Michigan, 1994, p. 4). A 1992 report from another institution calls for the university to “affirm and value *women’s roles, especially women’s child-bearing and child care responsibilities*” [italics added] (The Ohio State University President’s Commission on Women, 1992, p. 30). Similarly, another report recommends that the institution “enrich the current benefits plan by adding *‘family-responsive benefits’* and enhancing existing benefits to better meet *the needs of. . . female employees*” [italics added] (Pennsylvania State University Strategic Study Group on the Status of Women, 1988, p. 7).

Another “need” of female employees and women students at the university is implied through commission reports’ attention to women’s health care. For example, providing “complete gynecological services” for women is one of 13 recommendations made by one report issued in 1971 (The Ohio State University, 1971, p. 6). A focus on women’s health concerns carries through reports issued at all four institutions and over the three decades examined in this study. For instance, a 1988 report states that the university needs to “strengthen the Women’s Health Department [for women students] and broaden its mission to include nongynecological health problems such as anorexia” (Pennsylvania State University Strategic Study Group on the Status of Women, 1988, p. 12). Also, a 1992 report calls on the university to “improve health care for women” as a means of “creating an environment that is psychologically safe for women” (The Ohio State University President’s Commission on Women, 1992, p. 28).

Whether it be safety, child-care or women's health care, the dependency discourse provides for a focus on the necessity of institutional leadership to improve the status of women. This is often highlighted in commission report appeals for the *advocacy* of "women's needs" and "issues." This need for advocacy is explicitly evidenced in directives like:

Advocate and implement practices and policies that acknowledge and value women's differences [from men], e.g., preferred organizational structures (such as those that are less hierarchical. . . , styles of communication, teaching styles. . . , women's ways of knowing (The Ohio State University President's Commission on Women, 1992, p. 30).

Enhance the current structure of advocacy for women by expanding the resources available to the Commission for Women, the Office of Human Resources, the Equal Opportunity Planning Committee, and the Center for Women Students (Pennsylvania State University Strategic Study Group on the Status of Women, 1988, p. B-33).

While the second excerpt expresses the need to locate advocacy for women with women's organizations primarily, it positions women as supplicants having to request the financial support needed to advocate for themselves. Again, the institution is situated as provider.

Another example of the discourse of dependency that positions women as supplicants and locates power and control in upper level administrators is made apparent through women's commission efforts to promote mentoring programs for women. While some mentoring initiatives focus on women mentoring other women in the context of faculty/student and senior/junior faculty relationships, other mentoring initiatives may reinforce women's dependence on men. For example, the text of one commission report detailed an on going mentoring initiative called the "Administrative Fellows Program." This particular program was designed to encourage and promote

women with leadership “potential” to acquire the necessary skills and experiences needed to become university administrators. Supported by the commission, the Administrative Fellows Program was an opportunity for select women (usually white) to be paired with upper-level administrators (who were predominantly, if not entirely, white men). These pairings were promoted as an opportunity for women to be mentored, trained and developed until they would be appropriately qualified to hold such a position on their own. While programs like this may be initiated with the best interests of women in mind, it may also serve to reinscribe dominant gender/sex and race-based power imbalances by reinforcing women’s dependent position.

Power imbalances supported by a dependency discourse can also be identified in commission-report recommendations that implore the executive leadership of the institution to **enforce**, monitor and provide accountability relative to university policies that provide for and protect “women’s needs.” Often, this call for accountability and enforcement occurs when commissions address the issue of sexual harassment. A focus on sexual harassment appears in nearly all the reports issued since the mid-1980s. Typically, the reports recommend that there be increased education and awareness around the issue and that the upper-level administration “create a more visible and more effective system of institutional accountability” for those experiencing sexual harassment (Pennsylvania State University Strategic Study Group on the Status of Women, 1988, p. 10). The reports evidence the discourses of distress and dependency as they plead with institutional leaders to take action against the harassers. Women’s frustration is made apparent in the following:

Over and over again, women across the University identified lack of accountability as a major organizational barrier to their progress. . . . Women find that pervasive sexism and sexual harassment are not taken seriously by peers or by those in the chain of command (The Ohio State University President's Commission on Women, 1992, p. 25).

Thus, commission reports repeatedly recommend not only the establishment and implementation of sexual harassment policies, but also the enforcement of such policies.

In so doing, commissions again locate the exercise of power and control with the predominantly male executive leadership of the institution.

Like those regarding sexual harassment, other commission report recommendations position university leaders as enforcers (and directors) of policy initiatives designed to ensure pay equity and equitable representation of women in arenas in which they have been traditionally underrepresented. For example, a 1977 report recommends that “closer *University pressure and surveillance* are needed on those recruiting women and minority persons to the faculty” [italics added] (The Ohio State University Commission on Women and Minorities, 1977, p. 37). Another recommends that a procedure be negotiated with the administration to locate and rectify cases of salary inequity (University of Michigan, 1972, p. 16). Here are few more examples of this:

- “Develop and implement ongoing *internal periodic assessment* of gender patterns in compensation and resource allocation to staff, faculty and students” [italics added] (University of Michigan, 1994, p. 4).
- “Establish *a centralized fund* to correct compensation inequities recognizing that these inequities cannot be solved solely at the departmental level” [italics added] (The Ohio State University President's Commission on Women, 1992, p. 31).

- “Assign an individual *from the Office of the President* to work closely with the Affirmative Action Office in the conduct of targeted searches and in active talent identification for both present and future openings” [italics added] (Pennsylvania State University Strategic Study Group on the Status of Women, 1988, p. B-6).
- “The *University administration* [should] *establish a permanent board to supervise* the relative allocation of money and distribution of facilities and services between men and women in the area of athletics [italics added] (University of Maryland Chancellor’s Commission on Women’s Affairs, 1974, p. 18).

Repeatedly, commission report recommendations both explicitly and implicitly suggest that upper level university administrators provide direction and enforcement relative to policies and practices that are designed to improve the status of women. While this approach may seem like a rather common-sense way of negotiating institutional change, I am interested in examining how these seemingly commonsensical strategies may actually undercut the very goals university women’s commissions are striving to achieve.

The discourse of dependency circulating in commission reports makes clear that women are not well represented in executive positions of power within the university. Further, this discourse provides that the power to implement and enforce institutional change resides in the administrative ranks. Since women are not well represented in these ranks, they are positioned as dependent upon those who occupy these positions to recognize their concerns and advocate for their best interests. Women thus find themselves in the very precarious and often demeaning position of requesting that their needs be taken seriously, that policies and practices be implemented to protect and

provide for their needs, and that those in positions of power enforce them and hold accountable those who violate them.

While commission reports are prepared in an effort to advance women's status, my study indicates that these reports may unintentionally undermine this intent. Alongside the discourse of distress, the dependency discourse is a primary way by which women's commission reports support a dominant discourse of femininity. These femininity discourses provide that women are continually positioned as "in jeopardy" and reliant upon the institution and its leadership to provide for them and take action on their behalf. As a result, commission reports may unwittingly contribute to sustaining institutional power imbalances that they seek to level out. If women's commissions desire to enhance the possibility of improving women's status and empowering women, they may do well to become more aware of how these discourses operate within the reports and to make efforts to mitigate their possible negative effects by drawing on alternative discourses. Next, I turn to examining a discourse of feminism as an alternative to the dominant discourses of femininity I have just described.

An Empowered Woman—A Discourse of Feminism

As discourses of femininity shape the vulnerable woman subject position through university women's commission reports, a discourse of feminism serves to simultaneously construct an empowered woman subject position through these reports. While discourses of distress and dependency situate women as weak and needing protection from upper-level administrators within the institution, a discourse of feminism contributes to shaping an empowered woman by locating power and agency within women themselves. While the discourse of distress positions women's fear as the ill to

be remedied, a discourse of feminism identifies sexism as the problem in need of a solution.

A discourse of feminism is apparent in commission reports when the source of women's problems are identified as sexism rather than women themselves. For instance:

The pervasive sexism is not being countered by systematic training for those in positions of authority, including faculty. Women believe that until such training programs become part and parcel of every faculty's, manager's, and administrator's regular duties, such persons will continue to fail in holding themselves and others accountable for policies and provisions that are fully inclusive of and responsive to women [italics added] (The Ohio State University Commission on Women, 1992, p. 24).

This excerpt represents a discourse of feminism because it explicitly identifies sexism as a problem needing to be resolved. In this case, training programs/education and awareness efforts are offered as possible ways to alleviate the problem.

Another commission strategy offered to reduce sexism involves a focus on language. Often, commission reports issued since the 1980s insist that "the official language of the University must be gender-neutral" (The Ohio State University Commission on Women, 1992, p. 27). In some cases, a discourse of feminism is more explicit in describing the problems associated with language, as in the following recommendation from the same report: "Revise all publications and documents to eliminate sexism, racism or other bias" (The Ohio State University Commission on Women, 1992, p. 31). In another report, a recommendation links sexism with sexual violence as a problem for women:

Support a coordinated rape education program through the Center for Women Students, beginning with the establishment of a rape awareness/prevention specialist position to develop and coordinate a broad range of programs on stranger rape, date rape, gang rape, *sexism*, pornography, and *other topics related to the increased understanding of*

the seriousness of our sexual assault problem [italics added]
(Pennsylvania State University Strategic Study Group on the Status of
Women, 1988, p. B19).

Similarly, another report invokes the problem of sexism in addressing the issue of sexual harassment:

Women's experience of sexism is further illustrated by research data estimating that 35-40% of all the women on college and university campuses (including our own) experience some form of sexual harassment (The Ohio State University President's Commission on Women, 1992, p. 19).

While these excerpts provide a view of how a feminist discourse operates to identify sexism as the underlying problem to be eliminated in order to improve women's status, explicit references to sexism like these are not prevalent in commission reports. While a discourse of feminism provides an opportunity to avoid blaming women for problems they face (i.e. women's safety=a problem of women's fear and anxiety; women's underrepresentation=lack of training and experience; women's feelings of invisibility=lack of assertiveness), it is not as pervasive as other discourses circulating in commission reports. Thus, more often, women are positioned in ways that disempower rather empower them.

The empowered woman shaped through a discourse of feminism is one who recognizes constraints of a sexist culture but refuses to accept them as inevitable. Merging with the discourse of affirmation described earlier in this chapter, a discourse of feminism contributes to shaping the empowered woman subject position. In so doing, women move from supplicants and petitioners to claiming their inclusion within the university structures and practices. The empowered woman is active in demanding her right to be included in the institution and to become a "full beneficiary" of the rewards

associated with the institutional culture. For example, a 1992 commission report sets a goal to “transform” attitudes and environment in order to “create a climate which permits and develops opportunities for the full participation of women staff, faculty, and students in decision making processes” (The Ohio State University President’s Commission on Women, 1992, p. 27). Similarly, another report delineates the commission’s goal “to create a University climate that fosters the success of women faculty, students, and staff by drawing upon the strengths of our diversity” (University of Michigan, 1995 p. 2).

While the representation and affirmation strands of the access discourse request that institutional leaders include women and recognize and value their contributions and accomplishments, a feminist discourse offers women the opportunity to focus energy on valuing themselves. In this case, women can influence the culture of the institution by recognizing and celebrating their own abilities to contribute to that culture, rather than expending energy trying to convince upper level administrators to do this. One way in which commission reports reflect this approach is through their description of commission-sponsored awards ceremonies, annual banquets, and publications designed to highlight women’s achievements. For example, since 1977, the women’s commission at the University of Maryland has sponsored the Outstanding Woman of the Year award ceremony and reception (University of Maryland President’s Commission on Women’s Affairs, 1994, p. 11). In the late 1980s the Penn State Commission for Women began producing the “Achieving Women Booklet,” which highlighted university-affiliated women and their accomplishments. This same commission also sponsored a Speaker Series “designed to bring successful, prominent, former Penn State women to the attention of the University community” (Pennsylvania State University Commission for

Women, 1992, p. 14). To commemorate its 10th anniversary, the Commission developed a poster that was distributed throughout campus, held a celebratory banquet and developed a videotaped history of commission efforts over the decade (Pennsylvania State University Commission for Women, 1992). Like Penn State, other commissions also celebrated their work and accomplishments. The University of Michigan Commission held a 25-year anniversary celebration in 1996 and the University of Maryland held a 20th anniversary celebration in 1994.

These examples provide an opportunity to consider contradictions produced through multiple and competing discourses in commission reports. Here, I have described how a feminist discourse serves as an opportunity for women to focus energy on valuing women's contributions. However, while these initiatives may place women at the center, they do so in a very official context and on decidedly institutional terms. As such, they may not yield the intended outcomes commissions are seeking. In the next chapter, I show how such efforts to highlight women's achievements in the academy are shaped by a discourse of professionalism that contributes to constructing a hierarchy of prestige that sustains the institutional status quo.

I have also identified a discourse of feminism circulating through commission reports by the ways in which the reports provide a woman-centered standpoint and highlight women's agency. In contrast to femininity discourses that describe women as fearful and in need of protection from the institution and its leaders, a feminist discourse asserts that women themselves can be change-agents on their own behalf. A feminist discourse, then, provides a discursive interruption to the vulnerable woman subject position shaped through commission reports by producing an empowered woman. Often,

this feminist discourse shapes an empowered woman subject position through the promotion of consciousness-raising, the development of initiatives designed to recognize and value women for their contributions and achievements, and the promotion of networking among women.

During the U.S. women's movement of the 1960s and 70s, women often gathered together to talk informally about personal experiences and connect those experiences with understandings of sexism. These "meetings" among women came to be called consciousness-raising groups and were primarily identified with white middle-class women. According to MacKinnon (in Kramarae & Treichler, 1992), "In consciousness-raising. . .the impact of male dominance is concretely uncovered and analyzed through the collective speaking of women's experience" (p. 105). I use the term consciousness-raising to describe various activities in which women communicate with each other in efforts to translate personal experiences into political action. Such activities are made evident through a discourse of feminism in women's commission reports, particularly in reports produced in the 1970s and early 80s. For instance, the University of Michigan Women's Commission produced a radio show called the "Women's Report" to "highlight issues of particular importance to women" (University of Michigan, 1972, p. 18). The radio show aired weekly for nearly ten years and featured diverse topics, including: "Economic and Legal Aspects of the Older Woman"; "Women's Health Network"; "Women and Sports"; "News from Feminist Newspapers in the U.S."; "Protect Your Body—Rape Prevention"; "Lesbian Advocate"; "Wife Abuse"; and "Social Action Organizing" (University of Michigan, 1979, AA55, 56).

This 1972 commission report also notes that the commission produced and distributed a Women's Information Network (WIN) Bulletin to share information among women working at the university. "Planned and edited by a group of 30 women from across the campus the WIN Bulletin [is] a unique information and communication mechanism for women across the campus, and is one of the Commission's more visible activities" (University of Michigan, 1974, p. 1). The bulletin announced news about various topics of interest to women, including child-care, equity legislation, women as leaders in unions, how to file grievances, developing leadership skills, and understanding sexism (University of Michigan, 1975). Similarly, a commission report at the University of Maryland noted that one of their activities was the production of a women's calendar to highlight women-centered activities and events being held on campus (University of Maryland President's Commission on Women's Affairs, 1994).

Other kinds of consciousness-raising activities taken on by women's commissions and described in their reports produced at the four institutions examined for this study include the organization of "women's resource fairs" (University of Michigan, 1971, p. 1), women's "networking" breakfasts/lunches for the purpose of building alliances among women (University of Maryland President's Commission on Women's Affairs, 1994, p. 10), and special meetings and conferences. For instance, the 1972 University of Michigan Commission report notes that "in an effort to explore common problems and programs, the Commission hosted a joint meeting of women from six universities throughout the state, which resulted in the formation of Michigan Women in Higher Education (University of Michigan, 1972, p. 18). All of these initiatives referred to in commission reports and described more fully in commission meeting minutes and other

secondary data sources reflect a feminist discourse in that they provide a woman-centered approach, highlight women's agency, and provide an institutional critique.

These examples of a feminist discourse operating alongside a discourse of femininity provide an opportunity to examine how multiple and competing discourses circulating in commission reports may influence the shaping of very different approaches to the improvement of women's status in universities. Femininity discourses of distress and dependency offer strategies for improving the status of women that reinforce existing power relations by locating the "problem" of safety within women themselves and positioning women as reliant upon the university to provide for their "needs." In contrast, a discourse of feminism provides opportunities for commissions to interrupt the institutional status quo without positioning women as "damsels in distress"—reliant upon university leaders to direct, implement and enforce institutional change on their behalf. A feminist discourse allows for an empowered woman subject position by situating power and agency within women themselves and by providing an institutional critique.

In this chapter, I have described how discourses of university women's commission reports construct subject positions for women in relation to the university. Discourses of access, including entree, representation and affirmation, situate women as outsiders to the institution and hold implications for how equity is understood and assessed. Femininity discourses of distress and dependency produce the vulnerable woman subject position; while a discourse of feminism interrupts these and situates women in a more empowering position of demanding their right to be included in the institution. While both femininity and feminist discourses position women as in need of something they lack, they differ in the way in which this gets accomplished. The

femininity discourses position women as supplicants while a feminist discourse refuses to take the institutional (typically male) authority for granted. A feminist discourse focuses on sexism as the problem to be remedied while at the same time acknowledging women's contributions and capacity to exercise power.

Notes

¹Patricia Hill Collins offers the term “outsiders-within” to describe Black women’s “unique standpoint on self and society” (1991a, p. 11). I borrow the term for its utility in conveying the often contradictory location in which women’s commission members find themselves. However, I want to make clear that Collins’ delineation of this concept is more specific than this. The outsider-within perspective delineated by Collins (1991a; 1991b) is particular to Black women and is generated by their subordinate status in the labor market along with their grounding in African-derived traditions of self and community. Collins (1991a) contends that this positioning gives Black women a “new angle of vision on the process of suppression” (p. 11-12) because, while they may be allowed within white spaces (e.g. as domestics in white middle-class families), they know they will never truly have a sense of belonging there—thus, they will remain outsiders in these realms. However, this positioning gives Black women a unique standpoint or view of culture in that they can see “from both the outside in and the inside out” (hooks in Collins, 1991b, p. 36).

Collins (1991a; 1991b) also uses the concept of “outsiders-within” to describe the situation for Black women intellectuals whose ideas have been excluded from mainstream academic discourse. She writes:

The assumptions on which full group membership are based—whiteness for feminist thought, maleness for Black social and political thought, and the combination for mainstream scholarship—all negate a Black female reality. Prevented from becoming full insiders in any of these areas of inquiry, Black women remain outsiders within, individuals whose marginality provides a distinctive angle of vision on the theories put forth by such intellectual communities (1991a, p. 12).

I borrow the outsider-within terminology from Collins as a means of describing the location of women's commission members as insiders by virtue of their location within the institutional structure (having gained access to higher education as students, administrators and academics), and their discursive positioning as outsiders within an institutional culture that can be described as male-centered. However, commission members are typically white middle-class women. So, while I contend that their outsider/within positioning offers commission women an angle of vision that likely differs from male "insiders," I do not contend that it is the same vantage-point that Collins (1991a) describes.

CHAPTER 5

DISCOURSING DIFFERENCE: PRESENCES AND ABSENSES IN COMMISSION REPORTS

In the previous chapter, my analysis attended to the shaping of women's subject positions in relation to the university and was premised upon the provisional acceptance of women as a category. In this chapter, I interrogate this configuration and look toward how the discourses of university women's commission reports contribute to shaping women's subject positions in relation to other women. Central to this analysis is an examination of how difference among women is re/produced and addressed through dominant discourses carried by commission reports.

Scholarship on the construction and meaning of difference and its connections to subjectivity and power have gained intellectual prominence and political urgency in a number of academic areas including literary criticism, cultural studies, women's studies, gay and lesbian studies, queer theory, critical legal studies, critical race theory and anthropology (Ellsworth & Miller, 1996; Weedon, 1999). My analysis of the discourses of university women's commission documents and my understanding of how they tell a particular story about women's status in relation to other women is informed by feminist scholarship across a number of these areas. In particular, I draw on the influences of poststructural perspectives in feminist theory. As I described in chapter two, such influences have contributed to understanding difference as multiplistic, local and shifting.

For example, West and Fenstermaker (1995) argue that difference should be configured as an “ongoing interactional accomplishment,” in contrast to the fixity of bounded category schemes (e.g. race, class, sex, ethnicity, sexuality) that typically characterize difference in the context of policy. Such category schemes may contribute to unintended exclusionary consequences as difference within the category women is subsumed and “women’s needs” come to reflect particular privileged perspectives.

To further frame my analysis, I draw upon the work of feminist scholars who have contributed to a literature on identity and difference. In general, this literature explores difference as it relates to various aspects of social and cultural identities. In this context, “difference” generally connotes the multiple ways in which lived experience shapes not only gender differences, but also difference among women themselves (Gordon, 1991; Farganis, 1994). The development of writing about difference among women was largely inspired by women of color who advocated a move away from false unities conveyed by essential configurations of women as a homogeneous category (Collins, 1991a; hooks, 1984; Lorde, 1984; Moraga & Anzaldua, 1983; Spelman, 1988). Rather than continue to see all women as a coherent group, the concept of “difference” provided an opportunity for feminist thinkers to acknowledge how people are differently situated in terms of race, sex, gender, sexuality and social class.

The acknowledgment of difference within the category “women” is not without its problems. A number of feminist analyses have exposed how identity classifications such as race, gender and sexuality are often understood as fixed categories which fail to account for the ambiguity of real life experience and the cultural shaping of identity (Gordon, 1991; Phelan, 1991; Williams, 1991; Young, 1994). In other words, despite the

recognition of difference, there remains a common tendency to understand differences as fixed characteristics, rather than as the “consequences of socially constructed meanings” and social relations of power (Farganis, 1994, p. 36). These categories then often position women in terms of fixed and limiting categories that fail to describe most women. In this chapter, I examine how the discourses of women’s commissions re/construct some of these categories even as they purportedly work to advance equity for all women.

Subject Positions

In chapter four I examined how the discourses of university women’s commission reports produced subject positions for women in relation to the university. From that vantage point, my analysis contends that dominant subject positions for women include the “vulnerable woman” and the “woman outsider” which are produced through discourses of femininity and access that inhere in commission reports. I also found that while a discourse of femininity shapes a vulnerable woman subject position, an alternative discourse of feminism allows an empowered woman subject position to emerge. Here, I examine how discourses of difference produce subject positions for women in relation to other women. From this perspective, I work to understand how difference among women is discursively constituted through commission reports and how this construction may contribute to policy consequences that could undermine some of the very goals women’s commissions seek to attain.

In this chapter, as in the previous, I do not suggest that the discourses of commission reports stand alone in constructing these subject positions. Rather, my analysis begins with the understanding that commission reports employ discursive

strategies that circulate and intersect within broader discursive fields (Weedon, 1997). Discourses do not stand alone, and they do not stand still. Rather, discourses are dynamic constructions; they circulate, intersect, and collide with other discourses. Yet, some discourses are more dominant than others and hence are more readily available for the shaping of subject positions and subjectivity. In this chapter, I highlight three dominant discourses of difference—discourses of *professionalism*, *heterosexuality* and *whiteness*—and analyze how their circulation in commission reports produces particular subject positions for women in relation to one another. I also highlight another strand of the dominant discourse of femininity that I introduced in chapter four. There I described how the discourses of distress and dependency circulate through commission reports to produce the vulnerable woman subject position. In this chapter, I describe and examine how a care-giving strand of the femininity discourse works as a type of counter-discourse to professionalism, and how together these contribute to producing the within/against positioning of university women's commissions.

Harkening back to my research questions outlined in the first chapter, I began this analysis with some specific questions in mind. After asking what the reports describe as problems and solutions for women in universities, I examined the predominant images of women that emerge from the text of commission reports. Using my conceptual framework as a guide for this analysis, I also looked at policy silences—for example, what unstated assumptions and perspectives are most evident in the making of these characterizations? Finally, I analyzed the data with a focus toward the discursive constitution of subject positions for women through the policy reports and how these

subject positions emerge in relation to other women. In the following sections of this chapter, I examine these questions.

First however, I elaborate the ways in which the articulation of policy problems and solutions of university women's commission reports is predicated upon a configuration of women as a collective. As a result, commission policy reports contribute to producing a homogeneous view of women as a group that may lead to unintended and exclusionary consequences for many women working and studying in these universities. I lead with this discussion as it provides an important conceptual base for understanding possible implications of dominant subject positions constituted by the reports. In the remainder of the chapter, I examine how the dominant discourses of difference circulating in commission reports contribute to shaping professional, white and heterosexual subject positions.

Women as a Collective

Inevitably, characterizations of women's 'nature' or 'essence'-- even if described as socially constructed. . . tend to reflect perspectives of those making the characterizations (Nicholson, 1994, p. 94).

I offer this quote as a starting point for thinking about possible implications of the ways in which university women's commission reports present women as a coherent group. Phrases like "women's needs," "women's issues," and "concerns of women" pervade the sample of commission reports examined in this study. Such terminology is used in reports issued throughout three decades and across the four institutions included in this study. In fact, the configuration of women as a category is quite central to the articulation of problems and solutions within the text of commission reports. For

example, the following segments of text reflect ways in which commission reports typically articulate problems related to sex-based discrimination:

- “efforts made to focus attention on the *needs of women*” [italics added] (The Ohio State University Commission on Women and Minorities, Vol. II 1977, p. 56)
- “major barriers impeding *women’s progress*” [italics added] (The Ohio State University President's Commission on Women, 1992, p. 9)
- “all suggest that *women’s concerns* have entered a new era at the University” [italics added] (Pennsylvania State University Commission for Women, 1985, p. 2).
- “supporting services that address the *needs of women* and their families. . . [italics added] (Pennsylvania State University Commission for Women, 1993, p. 2).

The configuration of women as a group is also embedded in proposed policy solutions throughout the three decades of reports under examination. For example, a 1994 report states that “the commission has always recommended appointment of a high-level person whose responsibilities involve advocacy on *women’s issues*” [italics added] (University of Maryland President's Commission on Women's Affairs, 1994, p. 5). Taken together these quotes serve as an example of the problematic ways in which women’s commission reports tend to homogenize women.

In the late 1980s and early 90s a shift toward the use of “gender” as a substitute for “women” becomes evident in the reports. For instance, what were once called “*women’s issues*” often become labeled “*gender issues*.” This is evidenced in problem statements like, “women still confront an environment that ignores critical *gender differences*,” [italics added] (The Ohio State University President's Commission on Women, 1992, p. 6) and similarly, in the recommendation to “achieve true *gender equity*”

[italics added] (University of Michigan, 1995, p. 10). While reports issued since 1990 generally invoke the term “gender” rather than “sex” to articulate concerns and recommendations, this shift remains rooted in an understanding that gender = sex = women as a collective. In other words, gender is most often used as a synonym for women and likewise, does not reflect difference within the category. Thus, whether the term “women’s issues” or “gender issues” is used, the reports still contribute to an uncomplicated view of women as a coherent category (Carver, 1996; Martin, 1994). Women of color who claimed that feminist analyses of gender were ethnocentric initially articulated these doubts about configuring women as a group, contending that the conceptualization of women as a unit reflected dominant views and experiences of white middle class women and resulted in homogenizing women within the category (Collins, 1991a; Higginbotham, 1992).

Gender as a concept was, and continues to be, advanced by feminists as the social and behavioral contrast to biological sex (Nicholson, 1994). Generally, gender refers to femininity and masculinity, or the social and behavioral traits that can be distinguished from the physical constitution of the human body as male or female. Where sex is understood as a relatively fixed state derived from one’s gross anatomy, chromosomes and hormones, gender is understood as a performance—a fluid set of behaviors that signal masculinity or femininity in a particular cultural context. Some feminist thinkers argued that the concept of gender allowed feminism to retain a subject around which to organize while simultaneously dislodging a determinist stance about essential differences between women and men.

The concept of gender allowed for personality traits, like nurturing, or behaviors, like map reading, to be interpreted in a cultural context rather than assumed to be inherently male or female. Many believed that this move opened up the possibility for change by rupturing the immutability of male/female differences believed by many to be rooted in biology (Carver, 1996; Weedon, 1999). While this conceptualization of gender has served as a vital tool for feminist theorizing and political activity, a number of feminist scholars have problematized its current utility (Butler, 1993; Nicholson, 1994; Riley, 1988).

Questions about the usefulness of gender as a category parallel similar conundrums posed by the configuration of women as a category. Feminist scholars have pointed to the way in which the concept of gender becomes conflated with biological sex. Thus, what was once thought to be distinct from gender as a social construct—the physical/biological—becomes subsumed under the rubric of gender (Nicholson, 1994; Harris, 1997). The validity of this critique is evidenced in university women's commission reports where the cultural category "gender" is often invoked as a replacement for the biological categories "sex" and "women." This is evidenced by the use of the term "gender" to describe problems like: "the communication of information to the University community about complaints and outcomes with regard to *gender discrimination*" [italics added] (Pennsylvania State University Commission for Women, 1994, p. 4) and "the *gender composition* of the faculty" [italics added] (University of Michigan, 1993, p. 3), where it is assumed that the statement refers to the number of male and female faculty rather than the number who identify as masculine or feminine.

Further, the usefulness of gender as a category is questionable when biological aspects of subjectivity become increasingly understood as social constructions. From this perspective, the once distinct concepts of gender and sex can easily collide. As a result, the utility of gender as a concept for disrupting determinist notions of male/female differences becomes substantially undermined (Phelan, 1991; Weedon, 1999; Young, 1994).

Women as a category, and gender as a substitute for women, are configurations that are rarely, if ever, called into question in the text of official commission reports or in the supporting documents (commission meeting agendas and minutes, supplementary reports, and news articles) examined in this study. This is potentially problematic in that policy recommendations built on a unified configuration of women may unintentionally contribute to the marginalization and exclusion of difference within the category. Such an approach likely contributes to the overly simplistic view that women and gender are coherent categories. If policy initiatives are undergirded by this view, the needs of many women are likely to be slighted. For example, research indicates that women of color in graduate programs are older than white women and men in their cohort and often articulate very different concerns about work and family obligations (Upton & Pruitt, 1986). If these data are omitted in the articulation of “women’s needs,” then commission reports may reinforce a homogenized image of women that will likely result in policy recommendations that fail to meet the very real needs of many women of color and non-traditional aged women students at the institution.

The configuration of women as a homogeneous group in commission reports undergirds the discursive constitution of the white, heterosexual, faculty/professional, and

care-giver subject positions. While alternative discourses are available and are occasionally provided by commission reports, discourses of professionalism, femininity, whiteness and heterosexuality predominate. Through these discourses, commission reports are often explicit in marking racial, ethnic and class differences among women. At other times however, it is what is absent from the text that contributes to constructing difference among women. Next, I turn to examining these discourses and the particular strands of each as well as the silences inherent in each discourse. I begin with an examination of the discourse of professionalism.

Outstanding Women: A Discourse of Professionalism

Among the dominant subject positions produced through discourses of university women's commission reports is that of the *professional woman*. Constituted through a discourse of professionalism, this subject position characterizes women's experiences primarily from faculty and administrative perspectives and seeks to re/make others in their professional image. While there are alternative discourses available, the dominance of the professionalism discourse contributes to placing concerns of faculty and administrative women at the fore of most reports. Thus, the discourse of professionalism (re)produces a hierarchy—one that often coincides with social class since women faculty and administrators typically have more formal education and higher incomes than classified and clerical staff women.

The discourse of professionalism in commission reports is characterized by a focus on individual improvement through “professional development,” “leadership,” and “career training.” In addition, this discourse works to construct a taken-for-granted belief that *all* women will benefit from the professional/career advancement of individual

women. In other words, the focus on promoting the professional development of individual women as a benefit to all women becomes a matter of “common sense.” The professionalism discourse serves as an example of how power operates discursively. Once a discourse becomes so naturalized that its tenets are rarely called into question, it can be understood as dominant (Mills, 1997, Weedon, 1997). So, despite the existence of other discourses that may question the apparent “goodness” of professional development for *all* women, they are not likely to be taken up because of the truth power that inheres in naturalized discourses.

Like other commission discourses I have described, the professionalism discourse does not stand alone in normalizing particular approaches to improving women’s status and constructing the professional woman subject position. Rather, this discourse, like others, is supported (and contested) by a web of other discourses circulating in commission reports and in Western society at large. For example, the discourse of professionalism is supported by the broader discourse of enlightenment humanism that privileges autonomy, reason and progress as the means of achieving human rights and freedom (Weedon, 1999). A discourse of professionalism also intersects and is closely aligned with discourses of excellence, quality and productivity circulating in broader society and within institutions of higher education (Bensimon, 1994; Gumport, 1993; Readings, 1996). So while I describe a dominant discourse of professionalism that emerges from the reports, I want to emphasize, as Readings (1996) does in his examination of a discourse of excellence in universities, that commission reports carry “divergent. . .discourses, even if one discourse dominates over the others at certain moments” (p. 14).

A critical examination of the discourse of professionalism in education (especially teacher education) has been the focus of recent scholarly attention related to education reform (Bloch, 1987; Densmore, 1987; Heyning, 1997; Labaree, 1992; Larson, 1990; Popkewitz, 1994, 1995; Seddon, 1997). According to Heyning (1997), most educational reform policy reports published in the 1980's advocated for increased professionalism in teaching. "The cultural appeal of professionalism is often grounded in notions of upward mobility and it is believed that teachers will receive higher professional status if they become more like doctors and lawyers" (p. 8). Typically, the concept of professionalism is linked to ideas about quality, dependability, excellence, efficiency, and autonomy (Bensimon, 1994; Heyning, 1997; Popkewitz, 1994). Professionalism is also described as "a *state of mind* that must be earned through integrity, commitment, trust and honest hard work" [italics added] (Heyning 1997, p. 8).

Specialized knowledge or training, juried entry and regulation of standards are traditional benchmarks of professionalism described in the literature (Argyris & Schon, 1978; Heyning, 1997; Seddon, 1997). Professions have been recognized as "gatekeeping mechanisms, making demarcations between self-regulating communities and other occupational groups that consolidated the power of the former at the expense of the latter" (Seddon, 1997, p. 232). Larson (1990) uses the concept of discourse to argue that professionalism as a discourse is inextricably linked to power/knowledge and serves to produce status and rewards through a system of expertise rooted in codified knowledges. Accordingly, a dominant discourse of professionalism produces a prestige hierarchy even within a "community of credentialled knowers" (like the academy). She writes,

The unequal ability to produce or appropriate authoritative statements distinguishes the leaders from the led, the official from the unofficial spokesmen [sic], the orthodox from the marginals or the dissenters, the prestigious from the more obscure institutional roles and even, after all that, the talented from the less talented (Seddon, 1997, p. 234).

Thus, as it is dispersed through the social body, the discourse of professionalism serves to differentiate and regulate. The discursive formulation of subject positions and subjectivity provides that professionalism can become a “state of mind.” Its dispersal guarantees that individuals learn, not only to judge others, but also to see themselves according to particular “standards” established through the discourse.

Through my analysis, I have identified discourses of *achievement*, *leadership* and *career/professional development* as the most prominent strands of a larger discourse of professionalism circulating in university women’s commission reports. I have grouped these strands together because they all contribute to producing the professional woman subject position. Each discursive strand provides a focus on improving women’s status through enhancing the professional capabilities and goals of individual women and/or recognizing individual women who have achieved such goals. These goals include the pursuit of a career and leadership position, both of which typically involve a system of credentialing operationalized through formal education and “development.” This discourse of professionalism also provides that more is better. In other words, increased education and training will result in increased “advancement” for individual women and “progress” for women as a group. Such an assessment is based on a social hierarchy that grants professional women higher status than women who have not formally achieved this ranking.

Taken together, the discursive strands of the professionalism discourse classify and taxonomize women in relation to other women. While not all women working in the university are typically considered to be professional status, the discourse works to *professionalize* all woman. For example, commission reports often advocate for increased “professional development” for classified staff and some commissions sponsor professional development conferences and workshops designed specifically for clerical staff. So, while many women may not see themselves as “professional,” in terms of the discursive ideal, the discourse provides that they should aspire and work toward it. Despite the way in which the discourse works to professionalize *all* women, the embodiment of the professional woman subject position serves to (re)produce difference among women. For instance, some women will find that their sense of self aligns with the discourse—they may see themselves as an accomplished scholar or administrator for example and will likely feel validated by the policy problems and solutions delineated in commission reports. Yet, most women working in universities are not faculty members or administrators. These women are likely to relate to the discourse in a markedly different way. Women whose experiences do not align with the professional woman subject position are likely to view themselves as deficient and according to the discourse however, it is only possible to alleviate this “deficiency” through increased education, training and professional development.

Thus, the discourse of professionalism produces difference among women as it works to professionalize all women. Further, the discourse positions women who aspire to have “careers,” become “leaders” and engage in professional development as not only improving their own lives, but also the lives of *all* women. One way in which the

discourse of professionalism works to differentiate women from one another is by constructing a discursive ideal that inheres in the professional woman subject position. All three strands—achievement, leadership and development, contribute to this construction. I begin by describing the discourse of achievement.

The Achieving Woman

The discourse of achievement is one strand of the professionalism discourse that contributes to producing the professional woman subject position. Concern with lack of achievement, opportunities for achievement, or women's achievements that go unrecognized is often a focal point in commission reports issued across the institutions and throughout the decades examined in this study. This concern can take a variety of forms and is often used to describe policy problems and recommended solutions. For instance, a 1992 report contends that

Women still confront an environment that ignores critical gender differences, places impediments in the way of women striving to reach their full potential, and fails to *recognize and respect women's professional abilities and achievements*" [italics added];

the same report recommends the development of "new models for *assessing achievements* and giving rewards" (The Ohio State University President's Commission on Women, 1992, p. 31). Similarly, a 1990 report from another institution includes the recognition of women's achievements as a significant accomplishment of the commission:

Since the mid-seventies, the University of at College Park has maintained a strong commitment to the President's Commission on Women's Affairs. The Commission has over the years brought about significant change for women on campus in many areas including the [sic] day care, elder care, faculty salary equity, women's athletics, *recognition of women's*

achievements, and inclusive language (University of Maryland President's Commission on Women's Affairs, 1990b, p. 3).

At another institution, a 1993 report uses achievement as an indicator of women's status as noted in the following excerpts: "The proportion of women of color *who achieved promotion* to the rank of associate professor is lower than that of either men of color or white women" and "women hired as instructors were less likely than their male counterparts *to achieve tenure*" (University of Michigan, 1993, p. 8). Achievement is also used as a way to describe the mission and purpose of the commission and commission goals for themselves and the university as evidenced in the following excerpts from reports issued at Penn State in 1982, 1988 and 1994:

- Serve as a visible University body whose primary purpose is to contribute to a vital climate for *women to achieve academic success* (Pennsylvania State University Commission for Women, 1982, p. 1).
- *Achieve a balanced representation of men and women in leadership positions throughout the University* by increasing the percentage of women to 50 percent in academic, administrative, and management positions by the year 2000 (Pennsylvania State University Strategic Study Group on the Status of Women, 1988, p. B31).
- Three components were identified that contribute to an enhanced university environment *where all participants can learn, achieve, and contribute to their full potential*. The three are the respectful community, the inclusive classroom, and academic support services and women's athletics (Pennsylvania State University Commission for Women, 1994, p. 2).

Occasionally, commissions are involved with initiating and sustaining efforts to recognize achievements and contributions of women working in the university. For example, the commission at the University of Maryland sponsors an "Outstanding Woman of the Year" awards program while a commission at Penn State initiated an "Achieving Women's Booklet" featuring the names and accomplishments (degrees,

awards, publications, leadership posts etc.) of women on campus. In both cases, the achievement discourse reinforces a particular view of what “counts” as valid/valued achievements for women working in these universities. In so doing, the discourse produces a particular ideal that takes the form of the professional woman. For example, the text of a 1990 report documented the work of the commission in providing the “Outstanding Women of the Year” awards. In so doing, the report listed the following criteria for evaluating nominations:

1. Service to women and women’s issues in higher education.
2. Service to the University community above and beyond normal duties.
3. National recognition for research/literary achievement
4. National recognition for leadership in professional societies or athletics
5. Outstanding campus administrative achievement
6. Excellence in teaching (University of Maryland President’s Commission on Women’s Affairs, 1990, p. 18)

As this list of criteria explicitly describes who might be eligible for consideration as “outstanding” woman, it clearly excludes the majority of women who work on that campus. Perhaps it would be more apt to re-name these particular awards “Outstanding Faculty/Professional Woman of Year.” Judging from the list of criteria, it is not surprising that all those selected as outstanding woman of the year were either faculty or professional employees and 17 of the 20 recipients carried the title “Dr.” before their name (University of Maryland President’s Commission on Women’s Affairs, 1994, p.16). So while the awards program was initiated as a means of honoring and enhancing the collective experiences of women on campus, it also systematically excludes the majority of women who work on that campus from being considered an “Outstanding Woman of the Year.”

I believe that these awards programs, recognition banquets and achieving women booklets are well-intentioned efforts on the part of commissions. Such initiatives however are informed by a discourse of achievement that privileges faculty/professional perspectives and thus carries exclusionary consequences. In the above example, the discourse employed serves to explicitly describe the ideal professional woman as a faculty woman through the delineation of the criteria for assessing award recipients. This effect was not lost on commission members who, in an apparent effort to be less exclusionary, later initiated a “recognition awards” ceremony for secretarial and clerical employees. However, the achievement strand of the professionalism discourse operates to make clear that while any woman may be recognized for her achievements, not *all* achievements are considered worthy of “outstanding” status. The value placed on faculty achievements over others is further evidenced textually by the *presence* of a list of recipients for the “Outstanding Woman of the Year” awards and the *absence* of a comparable list for the clerical employee recognition awards.

Relatedly, the issue of textual presence and absence further evidence the perspectives that are privileged in the shaping of the professional woman subject position. Burton and Carlen (1979) refer to this aspect of discourse as “narrative time” (p. 75). The analysis of narrative time enables the examination of how textual space is managed and controlled and whose interests are highlighted in the process. In the case of women’s commission reports, much narrative time is focused on faculty women. Despite the fact that women students and clerical workers typically comprise the largest percentages of women participating in university life, concerns that are specific to faculty women are highlighted far more frequently in the reports. For example, inequity in the

tenure and promotion process, a concern that applies to faculty women in particular, is described extensively in reports issued throughout the three decades and across the four institutions examined in this study as in the following:

- In nearly all colleges the percentage of women in *non-tenure track appointments* exceeds the representation of women in tenured or provisional appointments [italics added] (Pennsylvania State University Commission for Women, 1994, p. 10).
- In spite of the growth in the numbers of women among PhDs in the past 25 years and recent progress in increasing the proportion of women on our *faculty, women represent only 22% of the tenured and tenure track faculty* at the University of Michigan. In contrast, 53% of UM lecturers are women [italics added] (University of Michigan, 1996, p. 2.i).
- *Salaries of women faculty* continue to lag behind men in the same rank; this finding is true for the campus and for the state, where it is a consistent pattern across disciplines. The findings in this report suggest that more effort is required to *increase the numbers of women faculty* hired, and the numbers of women appointed to upper-level administrative positions, particularly as heads of academic departments and as Deans [italics added] (University of Maryland President's Commission on Women's Affairs, 1993, p. 32).
- Women perceive that they are expected to be caretakers or nurturers in their divisions or departments: they are expected to carry heavy service and advising burdens, and take care of families, and be exemplary as teachers, researchers, and publishing scholars. As a result, inequitable assignment or duties to women is the norm even though inequitable work loads *can lead to failure as these women may not achieve tenure or job security because of the inequity*. Given the complexity of this issue, many women wonder why the University has failed to conduct a systematic study of service, advising, and teaching loads by gender [italics added] (The Ohio State University President's Commission on Women, 1992, p. 24).

In contrast, there is scarcely documentation or attention given to the problem of inflexible work hours—a concern which is specific to many clerical staff and ironically, a reality that may often prevent them from becoming involved in commission efforts.¹

In addition to concerns related to the tenure and promotion process, many other issues particular to faculty are emphasized in commission reports including: committee appointments, faculty role models, teaching responsibilities, research funding, office space allocation, curriculum development issues, and employment assistance programs.

Such concerns are evidenced in the following excerpts:

- Part-time faculty have no security and no benefits. Seventy-five percent of us are women. . . .The general tendency for women is to teach primarily the more demanding courses at lower academic levels and receive less recognition and support than male faculty (The Ohio State University President's Commission on Women, 1992, p. 21).
- A number of faculty women reported that they are expected to perform a disproportionate amount of University service, including student advising informal counseling and committee work (University of Michigan, 1995, p. 9).
- Women faculty and students receive proportionately less intramural research support than do their male equivalents (The Ohio State University President's Commission on Women, 1992, p. 11).
- The Office of the President should initiate a series of workshops on gender bias for administrators and others involved in the tenure and promotion process. These workshops should address a variety of issues such as perceptual bias, issues of double discrimination, the treatment of women faculty in informal professional interactions, the denigration of research on women or research in areas dominated by women, and problems of hidden workload (Pennsylvania State University Strategic Study Group on the Status of Women, 1988, p. B9).

Discussions and listings of the membership composition of commissions provides further evidence of the centrality of faculty and administrative perspectives. For example, one report states that "the original proposal for the Commission for Women recommended that the Commission be composed of four to eight women faculty, four women administrators and four women students" (Pennsylvania State University Commission for Women, 1992, p. 6). In another report, the commission was comprised

of 19 members and all but six were faculty/professional (Pennsylvania State University Commission for Women, 1982, p. 1). Some commission reports reflect a stated shift in terms of membership practices. For instance, a 1990 report at another institution states, “under a special ad hoc committee. . .the membership of the Commission itself was studied as to its balance in representing various constituencies of women on campus” (University of Maryland President’s Commission on Women’s Affairs, 1990, p. 4). Nevertheless, my personal communications with commission members and my own experience indicate that in many cases the hierarchy of prestige and the resultant division between professional women and “other” women serving on the commission remains strong (C. Sepulveda, personal communication, July 10, 1998). An account of the unionization of Harvard clerical and technical workers is indicative of such dynamics among commission members. Hoerr (1997) reports that activist clerical and technical workers at Harvard thought that the Committee on the Status of Women would be able to push for reforms on their behalf. He writes:

A corrosive elitism had begun to erode the very concept of female solidarity even before the committee was set up. In small planning sessions of faculty members and students only, Mary Howell [a clerical/technical representative] was astonished to hear proposals that workers be excluded from the committee. . . .She argued that “it was not right that a committee like this, which we hoped would have some influence, was just going to be people with graduate degrees” (p. 42).

Expanding the membership of women’s commissions may be an important gesture toward providing policy recommendations that meet the needs of diverse women. However, altering membership of commissions alone is not likely to have the desired effect of providing more diverse perspectives when the dominant discourse of professionalism is taken up so regularly to identify problems and make recommendations

for improvement. Further, the idea that “balance” could be achieved by extending commission membership to constituencies of women that have been underrepresented on the commission fails to take into account the ways in which social relations are discursively constituted through discourses of professionalism that hierarchize as they differentiate women from one another. In the case of universities and university women’s commissions, a dominant discourse of achievement provides that faculty and administrative women are accorded most prestige, power and influence among women working and studying at the university. Thus, it is unlikely that a classified staff member’s voice on the commission would “balance” the power and influence carried by a commission member who is a faculty member.

This understanding has long shaped the formation of collective bargaining units in the context of higher education (Hoerr, 1997; Nelson, 1997). While unions exist within institutions of higher education—among faculty included, there is no mention of them in the reports examined for this study. The closest mention of the formation of a union is in a report from Penn State that describes the consideration of a proposed “staff assembly” but explicitly states that this group will not function as a collective bargaining unit (Penn State Commission for Women Annual Report, 1993, p. 16).

The discourse of achievement circulating in women’s commission reports privileges a version of achievement that emphasizes “excellence” in scholarship, teaching and service—the tripartite mission of a faculty member. The version of achievement discursively constituted in the reports also focuses on professional titles, affiliations and connections to upper-level administrative positions within the institution. Thus, the discourse of achievement, one strand of the discourse of professionalism, contributes to

shaping the professional woman subject position in a way that re/produces the prestige and influence of faculty and administrative perspectives. This coupled with the “swarming” (Foucault, 1979) of the discourse of professionalism and the uncritical construction of women as a collective works to construct difference among women within the university as it produces a standard by which all women are measured.

Promoting Excellence: A Discourse of Career/Professional Development

The discourse of career/professional development is a second strand of the professionalism discourse that I have identified from the reports examined in my study. A focus on “careers” and “professional development” is pervasive in the reports. Typically, the reports cite the lack of professional development, opportunities for development and career advancement as problems related to the status of women in the university. They also use career/professional development as a recommendation for enhancing women’s status as the following examples indicate:

- Develop a program of *career development and training* for those faculty and staff with potential for academic or administrative leadership roles [italics added] (University of Michigan, 1994, p. 4).
- Provide funds for release time for clericals from branch campuses to travel to other locations so that they may participate in courses and workshops not available at their own locations. . . .Develop an office at University park whose main function would be to send out a core of people *to train, teach, and update clerical and support staff* (Pennsylvania State University Strategic Study Group on the Status of Women, 1988, p. B9).
- Include *employee development* in the formal evaluation for promotions of managers and administrators [italics added] (The Ohio State University President’s Commission on Women, 1992, p. 32).

- Since 1982 the Commission has sponsored a day-long conference and luncheon for clerical and secretarial employees (*the Professional Concepts Exchange*) [italics added] (President's Commission on Women's Affairs, 1994, p. 6).
- Appoint a standing task force to work with the Office of Human Resources in reevaluating current university policy regarding *professional development for clerical employees* (Pennsylvania State University Strategic Study Group on the Status of Women, 1988, p. B9).

This discourse, like the discourse of achievement, shapes the professional woman subject position from particular perspectives. An exploration of the discourse of career/professional development provides a means of examining how the discourse of professionalism operates in overt but subtle ways to produce the professional woman subject position.

One example of how the discursive constitution of the professional woman subject position reflects particular interests is the frequent use the term "career(s)" to describe problems for women working in the university. For instance, one report states that "fair and equal opportunity for women to pursue their *educations and careers* is not the norm" [italics added] (The Ohio State University President's Commission on Women, 1992, p. 11) and "the *opportunity to advance in one's career* appears blocked for many women" [italics added] (The Ohio State University President's Commission on Women, 1992, p. 21). Many women who work at the university as classified staff are unlikely to see themselves as pursuing a particular educational or career path. This distinction is made clear in a 1971 report that states "the existing Civil Service program offers *jobs, not careers*. It is felt that the system should be more concerned with personal advancement"

[italics added] (The Ohio State University, 1971, p. 5). Commission report emphasis on advancing careers for all women is reflected in the following quotes:

- Establish a *career counseling* office geared specifically toward *educating clerical employees* about the *advancement opportunities* available to them. At non-University Park locations, the existing career development and placement office could set aside specific times for the *counseling* of clerical and support staff [italics added] (Pennsylvania State University Strategic Study Group on the Status of Women, 1988, p. B9).
- Create a *career development awards program* for women faculty members who make significant service contributions to the University, assisting them to carry out research [italics added] (University of Michigan, 1994, p. 4).
- Encourage personnel representatives to develop better communications with clerical staff to keep them better informed of changes in policies related to professional development and *career advancement opportunities* [italics added] (Pennsylvania State University Strategic Study Group on the Status of Women, 1988, p. B9).
- In an effort for *career advancement*, [civil service] employees may apply and be tested for these new positions [italics added] (The Ohio State University, 1971, p. 4).
- The *Women of Influence Program* was hosted for the second year by the Committee. Held on April 24, 1990, the program included a panel discussion by four alumnae of the University of Maryland at College Park who *discussed their lives, careers, and personal transitions* and the role student leadership experiences played in influencing their development (University of Maryland President's Commission on Women's Affairs, 1990, p. 19).
- Played an important role in the highly successful Women's Career Fair. Contributed money plus the expertise and enthusiasm of commission members (University of Michigan, 1978, p.1).

As evidenced by these commission report excerpts, it is common for commission reports to provide a focus on “training” and “development” for the purposes of advancing women’s careers. While this emphasis is directed toward women throughout various

occupations and ranks, the discourse of career/professional development promotes the desirability of having a *career*. In so doing, difference among women is produced and a hierarchy is discursively constituted as women are differentiated from one another on the basis of their relationship to a career. A discourse of professionalism provides that women with “careers” are more prestigious than women who hold “jobs.”

Through this discourse then, it is assumed that careers are better than jobs for women. As such, the reports tend to reflect the assumption that career training is in the best interests of women and accordingly, that women as a group “naturally” desire career training and development. The following excerpts provide a few examples of this:

- while some *training activity* is taking place at the University, little is geared specifically to women and minorities [italics added] (The Ohio State University Commission on Women and Minorities, 1977, p. 47).
- funding is no longer available for the special *career development* project [italics added] (Pennsylvania State University Commission for Women, 1994, p. 12).
- are women able to move out of stereotyped clerical jobs or advance in defined *career ladders* within the clerical/secretarial categories? [italics added] (University of Maryland Chancellor’s Commission on Women’s Affairs, 1978, p. 1).
- commission members have expressed interest in: documenting the need for *a system of career development* in career ladder counseling for university employees [italics added] (University of Michigan, 1978, p. 2)
- foster *professional development* opportunities for women by: sponsoring professional development programs [italics added] (Pennsylvania State University Commission for Women, 1993, p. 3).

The discourse of career/professional development is often taken up to address issues of concern related to staff women specifically. For instance, the theme for a commission-sponsored conference for clerical staff was “Professionalism and Excellence:

Meeting the Challenge of the 90's" and was designed to "*improve the image, enrich the lives, and enhance the abilities and skills* of office support staff [italics added]

(University of Maryland President's Commission on Women's Affairs, 1990, p. 21).

Here the discourse not only constructs career/professional development helping to improve a woman's work experience—but also improve her image and enrich her life.

While not explicitly focused on "career" development, the following recommendation carries a similar tone suggests that the "professional" image extends beyond the workplace:

Extend and communicate for effective information about programs for staff members and their families to encourage their involvement with the University and *develop their potential* (e.g. improved access to University education, family literacy, Young Scholars, reduced ticket prices to cultural and athletic events (The Ohio State University President's Commission on Women, 1992, p. 30).

Like the discourse of achievement, the career/professional development strand of the professionalism discourse constructs difference among women as it contributes to shaping the professional woman subject position. While commission efforts to promote professional development and career training for "clerical" and "classified" staff may be well-intended, they likely contribute to reinforcing a hierarchy of prestige where women faculty and administrators hold privileged positions.

Expanding the Leadership Share: A Discourse of Leadership

The discourse of leadership is the third strand of the professionalism discourse I have identified in the commission reports examined for this study. Leadership, like concepts of achievement and career/professional development, is offered by commission reports as a means of improving women's status. The discourse provides that leadership

is a desirable activity for women and that increasing the numbers of individual women in leadership positions will serve to improve the experiences of women as a group. The normalizing power of this discourse is evidenced by the way in which the inherent *goodness* of leadership is taken-for-granted.

I have included leadership as a strand of the professionalism discourse because its use in the reports is typically linked with understandings of professional achievement and success. The discourse of leadership emerges prominently from the reports across all years and institutions examined in this study. Generally, the discourse provides a way of talking about both the university and women within the university. In more recent years (since the mid-1980's), some commissions use the concept of "leadership" as a sort of admonition directed to the university's leadership. Examples of this are evidenced by the following report excerpts:

To begin, we propose a very simple yet challenging vision statement for the University: By the Year 2000, the University of Michigan will *become the leader* among American universities in promoting the success of women of diverse backgrounds as faculty, students, and staff. . . .The University of Michigan has the opportunity to *emerge as a leader* in the role of women in higher education. But to *earn this leadership* and to achieve the vision proposed by the Michigan Agenda, it will be necessary to change the University in very profound, pervasive and permanent ways [italics added] (University of Michigan, 1994, pp. 3-5).

To affect campus climate calls for a massive effort on the part of all University citizens, and assuring such an effort demands *strong and persistent leadership* [italics added] (The Ohio State University President's Commission on Women, 1992, p. 27).

Only with committed and *visible leadership* at all levels will progress toward an equitable university continue [italics added] (Pennsylvania State University Commission for Women, 1994, p. 2).

More often however, the leadership discourse is taken up to describe the status of women and recommend ways of improving this status as portrayed by the following recommendations:

Appoint *more women to key University leadership positions* (executive officers, deans, directors, chairs and other senior positions) [italics added] (University of Michigan, 1994, p. 4).

Expand *women's leadership share*. . .helping to cultivate a positive campus climate for women [italics added] (Pennsylvania State University Commission for Women, 1993, p. 3).

Monitor the appointment of women to high level positions and the need for women on search committees and other decision-making campus groups. . . .Appoint *more women to leadership positions* (University of Maryland President's Commission on Women's Affairs, 1994, p. 5).

Typically, the reports draw a connection between leadership, careers and achievement for individual women *and* women as a group. In other words, women who become designated as "leaders" in the university have not only advanced their own status (and thus helped all women), but they are also in the position to influence the culture of the institution in ways that will benefit all women. Some of these connections are delineated in the following excerpt:

Recently, several women have also been appointed to Vice Presidential and cabinet-level positions in University administration. These appointments *provide an excellent opportunity for women not only to have a voice in managing the current system* but also, and perhaps more importantly, to *play a major role in shaping the direction* of the University. . . .A second less obvious but equally important effect is that the individuals appointed to these senior positions *can function as mentors and role models to women with less seniority*. . . .The commission is encouraged by *progress made among women in executive ranks* and urges that this important trend continue.

Thus, the discourse makes clear that leadership is a critical ingredient for improving women's status. As noted, commission reports often address their concerns to

university leaders—requesting them to make decisions that will improve the environment for women. This approach aligns with the dependency strand of the femininity discourse described in chapter four where women are positioned as supplicants to the predominantly male university administration. However, the leadership strand within a discourse of professionalism takes a different form. Like the discursive strands of achievement and career/professional development, the leadership discourse provides that women need to become leaders for the benefit of all women. Further, the reports imply that becoming a “leader” is something that requires education, training and mentoring.

As reflected in the above set of quotes, women’s commission reports contend that increasing the numbers of women in leadership positions is one way of improving women’s overall status within the university. It follows then that the task at hand is to find ways to move women leaders into “key leadership positions.” As a discourse of professionalism, the leadership strand works to differentiate by re/producing an understanding of leadership that warrants specialized training and development. Thus, women with “potential” for leadership need to be identified and leadership skills need to be cultivated. This approach is evidenced in report recommendations like the following: “Develop a program of career development and training for those faculty and staff with *potential for academic or administrative leadership* roles” [italics added] (University of Michigan, 1994, p. 4). Similarly, another report states that one of the major goals of the commission’s establishment was “to develop a positive environment for Penn State women, to assist in *identifying leadership potential*” (Pennsylvania State University Commission for Women, 1982, p. 1). The use of the word “potential” in connection with leadership evidences the way in which the discourse works to construct leadership as a

set of traits or skills that most (women) are lacking and that require specialized training for their acquisition.

Commissions not only *recommend* leadership training for women, some commissions also design and sponsor leadership development programs. For instance, the commission at the University of Maryland formed a special committee on Undergraduate Women's Leadership with the goal of cultivating leadership skills among women undergraduate students. A number of their efforts are documented in the text of the 1990 commission report and included hosting a "Women of Influence Program" and developing a scholarship drive to send women students to the National Women's Leadership Conference (University of Maryland President's Commission on Women's Affairs, 1990, p. 19). The committee also reported their interest in producing a newsletter for undergraduate women leaders, planning a leadership retreat, researching women in leadership and designing a mentoring program for women leaders (University of Maryland President's Commission on Women's Affairs, 1990, p. 19).

An examination of the leadership discourse as it circulates in commission reports provides an opportunity to consider how this discursive strand contributes to constructing the professional woman subject position. In producing this subject position, the discourse differentiates women from one another by establishing leadership as a desirable set of traits that needs to be developed and refined in order to improve one's status as an individual and the status of women as a group. Thus, the discourse re/produces a particular view of leadership—a view that accords "leaders" an elite status; a view that provides that leaders, like professionals, require specialized training. In this sense, leadership is not portrayed as a set of traits or qualities that are "natural" to women or

that might be learned by women in the course of their daily lives. As such, the discourse, as it is carried in commission reports, implies that *some* women are deficient—lacking in female leadership role models—due, at least in part, to the lack of women who are adequately prepared to be “leaders” as it is dominantly defined. Some women are viewed as having leadership potential while others are not. This contributes to differentiating women and excludes some women.

The shaping of the faculty/professional ideal through the discourses of achievement, career/professional development and leadership may seem self-evident in the context of a university—after all, it is an *academic* institution, an enterprise designed to educate and provide training for professions. Indeed, it is precisely this predictability that evidences the normalizing power of the discourse of professionalism. The discourse supports particular versions of achievement and success that become taken-for-granted and accepted as “normal” or given. In other words, they are no longer seen as just one of many possible perspectives. The dominance of the discourse—and its taken-for-granted “goodness,” make it difficult to see how dominant meanings of achievement or leadership might serve to disempower many women whose sense of self does not align with these particular meanings. This is especially invidious when the discourses provided by policy reports are intended to empower women and improve their status.

Commission reports examined for this study purport to be working toward improving the status of *women* on campus. Are readers to assume that commissions are really improving the status of women—or just the status of some women? Does the discursive shaping of a faculty/professional ideal of achievement serve to improve the status and experience of all women working in a university? Does the discursive

construction of leadership in the reports serve to empower women? The deployment of the professionalism discourse within commission reports is not uncomplicated however and serves to illustrate the within/against positioning of these groups. Discourses of commission reports are multiple and competing. Despite what might appear to be an uncritical deployment of the professionalism discourse in the reports, it is interrupted at times by other discourses, most notably through the care-giving strand of the femininity discourse, which I examine next.

Family Matters: A Discourse of Care-Giving

The tension between the discourse of professionalism and a discourse of care-giving provided by commission reports is illustrative of the within/against positioning of university women's commissions. The discourse of professionalism, as it is deployed in the reports, marks the "within" status of commissions as it re/produces dominant institutional values and hierarchies traditionally critiqued by feminist activists (Ferree & Martin, 1995; Iannello, 1992). At the same time however, commissions are discursively positioned "against" as they take up a *care-giving* strand of the discourse of femininity to interrupt the discourse of professionalism. This is ironic in a sense, and further complicates my analysis in that I have previously discussed how the dominant discourse of femininity typically produces subject positions that are disempowering to women (i.e. vulnerability and dependency as described in chapter four). Here however, a different strand of the dominant discourse of femininity works, at various moments, to empower women by providing discursive interruptions to the discourse of professionalism.

I consider the care-giving discourse to be a component of a larger discourse of femininity because it incorporates characteristics traditionally thought to be uniquely

“feminine.” The *care-giver* subject position that it produces embodies the feminine qualities of nurturing and emotionality. The care-giving strand of the femininity discourse is most often deployed in commission problem statements and policy recommendations relative to women’s concerns with their abilities to adequately care for family in the context of their work/study in the university. For example, a 1992 report recommends “progressive maternity leave policies for all faculty, staff and student women that assures adequate time off without jeopardizing position, academic standing and are not subject to supervisor discretion, criticism or retaliation” (The Ohio State University President’s Commission on Women, 1992, p. 30).

Concerns related to the collision of professional and family “needs” is a hallmark of commission reports. Spanning the four institutions, commissions draw on a discourse of care-giving to articulate this tension. In the reports produced in the 1970s and early 80s the primary focus is on the provision of child-care facilities and adequate maternity leave policies as evidenced by the following:

- The whole question of maternity leave and the utilization of sick leave during the final weeks of pregnancy and childbirth itself need to be thoroughly investigated (The Ohio State University, 1971, p. 3).
- University policies [should] provide support for working parents (childcare, especially in infant and pre-teen) (University of Michigan, 1978, p. 2).
- The Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs should be requested to survey to determine the extent of need for child-care among members of the campus community. This study should distinguish needs for whole day, part day, and by-the-hour service, as well as the level of need during vacation periods and after normal business hours. It should make specific recommendations for filling these needs (University of Maryland Chancellor’s Commission on Women’s Affairs, 1974, p. 14).

- [The Commission] advocated successfully for maternity disability to be treated as would any other medical disability under University policy (University of Michigan, 1978, p. 1).
- An informal child care matching service should be set up immediately to put people in touch with others who have complementary needs for child care (University of Maryland Chancellor's Commission on Women's Affairs, 1974, p. 14).

Reports issued in the late 1980s and early 90s add eldercare and spousal employment assistance to the list along with an increased focus on "attitudinal barriers" that tend to impede women's capacity to gain professionally while maintaining a commitment to care-giving. Some of the following excerpts provide examples:

- Assess University policies, practices, and procedures from the viewpoint of family responsibilities (e.g., child care, elder care) and implement appropriate actions (University of Michigan, 1994, p. 4).
- Implement policies that will provide students and employees at all locations with access to affordable, quality family care opportunities. Steps should be taken to (1) ensure the availability of adequate family care opportunities at all locations, (2) enhance student and employee ability to afford quality family care, and (3) facilitate the scheduling of family and work time to accommodate the needs of employees and students with family care needs (Pennsylvania State University Strategic Study Group on the Status of Women, 1988, p. 11).
- Assess University policies, practices, and procedures from the viewpoint of family responsibilities (e.g. child-care, elder-care) and implement appropriate actions. . . .Affirm and value women's roles, especially women's child-bearing and child-care responsibilities (The Ohio State University President's Commission on Women, 1992, p. 30).
- Several committee members testified before the Academic Deans to the needs of the caregiver, and an Eldercare Workshop was presented at the Personnel Practices Conference (University of Maryland President's Commission on Women's Affairs, 1990, p. 5).

These excerpts provide a glimpse of how the care-giving strand of the femininity discourse is set in tension with a discourse of professionalism carried by the reports. This

analysis highlights how a discourse (in this case femininity) can be dominant at one moment and at another, serve as a discursive interruption to a competing discourse. Both discourses are taken up by the reports for the purpose of improving women's status, yet they also compete with one another at various moments. Coincident with traditional institutional values, the discourse of professionalism is deployed to position women as achievers, leaders and professionals *within* the institution. In contrast, the discourse of care-giving contests predominant institutional values, thus positioning commissions *against* the institution. This seemingly precarious positioning of commissions is exemplified by the following excerpt:

In the caring workplace there is an awareness of the employee's responsibilities that stretch beyond the university. Flexibility is provided, as appropriate, to assist the individual in meeting these external responsibilities. This caring support contributes to the well being and productivity of the individual and therefore is cost-effective for the university. Many organizations have learned that support programs are cost-effective because they help employees contribute most effectively to the mission and the goals of the institution (Penn State Commission for Women, 1994, p. 13).

As this quote demonstrates, the collision of discourses often challenges commissions to find compatibility. In this case, the commission argues that care-giving coincides with the missions and goals of the institution—including its fiscal bottom-line.

Presences in Absences: Producing Whiteness and Heterosexuality

Alongside the discourse of professionalism, discourses of heterosexuality and whiteness also work to differentiate women from one another, as they operate to constitute subject positions. Different from the discourse of professionalism however, the discourses of whiteness and heterosexuality are often made most obvious through their silences. As explicated in chapter three, policy discourse analysis calls for the

examination of both presence and absence in the text of policy reports. While the formation of the professional woman subject position is produced by policy silences as well as what is made explicit in policy, the making of the heterosexual and white woman subject positions is evidenced most often by the silences. The formation of these subject positions provides an opportunity to examine how dominant discourses that become “taken-for-granted” in a particular society can work to produce hierarchized difference among women.

My attention to policy silences related to whiteness and heterosexuality is predicated upon the raw data of the reports as well as my familiarity with scholarship related to difference—in particular, established theoretical positions related to heterosexuality and whiteness. In this section, I will elaborate the heterosexual woman subject position produced by the policy reports, and in the following section, will describe the white woman subject position. In both cases, I examine how the formation of these subject positions contributes to the re/production of a hierarchy that situates professional, white and heterosexual women as most privileged. While this might be seen as an expected outcome of institutionalized policy efforts, it is particularly troublesome in that these reports are offered specifically as a means of promoting equity among all women participating in universities. They are not offered as reports of the “commission on professional women,” “the commission on administrative women,” or “the commission on white, heterosexual (and other) women.” These are reports of the universities’ commissions *on women*. They explicitly describe their intended goals as promoting equity and improving the status for *all* women on campus.

A Discourse of (Hetero)Sexuality

Heterosexism provides that heterosexuality is always assumed and never needs identification. As Tierney (1997) writes, “what we have come to define as normal is actually heterosexual privilege” (p. 166). Commission reports evidence this privileged position which is produced through a discourse of heterosexuality circulating in the reports. This discourse, like the others I have described, does not stand alone producing the heterosexual subject position. A complex web of dominant discourses circulating in Western society supports the discourse of heterosexuality provided by commission reports. Among these are discourses of psychology, medicine, religion, family and gender which coalesce to produce the discursive domain of sexuality and “privilege heterosexuality as the natural way to be” (Weedon, 1999, p. 45).

Ironically, the privileged position of heterosexuality is evidenced by its absence in the text of women’s commission reports. In fact, explicit references to sexual identity are nearly invisible in the text of most commission reports examined until 1988. In an influential essay, Adrienne Rich (1984) proposed that heterosexuality is institutionalized to such an extent that it is more a compulsion than a “natural” or “innate” inclination. She writes,

The assumption that ‘most women are innately heterosexual’ stands as a theoretical and political stumbling block for many women. It remains a tenable assumption, partly because lesbian existence has been written out of history or catalogued under disease; partly because it has been treated as exceptional rather than intrinsic; partly because to acknowledge that for women heterosexuality may not be a ‘preference’ at all, but something that has to be imposed, managed, organized, propagandized, and maintained by force is an immense step to take if you consider yourself freely and ‘innately’ heterosexual (in Weedon, 1999, p. 40).

Thus, the analysis of a discourse of heterosexuality circulating in commission reports involves an examination of the absence, as well as the marking of subject positions considered “other” to heterosexuality.

As Rich (1984) and others (Frye, 1992; Millett, 1990; Morgan, 1992; Lorde, 1984) have argued, the absence of references to sexual identity is usually indicative of an assumption of heterosexuality. Indeed there is a notable absence of references to sexual identity in reports prior to the late 1980’s. The meanings of these absences are also influenced by what is made present in the text. In the case of commission reports, the silence of talk about sexual identity is accompanied by frequent mention of problems women face as mothers with “childcare,” “family care,” and “maternity leave.” Let me be clear that I do not mean to imply that a focus on women as mothers automatically excludes women who identify as lesbian, bisexual or refuse heterosexual identity in other ways. Such exclusion or marginalization results not from a focus on motherhood, but from a focus on a version of motherhood that is shaped primarily through dominant discourses of heterosexuality. In the United States, “common-sense” understandings of motherhood are typically embedded in dominant discourses of femininity and heterosexuality (Pillow, 1994; Rich, 1976). These discourses configure motherhood as inextricably linked to notions of heterosexual marriage and family. In this construction of motherhood, supported by heterosexism, the very mention of “mother” conjures up images of “wife.” For instance, a recommendation from one report reads “affirm and value women’s roles, especially women’s child-bearing and child care responsibilities” (The Ohio State University President's Commission on Women, 1992, p. 30). When commission reports describe problems for women linked to motherhood (e.g. childcare,

family care and maternity leave), they do not make reference to sexual identity. In the context of heterosexism, this policy silence, or failure to specifically identify heterosexual women then contributes to producing a heterosexual woman subject.

Even when the reports do identify lesbian and bisexual women specifically, they evidence a discourse of heterosexuality by failing to specifically identify heterosexual women at the same time. So, despite the well-intended effort to make lesbian and bisexual women more visible, the reports may subtly but powerfully contribute to reinforcing their marginalization by not identifying heterosexual women, too. According to Weedon (1999),

The institutions and practices which produce the discursive context into which we are born also produce individuals with particular expectations about women and men and how they should relate. The privileging of heterosexuality as natural, to the point at which it becomes an invisible unmarked category, render other ways of being (lesbian, gay, bisexual or even celibate) seemingly deviant or not quite natural (p. 45).

The marking of lesbian and bisexual women alongside unmarked heterosexuality indicates the privileged positioning of the heterosexual woman subject. When commission reports are embedded in a discourse of heterosexuality, they need not specifically identify heterosexual women (as they do lesbian and bisexual women) in order for their presence to be recognized.

The invisibility of bisexual and lesbian women as participants in the community, coupled with the extensive identification of women as wives, mothers and family care-givers in commission reports, contributes to re/producing traditional and often limiting images of women as primary care-givers in heterosexual relationships. Such discursive effects also work simultaneously reinforce the marginality of women who identify as

lesbian and bisexual. Drawing on a discourse of heterosexuality, commission reports may then tacitly reinforce homophobia and discrimination by contributing to the invisibility of sexual identities that refuse dominant configurations of heterosexuality. Further, this uncritical acceptance of heterosexuality as the norm has been linked to the oppression of *all* women by a number of feminist theorists who contend that compulsory heterosexuality supports and reinforces male dominance in society (Frye, 1992; Lorde, 1984; Millet, 1990; Penelope, 1990; Phelan, 1989; Rich, 1976, 1984).

Several commission reports written since 1988 do more to identify sexuality as an issue related to women's lives. In some cases, the reports reflect a linguistic shift that replaces the terms wife/husband and spouse with the more inclusive term "partner." For instance, a few of the reports examined in the study describe domestic partners or life partners as reflected in the following excerpts:

- [Provide] short term hiring of the *academic spouses or life partners* of sought after faculty or administrators (The Ohio State University President's Commission on Women, 1992, p. 32).
- In response to the frequently encountered, difficult problem of attracting a candidate who is a member of a professional couple, a Dual Careers Employment Assistance Coordinator was appointed in OHR. In 1991-92, 95 requests for assistance were received, and 49 *dual career partners* were placed. The program includes domestic partners (Pennsylvania State University Commission for Women, 1994, p. 9-10).

While there is little mention of sexuality in reports issued prior to 1988, it begins to appear in later reports. However, with few exceptions, it is generally tucked away within an anti-discrimination statement or some other listing of identity markers as in the following:

- We recognize that women at the University of Michigan are an incredibly diverse group in terms of race, age, educational background, *sexual orientation* and many other characteristics (University of Michigan, 1994, p. 2).
- The Pennsylvania State University does not discriminate against any person because of age, ancestry, color, disability or handicap, national origin, race, religious creed, sex, *sexual orientation*, or veteran status (Pennsylvania State University Commission for Women, 1993, p. 1).
- Discrimination on the basis of *sexual orientation* was later included in the list (University of Maryland President's Commission on Women's Affairs, 1994, p. 2).
- For women and people of color, the disabled, gays and lesbians, veterans, and other under represented members, however, climate is often a central detriment to the quality of their lives at the University (The Ohio State University President's Commission on Women, 1992, p. 18).

Two reports that were more qualitative in style were also the most likely to explicitly attend to sexual identity as an issue related to women's well-being and status in the university. In one report, a recommendation reads, "Institute a University-wide policy of nondiscrimination based on sexual orientation. . .[and] work to provide more supportive living environments and more sensitive counseling for *sexual minorities*" [italics added] (The Pennsylvania State University Strategic Study Group on the Status of Women, 1988, p. 11). Another calls for the university to "Implement the recommendations of the Student Health Center review, especially focusing on women's health care, rape crisis services, obstetrics, gynecology, AIDS, gay and *lesbian health care*, and medical staff training regarding women's health care" (The Ohio State University President's Commission on Women, 1992, p. 29).

In the exceptional cases in which sexuality is explicitly attended to within the text of commission reports, the conceptualizations of identity are typically rooted in

immutable categories undergirded by bifurcated center/other configurations. For example, the use of the term “sexual minorities” serves to reinforce a heterosexual/other dichotomy that places heterosexuality in a more dominant position. Thus, these excerpts provide a glimpse of how the heterosexual subject position is produced through both presence and absence in the text of commission reports. The discourse of heterosexuality provides that heterosexuality is naturalized and is thus unmarked in the text of the reports, while that which is not within this construction of “normal” becomes marked through the discourse. Commissions likely provide these marked categories so they will not be complicit in contributing to their invisibility. Yet ironically, these efforts to be more inclusive remain embedded in a discourse of heterosexuality that may in fact contribute to undermining commission goals.

A Discourse of Whiteness

The analysis of “whiteness” has received attention recently in education literature (Apple, 1997; Cook, 1997; Fine, 1997; Rosenberg, 1997) and among women specifically (Frankenberg, 1994). While the focus on whiteness represents a relatively new direction of theorizing in education, its development has relied on the analytic work of many scholars who have examined privilege² and difference including Peggy McIntosh, Marilyn Frye, bell hooks, George Lipsitz, Adrienne Rich, Richard Dyer, and David Roediger (Fine et al., 1997). Describing the concept of “whiteness,” Weedon (1999) explains,

Whereas right-wing extremism privileges whiteness as a racial category, this is rarely the case outside of these circles. In mainstream discourses of race, whiteness functions as an unmarked neutral category, a norm which is equivalent to being human. Rather than being a racially marked category, whiteness signifies absence of colour (p. 154).

Similarly, in her study of the social construction of whiteness, Frankenberg (1994) examines women's perceptions about what it means to be white and describes whiteness as an unmarked category often represented as "a cultural space. . . [that is] amorphous and indescribable, in contrast with a range of other identities marked by race, ethnicity, region, and class" (p. 196). In her article, "The Art of Survival in White Academia: Black Women Faculty Find Where They Belong" Cook (1997) writes,

One obvious reason for identifying academia as "White" is that in many instances in predominantly White colleges and universities, the academic departments consist of a resounding majority of White faculty members. Thus, the demographics create an environment of "*Whiteness*. . . ." Furthermore, cultural racism within White academia is such that the White cultural values are strictly enforced and built into the power structure of academic departments [italics added] (p. 101).

Similar to the discourse of heterosexuality, the discourse of whiteness circulating in commission reports produces a dominant, yet unmarked subject position (white woman) while it simultaneously marks as deviant that which is not this norm.

Similar to the articulation of sexual difference, the presence of a discourse of whiteness can be examined through its absence in the text of commission reports. Explicit references to the implications of race on women's experiences working and studying in the university are virtually absent from reports issued prior to 1988. With the exception of a single sentence in a report issued at the University of Michigan in 1978 along with the report issued from the 1977 Commission on Women and Minorities at The Ohio State University, none of the commission reports prior to 1988 articulate race-based concerns for women at their institution. These policy silences evidence the reliance on a discourse of whiteness that simultaneously produces the centrality of the white woman

subject position as it also renders it invisible. Thus, when commission reports describe “women’s needs,” “women’s issues,” and “women’s concerns” without any acknowledgment of race, it is evident that these issues are being defined through a discourse of whiteness that privileges the perspectives of white women.

In describing this privileged position of white women with respect to race, I want to be careful not to obscure the dynamics of social class. As indicated in my discussion of the discourses of professionalism, not *all* white women are situated in the upper tiers of the difference hierarchy. The discursive constitution of the professional woman subject position evidences ways in which social class is also implicated in re/producing difference among women. In the case of the discourse of professionalism, middle-class perspectives are privileged thus positioning women whose experiences do not align with these perspectives as “deficient.” So, despite the ways in which the discourse of whiteness operates to privilege the white woman subject position, the taking up of this position is bound to its historical moment. Like the discourses described in these chapters, subject positions produced by them are multiple, shifting and set in tension with one another. While white women may be in a privileged position in relation to race, some of these women may not experience such status in relation to social class.

Commission reports written since 1988 however begin to move away from presenting a unified and homogenized category “women” in the articulation of policy problems and solutions. Yet, these attempts also evidence a discourse of whiteness as they typically mark “women of color” as a focus of special attention while ignoring the ways in which white women are also raced and impacted by racism. The following excerpts provide some examples of this:

- with special attention to increasing the presence and participation of women of color (University of Michigan, 1995, p. 3).
- indeed, for women of color, the climate may well have worsened (The Ohio State University President's Commission on Women, 1992, p. 6).
- In 1990, the Women of Color Committee. . . was formed to help carry out the campus's goal of diversity. . . and regularly acknowledge their accomplishments (University of Maryland President's Commission on Women's Affairs, 1994, p. 9).
- Create a University-wide Strategic Study Group on the Status of People of Color, with a charge to look closely at the special concerns of women of color within that larger context (Pennsylvania State University Strategic Study Group on the Status of Women, 1988, p. B14).

Here again, similar to sexual difference described in the previous section of this chapter, the inclusion/extraction of women of color in the text of commission reports is offered, I believe, with the best of intentions. Commission report writers are re/acting to the criticisms of liberal feminist ideology that has so often ignored difference within the category "women." Yet, as they (and many others involved in such policy-making efforts) work to be more inclusive, the dominant discourse of whiteness serves as an enclosure that constrains such well-intended efforts. Thus, even in the acknowledgment of racial difference within the category women, white women remain unmarked. It is this absence of color—a perception that whites are not raced—that evidences their privileged position.

Feminist scholars have cautioned against dangers of dichotomous thinking and conceptualizing difference in terms of a white/other model (Collins 1991b; Higginbotham, 1992; Kaminsky, 1994; Lugones, 1994; Weedon, 1999). For instance, Phelan (1991) argues that the concept of difference itself signifies "white women's turf,

where difference never seems to mean white or middle-class, but rather signifies that which is not” (p. 132). When commission reports address difference among women it is most often rooted in a white/other configuration where white women appear to be defining the problems for “others,” but where their racial identification remains unmentioned. This tendency to rely upon binaried (white/other) conceptualizations of difference reflects a discourse of whiteness circulating in commission reports and indicates the greater centrality of white women in producing commission reports.

When drawing on the discourse of whiteness, commission reports unintentionally reinforce the dominance of white perspectives in U.S. universities. In so doing, Black, Hispanic, Native American, Asian, biracial and other women who don’t identify as white, are marginalized. For example, the pervasive use of the terms “women and minorities” or “women and people of color” may have the inadvertent effect of excluding women of color from the category “women” (if one assumes that terms like “minorities” or “people of color” include women). In contrast, the phrases “women as well as men of color” or “women and men of color as well as white women” might be used to convey the idea that all women (regardless of race) as well as men who are not white experience barriers to their full participation in the culture of the university.

Articulations of difference in the text of university commission reports reveal much about whose perspectives are shaping the characterizations. The discourse of whiteness operates in often subtle but powerful ways. For instance, “outreach” is a term employed to describe some types of commission goals and recommendations. Typically, “outreach” is used in the reports to depict efforts to promote networking among women. For example a 1993 report states that,

The *Outreach* Committee prepared a list of women's and other underrepresented groups at the University Park campus. . . [and] thus decided to invite members of these groups to a Commission meeting and informal reception. . . to begin exploring ways in which the Commission and other groups could work together on issues of concern (Pennsylvania State University Commission for Women, 1993, p. 7).

At times, the term "outreach" is also used to convey the need to attend to "diversity" on campus. For instance, "*outreach to Black, Asian-American, Hispanic and Native American women*" (University of Maryland President's Commission on Women's Affairs, 1994, p. 14) was stated as one of this commission's goals. Based on its usage in the reports, one might argue that the term *outreach* identifies those who are *outside* of the center—those who find themselves on the margins. Whether intended or not, the use of the term "outreach" reinforces the whiteness of the center (the commission) and makes apparent those who are not (yet) in this space are Black, Asian-American, Hispanic and Native American women. Statements like this are indicative of a discourse of whiteness that contributes to locating the white woman subject position at the center and reveals how white women's perspectives are predominant in shaping images of women produced by commission reports.

Beyond words on paper, some reports evidence ways in which a discourse of whiteness, and the insider/outsider positions shaped through this discourse become operationalized in commission programs and activities. For example, one commission report documented that in an effort to highlight women's achievements and talents, the commission initiated an "Outstanding Woman of the Year Award," naming over 20 women as recipients over a 17 year time period. In addition, the report noted that for the past three years the commission also presented an "Outstanding Woman of Color Award"

(University of Maryland President's Commission on Women's Affairs, 1994). While it is unlikely that these initiatives were intended to be exclusionary, the way in which they are manifested may produce such an outcome. The discourse of whiteness constructs a particular unmarked center (outstanding woman), and marks that which is not this norm (outstanding woman of color).

Despite the increasing number of racial identity categories that have proliferated in the United States, there remains a strong tendency to think of race in terms of white/non-white (Kaminsky, 1994). The ways in which women writing commission reports describe "women" is indicative of this binary (white/other) configuration of difference and is reflective of a dominant discourse of whiteness that is provided by the reports. As such, commission reports, even as they appear to become more inclusive in their language, may have the effect of reinforcing the predominance of white women's perspectives. Interestingly, this *centering* of particular women through a discourse of whiteness may, at times, provide a discursive interruption to the discourse of access described in chapter four. I delineated discourses of entree, representation and affirmation, each of which produce the woman *outsider* subject position. Drawing on Collins (1991a, 1991b), I noted in my analysis that women in the academy occupy an inherently contradictory space as "outsiders/within" the institution.

Entree, representation and affirmation are all strands of an access discourse because they all evidence women's desire to be on the inside—thus implicitly constructing women as an outsiders. The deployment of a discourse of whiteness might be considered a metaphorical "reply" of sorts to the discourses of access that construct the woman outsider subject position. The discourse of whiteness works to situate white

women at the center—on the *inside*—which is after all, the most desirable location. Re/produced through the access discourses, it represents a logical way of overcoming the outsider/within problem. Yet, embedded in a discourse of whiteness, this “resolution” of the outsider/within problem is inevitably partial as it subtly re/produces the privileged position of white women.

While structural barriers for men and women of color are recognized with increasing frequency in some of the more recent commission reports, these race-based concerns are presented as problems that are separate from sexism. At times, oppression rooted in racism is conveyed as compounding the effects of sexism. In this way, oppressions rooted in race, class, sex and other identity categories are understood as distinct categories with cumulative or additive effects. This is evidenced in statements like, “women of color experience *double jeopardy*,” and, “women of color. . .voiced concern over what they experience as pervasive institutional racism—*on top* of the sexist attitudes already described in this report” [italics added] (The Ohio State University President's Commission on Women, 1992, p. 22). Similarly, another recent report states that “women of color face a particular challenge as they struggle for success in the face of both gender and racial prejudice in our society” (University of Michigan, 1995, p. 3). By calling attention to different experiences of women’s lives, these descriptions may be offered by women’s commissions in attempt to disrupt thinking about women as a unified category.

The configuration of race as a collection of immutable categories has been critiqued for the way in which it essentializes race and fails to account for the social construction of subjectivity. In attempts to incorporate race into the articulation of

problems and solutions for women in universities, some commission reports offer an attempt to move beyond the homogenizing effects that result from configuring "women" or "women's needs" as a unified whole. Yet, the reports continue to depict race in ways that reinforce the perceived stability of identity categories. It is likely that well-intended practices rooted in such an approach will result in marginalization and exclusion. This is why Higginbotham (1992) urges feminists to move beyond determinist notions of race and recognize it as an "unstable, shifting and strategic reconstruction" (p. 274), something that is accomplished rather than ascribed. More fluid understandings of race and other identity categories might assist women's commissions in promoting policy initiatives that better meet the needs of diverse groups of women.

Commission reliance on a discourse of whiteness results in the analysis of policy problems and recommended solutions that obscures discursively produced hierarchical power relations among women. Borrowing from Weedon (1999),

Missing in the analysis is the recognition that racism is grounded in a binary *relation* of difference in which whiteness is the dominant term. Racism functions by privileging whiteness. To fail to question this privilege is to leave intact the binary oppositions on which racist discourse is founded (p. 156).

The discourse of whiteness taken up in the reports re/produces the dominance of whiteness as evidenced by its invisibility in the text of the reports. This absence makes it difficult to see how whiteness is privileged and how this privileging is inextricably linked to the marginalization and exclusion of "others." The policy silences around whiteness tend to obscure how the white woman subject position is discursively constituted as part of a hierarchy of difference.

The discourse of professionalism, alongside discourses of heterosexuality and whiteness, are dominant discourses of difference circulating in university women's commission reports. These discourses are supported by configurations of women as a collective. Such configurations have been offered to improve "women's" status and provide a way of talking about the impact of sexism on all women. However, these configurations are also typically understood as static and homogenous categories rather than fluid constructions. As a result, difference within the category women is often subsumed and "women's issues" comes to represent privileged perspectives while other perspectives are marginalized or excluded. Supported by a view of women as a coherent unit as well conceptualizations of race and sexuality as immutable categories, university women's commission reports draw upon discourses of heterosexuality, whiteness and professionalism to re/produce white, heterosexual and professional woman subject positions. Further the discursive constitution of these subject positions works to differentiate women from one another and privilege perspectives of white, professional and heterosexual women within a hierarchy of difference.

In chapters four and five, I described the discursive construction of subject positions through discourses of university women's commission reports produced at four research universities over the past three decades. I have provided examples of how the dominant discourses of commission reports may actually contribute to undermining the outcomes that women's commissions are striving to achieve. In the next chapter, I examine implications of these findings and look toward how they may help to inform more effective policy development strategies for women's commissions and other groups seeking to improve the lives of those participating in higher education.

Notes

¹In making this comparison between faculty and staff, I am looking specifically at the issue of flexibility. In so doing, I do not want to ignore the fact that many women faculty, especially those pre-tenure, are burdened with work overload. While the workday for these faculty may extend beyond the eight hour day expected of most staff, it is a workday that usually offers a greater degree of control and flexibility than that of secretarial and administrative support staff.

²Drawing on the work of Ruth Frankenberg (1994) and others, I use the term privilege here to refer to “whiteness as a location of structural advantage, of race privilege” in society (p. 1). This use of privilege also refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and thus seemingly invisible to those who are advantaged by their social status (McIntosh, 1988).

CHAPTER 6

LIMITS AND POSSIBILITIES: IMPLICATIONS OF POLICY DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AND UNIVERSITY WOMEN'S COMMISSION POLICY REPORTS

In this chapter, I synthesize the findings of this study and consider what can be learned from my analyses and from policy discourse analysis as a hybrid method for the study of policy. I examine possible implications of the discursive constitution of subject positions through university women's commission reports and consider how the formation of these subject positions is implicated in constructing and constraining commission policy-making efforts. Further, I consider how the discourses circulating in commission reports operate to both limit and shape possibilities for more effective policy construction. Based on the findings of this study, I provide some suggestions for the strategic use of discourse for university women's commissions and similar groups. Finally, I offer some suggestions for further inquiry.

Researcher as Instrument & Feminist Praxis

This study originated out of my feminist interest in examining women's policy-making efforts in the context of higher education. I chose to focus my research on university women's commission reports as they represent the primary means by which women in universities have articulated concerns and made recommendations designed to improve their status in these institutions over the past 30 years. As a woman academic, I

believe I have personally benefited from policy changes inspired by the work of women's commissions. Nevertheless, recent research indicates that women do not yet experience "the benefits and pleasures of academic life to the same level and degree as presently experienced by men" (Billard, 1994, p. 115). Further evidence of this is marked by the fact that women's commissions of the 1990s have drawn many of the same conclusions reached in their reports twenty or more years earlier (Blum, 1991). Findings like these prompted me to consider whether or not the policy-making initiatives of university women's commissions could be made more effective. This research then emerged out of my interest in designing a study to yield insights that could be used to promote more equitable practices in higher education.

Thus, my study can be characterized as "praxis-oriented" research in that it is "research that is explicitly committed to critiquing the status quo and building a more just society" (Lather, 1991a, p.51). Rooted in neo-Marxian thought, the concept of praxis has been taken up by a range of emancipatory research approaches in the social sciences (Denzin, 1994; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994; Lather, 1991a). As such, a focus on praxis embodies an action orientation that can be said to politicize the research endeavor and is common to inquiry within critical, feminist, cultural studies, Freirian and other emancipatory frames (Denzin, 1994). More specifically, praxis-oriented research implies a "dialectical tension, [an] interactive, reciprocal shaping of theory and practice" (Lather, 1991a, p. 172). It is this particular aspect of praxis that I elaborate more fully in this chapter. Thus far, my chapters have focused primarily on theory as it relates to university women's commission policy reports. I have used the data provided by these reports to

offer conceptual insights about the discursive shaping of subject positions. Now, I turn my focus to considering the application of these conceptual insights.

Committed to research as praxis, my interest in discourse theory and its implications for policy-making led to me to consider how it might be possible (if at all) to reconfigure commission strategies. More specifically, how might the findings of this study contribute to re/considering the textual representation of commission policy-making efforts in ways that might enhance the achievement of their goals? As Wilkinson and Kitzinger (1995) have noted, the recent turn toward the analysis of discourse “owes much to the ways its analytic tools can be used to inform political practice and struggles” (p. 4). Relatedly, I began this study with the hope that my findings might serve as a “toolbox” of sorts for the policy-making efforts of women’s commissions as well as other groups seeking to eliminate inequitable practices rooted in the structure of social relations.

It is my hope that university women’s commissions can make strategic use of the findings from this study. Drawing on Blackmore’s (1995) recommendations for feminist administrators working for institutional change, it is important for my focus on praxis to understand policy discourse as “*tactical*.” Blackmore elaborates,

In order to contest policy it is necessary to enter the politics of discourse in order to make strategic discursive interventions (Yeatman, 1990, p. 160). This requires feminist educators learning to recognise how they are being discursively positioned in any specific context (p. 310).

Ball (1994) also contends that a focus on policy as discourse can be used toward developing political strategies toward eliminating social inequalities. He draws on Foucault’s concept of “specific intellectuals” to support his claim that the “tracing of the

discursive origins of policy” can be put to “strategic use in particular social situations and struggles” (pp. 26-27). It is my intent that the findings from this study be used toward developing “strategic discursive interventions” for university women’s commissions and the policy reports they create. Further, this study delineates *policy discourse analysis* as an enhancement to the proverbial “toolbox” for policy analysis. I hope that the approach I have employed in this study can feed further research directed toward examining the discursive shaping of subject positions and the possibilities for discursive interventions in other policy-making contexts as well.

Within/Against: Insights from Policy Discourse Analysis and University Women’s Commission Reports

I began the process of gathering and analyzing data guided by several research questions. These questions emerged from feminist, critical and poststructural perspectives outlined in chapter two. Through my analysis of the 21 university women’s commission reports issued between 1971 and 1996 at four research universities, I was able to examine:

- policy problems and solutions for women in universities as described by commission reports;
- predominant images of women that emerged from reports;
- discourses employed to shape these problems, solutions and images; and
- subject positions re/produced through these discourses.

The identification of policy problems, solutions and images of women conveyed by the reports provided the policy focus through which to examine the discursive shaping of subject positions by the reports.

The description and analysis of the findings provided in chapters four and five provide an opportunity to consider the uses of policy discourse analysis as a hybrid methodological approach to the examination of policy discourses and the subject positions re/produced by them. In chapter four, I provisionally accepted women as a category and described the discursive formation of subject positions for women in relation to the university. In chapter five, I questioned “women” as a category and looked at how commission discourses contribute to shaping subject positions in relation to other women and thus, re/producing difference among women. In each case, I described discursive alignments and clashes that serve to produce multiple and competing subject positions and situate women’s commissions as both within yet against the dominant culture of the institution.

Through the analytic process outlined in chapter three (see figure 3.1), I identified discourses of access, femininity and feminism as predominant in commission reports and constructing subject positions for women in relation to the university. Commission reports rely heavily upon discourses of distress and dependency—two discursive strands of a dominant discourse of femininity. I described how these discourses re/produce subject positions that situate women as vulnerable and dependent on the (typically male dominated) university administration to provide for them and keep them safe. I also demonstrated how discourses of access were drawn upon by commission reports and serve to position women as outsiders to: (1) the university itself—through a discourse of entree; (2) particular arenas within the university—through a discourse of representation; and (3) the dominant (male-centered) culture of the university—through a discourse of affirmation. Discourses of access and femininity work to situate women as supplicants,

positioning them as beseeching institutional power structures for the provision of protection and permission to participate fully in the university. In contrast, a discourse of feminism provides an interruption to these positionings by locating power and agency within women themselves; this discourse provides that women can change their outsider status and vulnerability within the institution. A discourse of feminism, then, re/produces an empowered woman subject position that contests the vulnerable and outsider positions shaped through the discourses of access and femininity.

In chapter five, I analyzed the dominant discourses of difference carried by commission reports. I described discourses of professionalism, heterosexuality and whiteness offered by commission reports. I drew attention to policy silences and how these absences “speak” the discourses and strongly contribute to the formation of dominant subject positions—white, heterosexual and professional woman. Further, I described how these discourses re/produce a hierarchy of difference among women that privileges these subject positions. For instance, policy recommendations related to improving women’s status in the university workplace tend to rely upon the professionalism discourse and reflect faculty/administrative perspectives through discourses of achievement, leadership and career development. Policy recommendations constructed through these discourses provide that each woman can improve her own status, as well as the status of all women, by participating in professional development programs, aspiring to leadership positions within the institution and achieving upper level positions within the institutional hierarchy. Such recommendations imply that all women desire to become the “ideal-typical” professional woman (faculty/administrator) constructed by the discourse. Lost in these recommendations is an opportunity to

consider how women working in the lower ranks of the university hierarchy (and ironically, the majority of women at the institution), might be able to improve their status and work experiences by organizing or implementing a collective bargaining unit for example.

In chapter five, I also examined how a discourse of care-giving, a strand of the dominant discourse of femininity, provides a discursive interruption to professionalism and contributes to producing the within/against positioning of university women's commissions. This serves as an example of Foucault's (1981) "principle of discontinuity" (in Ball, 1990, p. 18) which he offers to explicate how discourses are unstable and can shift to "be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy" (Foucault, 1978, p. 101). In chapter four, I delineated how the discourse of femininity serves to disempower women, situating them as vulnerable and dependent. In this way, the discourse contributes to reinforcing the status quo by providing for policy recommendations that answer to these dominant constructions. Yet, in chapter five, the discourse of femininity provides for a focus on care-giving that serves to interrupt the institutional status quo. Contesting the discourse of professionalism predicated upon a version of success and achievement that privileges autonomy, rationality and career development, the care-giving strand of the femininity discourse provides for an emphasis on interdependency, relationships and emotionality. The collision of these discourses provides an example of the within/against positioning of commissions and the ways in which discourse might be tactically deployed. The reports rely on a discourse of professionalism to align *with* dominant institutional norms and make recommendations

for the improvement of women's status *within* the university, while simultaneously, they draw upon the discourse of femininity to position themselves *against* institutional norms that narrowly define success in ways that ignore the work required of women (and men) as parents, partners and family care-givers.

In chapters four and five I considered how the privileging of perspectives that align with dominant subject positions produced through the reports might result in policy consequences that undercut the intended goals of commission efforts. For example, safety for women on campus is a common focus of commission reports. Yet, the problem of safety and the recommended policy solutions tend to be embedded in a dominant discourse of femininity that re/produces the vulnerable woman subject position. One effect of this discursive formation is that the "problem" of safety for women tends to be localized with/in women themselves. This is reflected in policy recommendations that focus more on alleviating women's fear than on eliminating sources of that fear. For instance, commission reports recommend the implementation of escort services; improved campus lighting and transportation at night; wallet-cards with emergency phone numbers; and increased availability of evening parking proximal to campus buildings. While such initiatives may indeed help to decrease women's fear related to safety, they are unlikely to eliminate, and may actually obscure, the ultimate source of that fear—the violence itself. Further, policy recommendations emerging from a discourse of distress serve to re/produce the vulnerable woman subject position and women who take up this position are likely to feel disempowered.

In this way, it becomes clear that attention to the discursive shaping of policy is of crucial importance to those who are invested in policy-making efforts intended to

empower and promote more equitable practices. This assertion resonates with other feminist examinations of educational policy and discourse (Bensimon, 1994; Blackmore, 1995; deCastell & Bryson, 1992, 1997; Fine, 1988; Pillow, 1997). Based on their research, Kitzinger and Thomas (1995) have noted that the development of institutional policies related to sexual harassment is “largely futile” and that what is needed instead is “to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the complexities within which the definition and discursive management of ‘sexual harassment’ is enmeshed” (p.47). More specifically, they argue for increased understanding and “deconstruction of the discursive techniques used to render sexual harassment invisible. . .and how it is that the ‘victims’ of sexual harassment are themselves complicit in this process” (p. 46). Policy discourse analysis provides an opportunity for a research focus on policy discourses and the discursive shaping of subject positions through policy. An understanding of the discursive effects of policy formation is crucial for determining how policy-making efforts intended to be liberatory, like those of university women’s commissions, can avoid undermining their own goals and work toward more effectively disrupting the status quo.

Containments & Enclosures: What Has Been Produced Here?

The findings of this study offer a perspective about the discourses of university women’s commissions and the subject positions re/produced by them. I do not claim that my interpretations are “the truth.” Rather, I have worked to establish the soundness of this examination such that my findings might be seriously considered as an opportunity to think differently about university women’s commission policy reports and the discourses provided by them. Borrowing from Pillow (1994), I designed my study in an effort to

prompt “*rethinking and unthinking* for policy theory and analysis” related to university women’s commission reports [italics added] (p. 294). While I believe this has been accomplished, I must also acknowledge how my very efforts to open up space for different ways of thinking and talking about the policy-making efforts of women’s commissions, and other similarly situated groups, also serves as a containment or enclosure of sorts. In the process of this research, I have opened up the “archive,” (literally *and* figuratively) and in so doing, I have intervened and imposed my own interpretations on the data rendering it forever altered. Through my analysis and writing, I have carved out and shaped a space for understanding university commission reports. Thus, in the very process of opening up space for thinking differently, my findings also serve to re/produce particular perspectives and interpretations while excluding others.

Thus, I borrow from Humes (1997) to offer the following reminder/caveat for readers of this work:

In social research, the ideal of methodological ‘purity’ is an illusion. Such research is always a complex, messy business in which the ‘evidence’ is never complete and the relative importance of the factors at work is a matter of judgement [sic] and interpretation rather than of establishing the ‘facts’ (p. 28).

I want to caution against the possibility of this research being read as a project of discovery that seeks to uncover a fixed reality hidden from view. It is not. Rather, the findings of this study offer a particular perspective *and* I contend that this perspective can serve as an incitement to new possibilities for thinking and practice. However, just as the discourses of commission reports construct and constrain possibilities for thought, so too, do the findings of this study.

Situated within/against interpretive, critical and poststructural methodologies, to what uses can policy discourse analysis be employed? In the next section, I offer some *cautionary* thoughts related to this question. I emphasize “cautionary” here because of the theoretical underpinnings that inform my approach to policy discourse analysis. As discussed in chapters two and three, my interest in a critical approach informs my desire to consider how findings from this study might be used to help commissions design more effective policy reports. Yet, at the same time, my interest in a poststructural approach requires that I place these desires under suspicion. Providing concrete recommendations for practice often implies that there is some sort of fixed reality or truth that can be predicted. Since policy discourse analysis is not predicated on such a view, it is with “caution” that I offer recommendations. While I provide some thoughts on improving practice—I do so based on a view of praxis in postmodernism (Lather, 1991a). In other words, the recommendations are not offered through a view of a fixed and predictable social world, but rather, as an opportunity “to think and act within an uncertain framework” (p. 13).

Thinking Differently: Discursive Effects and University Women’s Commission Reports

How might the findings of this study serve to inform more effective feminist practice? More specifically, based on my learning from this research, what recommendations might I offer to a university women’s commission or a similarly situated group? At best, such recommendations are provisional as they are predicated upon an understanding of the dynamic and unstable qualities of discourse. As Ball (1994) cautions, “there are real struggles over the interpretation and enactment of

policies. But these are set within a moving discursive frame which articulates and constrains the possibilities and probabilities for interpretation and enactment” (p. 23). Keeping this caveat in mind, my feminist commitment to praxis-oriented research fuels my interest in offering conceptual as well as applied suggestions for practice.

To begin, I suggest that participants in university women’s commissions and other like-groups develop an understanding of what discourse theory has to say about the ways in which subject positions and subjectivity are discursively constituted and the role of policy with/in discourse. Such an understanding is likely to increase the possibility that commission members become aware of the ways in which their policy-making efforts are shaped by the discourses they deploy in constructing policy reports. This recommendation reiterates Blackmore’s (1995) contention that,

Policy writers and practitioners alike need to be critical of the apparent common sense of policy discourses, and the power invoked when calling upon particular key concepts and logics unproblematically, thus institutionalising and legitimating them in specific policy texts (p. 312).

It is only when we can begin to see how discourse operates through policy to re/produce particular perspectives, subject positions, and possibilities for thought that we can even begin to imagine the possibility of thinking otherwise.

While this recommendation seems reasonable based on the findings from this study, it leads to the more difficult question of how might this be accomplished? How might commissions seriously undertake this process of understanding discourse theory and its implications? I feel as though I am “treading on thin ice” here as I know it would be far more comfortable to stay in the realm of theory. Offering such pragmatic suggestions feels risky and underscores the importance of doing this. Nevertheless, I feel

compelled to remind readers that these suggestions are merely that. They are humble starting points for considering the utility of the findings from this study. Further, they are offered with some sense of understanding the constraints within which these groups are working. For instance, commission members are typically full-time university employees who are adding commission work to lives that are already quite full. Like other formally organized groups within an institution, commissions work under time pressures and fiscal constraints. What may seem like a simple suggestion in theory, is generally far more difficult to operationalize.

In order for commissions to think differently about the policy reports they produce, they need the time and money to begin the work of “unthinking” their policy development. Through the use of discourse theory as a platform from which to rethink and unthink assumptions undergirding policy problems and solutions, commissions can work to identify discourses shaping such assumptions. This could be initiated in a number of ways. For example, commissions might begin their work together as a reading group. All members might agree on a particular set of readings related to discourse and meet together to discuss how the readings relate to their work. However, such an endeavor is complicated, as it must account for the disparate educational backgrounds represented by women on the commission. This is further complicated by the discourse theory literature which is often obtuse and inaccessible to those who have not acquired a specialized vocabulary for making sense of the writing. In chapter five, I pointed out ways in which commissions may unwittingly contribute to reinforcing hierarchies of difference among women. One of these ways was through a discourse of professionalism that privileges faculty/administrative perspectives—perspectives that require advanced

and highly specialized formal education. The challenge for this recommendation then, is finding ways for commission members to proceed with an understanding of discourse theory, yet avoid re/producing the privileged perspectives shaped through a discourse of professionalism.

Once again, I do not want these recommendations to be interpreted as definitive answers to exceedingly complex questions. It is my intent however, that the findings of this study, can open up the space to think differently *and act* differently and in so doing, contribute to the possibility that commissions can become more effective in their policy-making efforts. I don't pretend that commissions can somehow equalize power differentials operating out of the hierarchies of difference within these groups and society at large. However, I do believe it is possible to find new and better ways of accomplishing their intended goals while perhaps mitigating some of the unintended ways that their reports reinforce social relations of domination. In working toward understandings of how commission reports produce discursive effects, commissions must offer ways of learning that are accessible to those with/out advanced or formal education. Reading might be one of a number of approaches that could include conveying basic principles of discourse theory didactically through the use of a consulting team external to the commission as well as discussion/consciousness-raising groups within the commission.

Strategic Deployment of Discourse

Is it possible to be strategic about the uses of discourse? Again, I think it is important to begin unthinking the ways in which "strategy" is traditionally framed. I am not using strategy here in a positivist sense—as a technique of prediction—a means of

arriving at a predictable outcome. Rather, I am thinking of strategy reconfigured for a postmodern moment as a means of working toward interruption and destabilization. I am advocating for increased awareness about the ways in which we are constituted through discourse. As Ball (1994), drawing on Foucault, has said “we do not speak a discourse, it speaks us” (p. 22). Thus, I am not pretending to offer strategies in the sense that we can somehow stand outside of discourse and choose when, where and how to take up particular discourses to produce some intended and predictable effect. Nevertheless, I do think that we can be more informed, aware and analytic about discourse and discursive effects. As Ball (1994) says, “we do need to recognize and analyse the existence of ‘dominant’ discourses, regimes of truth, [and] erudite knowledges. . . within social policy” (p. 24). It is from this perspective that I offer the idea of thinking about discourse strategically.

Thinking about the strategic use of discourse for policy-making resonates with Katzenstein’s (1995; 1998) analyses of feminist protest inside institutions. Drawing from her years of historical research related to feminist activism in the U.S. military and the Catholic Church, Katzenstein elaborates the concepts of “discursive politics” and “discursive activism” that she uses to characterize much of the work women activists do in these institutional arenas. According to Katzenstein (1995), discursive politics holds transformative potential because it is “the politics of meaning-making” (p. 35). More specifically, she writes,

By discursive, I mean the effort to reinterpret, reformulate, rethink, and rewrite the norms and practices of society and the state. Discursive politics relies heavily but not exclusively on language. It is about cognition. Its premise is that the conceptual changes directly bear on the material ones” (1998, p. 17).

Drawing on her analysis of feminist women religious in the Catholic Church, Katzenstein argues that discursive politics is a “politics of reflection and reformulation” accomplished largely through “words and images” taking many diverse forms including: newsletters, pamphlets, T-shirts, greeting cards, songs, plays, workshops, memoranda and books (1998, p. 107).

The strategic deployment of discourse in the development of policy reports by university women’s commissions could also be considered a form of discursive activism. Like feminist women in the military and the Catholic Church, women’s commissions are forms of institutional protest whose work might be considered a rather unobtrusive form of protest. Yet, as Katzenstein (1998) argues, while it may not be the sort of lawbreaking protest characteristic of other forms of collective action, discursive activism has “challenged, discomfited, unleashed and provoked a wholesale disturbance of long-settled assumptions, rules and practices” (p. 7).

Through a greater awareness of the ways in which their policy reports are discursively constituted, women’s commissions can become more strategic about the ways in which their policy-making efforts re/produce particular ways of thinking. In so doing, they are more likely to disturb “long-settled assumptions, rules and practices.” Weedon (1997) argues that all discursive practices can be analyzed to examine “how they are structured, what power relations they produce and reproduce, where there are resistances and where we might look for weak points more open to challenge and transformation (p. 132). It is from these perspectives, as well as Blackmore’s (1995) contention that feminists need to focus on discourses of policy in order to make “strategic

discursive interventions” (p. 310), that I suggest the strategic deployment of discourse for university women’s commissions. Being strategic about discourse is *not* intended to satisfy modernist desires for predictable outcomes. Rather, the strategic deployment of discourse is offered as a means of working toward destabilizing normative powers of dominant discourses and enhancing the possibilities for unthinking and thinking differently such that policy development might hold greater potential for interrupting inequitable practices and transforming social relations.

Changing the Subject (Positions)

Discursive shifts are always occurring. While it is not possible to know exactly what results may be produced through a shift in discourse, it *is* possible to work toward imagining different possibilities. In the case of university women’s commissions, might it not be possible to imagine different and more desirable subject positions to be produced through the discourses provided by commission reports? If commissions would like to avoid re/producing the vulnerable, dependent and outsider subject positions, could they work to shift the discourse in ways that might interrupt these configurations and provide more desirable alternatives? For instance, the findings of this study contend that the discourses carried by commission reports often situate women as supplicants. It seems that this approach is so familiar that it is often unseen and reflects the taken-for-grantedness of dominant discursive constructions. By exposing the discursive constitution of the subject positions, the power of their taken-for-grantedness is undermined, thus affording women alternatives to their uncritical acceptance.

What if the very practices of women’s commissions could work to interrupt these dominant discourses? Commissions might think about how the ways in which they

approach their work could result in discursive shifts within their reports. What if commissions were to subvert the role of supplicant by taking a very different approach—one that positions them as members of a surveillance team for example. In this configuration, commissions would shift their emphasis from women's experiences of exclusion and focus more on male inclusion. They could begin to accomplish this by systematically examining male dominated domains of the institution. Commission members could position themselves as ethnographic researchers of sorts—"studying up," rather than focusing on themselves as the objects of analysis. Commission members might be dispatched to President's Cabinet meetings and the like to "collect data" about those arenas that have traditionally excluded women. This is one example of a type of discursively-based strategic action. Such a strategy might serve to make alternative discourses more prominent and thus provide an opportunity for different discourses to be taken up (and different subject positions produced) in the making of commission policy reports.

In chapter four, I delineated the ways in which the dominant discourse of femininity serves to locate the problem of women's safety in women themselves. Similarly, recognizing and analyzing this discursive effect may open up space for alternative and perhaps more empowering ways of addressing this issue. For example, commissions might draw on the available research to reframe the problem of safety for women as a problem of gender-based violence (among men) primarily. Such a platform would provide an opportunity to interrupt the equation of aggression with masculinity and other taken-for granted effects of dominant gender discourses. The reframing of women's safety as a problem of violence could provide a discursive shift that would

likely produce very different policy recommendations and might also mitigate the probability of re/producing the victim discourse that situates women as vulnerable and needing protection.

Commissions might also consider how the presentation of data in their policy reports works to support and subvert particular discourses. Again, I don't pretend there are any definitive solutions. In fact, poststructuralism asks us to work toward suspending that yearning. So, while I do not attempt to provide "answers," I do want to provide analyses that serve to spark new ways of thinking about the policy reports of university women's commissions. Developing an awareness of dominant discourses provided by commission reports and the ways in which these discourses manifest in particular subject positions may serve as a useful starting point.

Considering ways in which qualitative and quantitative data may produce different effects provides another angle through which to consider the discursive effects of commission reports. While all commission reports examined for this study provide a blend of qualitative and quantitative data, some lean more strongly on one than the other. For instance, the 1992 *Report of the President's Commission on Women* from The Ohio State University is highly qualitative, whereas the *Women at the University of Michigan Volume III: A Statistical Report on the Status of Women Students, Faculty and Staff on the Ann Arbor Campus* is primarily quantitative. As I discussed in chapter four, qualitative data was incorporated more often by reports offered since the late 1980s when the access discourse shifted from entree to a focus on affirmation. Yet, a discourse of representation remains strong throughout the three decades of reports I examined and this discourse is often represented by both qualitative and quantitative data.

According to President Vest at MIT when asked why administrators at that institution were reportedly so willing to accept the findings of the *Study on the Status of Women Faculty in Science*, he replied “It’s the scientific mindset. Give us convincing data, and we go with it” (Hopkins, 1999). Given the recent heralding of the “success” of this particular study, it seems pertinent to consider this claim, bearing in mind however, that what is “convincing,” is discursively mediated and context specific. The following comments of an MIT commission member reflect this:

Looking back on what have learned, I wonder now if there could be a better place for a social revolution to begin than at an institution of science and learning. Perhaps the ability of a handful of science professors to *quantify* gender bias, and the willingness of a few MIT administrators to support their findings, will help open the way to true equality in the workplace [italics added] (Hopkins, 1999, p. B5).

This sounds quite promising, but as Hopkins also points out “the committee recognized that [their] reforms could easily be undone if Dean Birgeneau and many of the committee members were to leave the school” (p. B5).

Discursive effects are impossible to predict. However, it *is* possible to consider ways in which data presentation may influence the types of discourses taken up and re/produced through commission policy reports. For example, the access discourse of representation is often carried through quantitative data display, while the femininity discourses of distress and dependency are typically carried through qualitative data. I am not making the claim that one type of data is likely to be more helpful for achieving commission goals. I am suggesting however that commissions would be well served to consider the ways in which the reliance on particular types of data may influence the discourses emphasized, and in turn, the outcomes produced, by their reports.

Commissions for Who?

Thinking carefully and more creatively about the membership composition of women's commissions and the power differentials operating within them may serve as another avenue through which to consider discourses and outcomes of commission reports. If university women's commissions intend to identify themselves as such, it is incumbent upon them to do more to reflect perspectives and interests of women who are not faculty or professional members of the campus community—the majority of women working on campus and women students. The findings of my study indicate that commissions do little to accomplish this. They may have the best of intentions toward enhancing the status of all women working and studying at their institution, but the dominant discourses reflect views of faculty and administrative women primarily.

Recognizing the power differentials operating within commissions, these groups must do more to consider how to acknowledge this and work to reduce the unintended consequences—the marginalization of perspectives and needs of those women whose voices are not adequately represented by the dominant discourses taken up in commission reports. Promoting and supporting the collective organizing of women working in the lower ranks and women students at the institution might be one approach. Another approach might be for commissions to organize the production of separate and distinct reports each focusing on a different constituency of women at the institution. Bearing in mind however that such structural changes are likely to be of little consequence if the discursive constitution of the reports is not considered.

Discoursing Difference: Conceptual Considerations

A problem with the discourse of difference that emerges from the text of university women's commission reports is that it generally fits into predominant thinking about identity as a framework of static categories. This then works to support policy strategies that rely on data collection techniques and proportionate representation claims to measure equity in terms of quantifiable variables. Further, these quantifiable category schemes are typically undergirded by dichotomies that often serve to reinforce particular centers/margins and insider/outsider positions. Unfortunately, these configurations too often contribute to reinscribing prevailing systems of inequity. University Women's Commission Reports represent the culmination of many months, and often years of collaborative work (Blum, 1991; TenElshof, 1973) on the part of committed staff, students and faculty. Yet, despite the magnitude of these efforts and assuming the best of intentions on their part, university women's commission reports are likely to tacitly reinforce the inequity they seek to change. This is due, in part, to the failure of the reports to challenge unity and coherence in the framing of identity. We must work to reconfigure narrow and limiting positions that language constructs for us. As Phelan (1991) argues, transformative change will only take place when we "speak and act in ways that do not fit in" (p. 138).

Maria Lugones (1994) calls upon feminists to reject the "purity" logic, which undergirds controlled, categorical, homogenous, hierarchical, one-dimensional and institutionalized understandings of identity. Drawing upon the work of Gloria Anzaldua, Lugones calls for theorizing which disrupts purity and incorporates the "festive resistance of curdling and living in the borderlands" (p. 477). Applying this concept to university

women's commission documents would entail the reconfiguring of sex, gender, race, sexuality and other identity categories to evoke more fluid, multiplistic, ambivalent and transformative meanings.

The move toward analyses that emphasize local, specific and discursive constitution of subjects is shared by West and Fenstermaker (1995) in their essay entitled "Doing Difference." In this conceptualization of difference, the authors contend that identity categories are not essential traits, but are ongoing processes that are "accomplished in interaction with others" (p. 21). Such an understanding requires attention to the emergence of these accomplishments in the context of social relations at a local level. This conceptualization coincides with discourse theory's contention that subjectivity is multiple, shifting and contradictory. If difference is an active process, then identity categories must be understood as transitory rather than essential and static.

If the predominant discourse of difference emerging from the text of commission reports is one that is likely to support existing inequities, then new ways of thinking about identity and difference are needed to disrupt the status quo. How then can university women's commissions and the reports they produce become more disruptive and hence, more effective instruments of change? It seems that this is an exceedingly important question, especially in the face of recent and continuing efforts to rollback gains made through affirmative action. If we understand commission reports as part of a larger body of official text that not only records, but also actively contributes to shaping institutional culture, then university women's commission reports can also be understood as a source of opportunity for transformative change.

I have drawn on scholarship related to difference to present possibilities for helping to expand limiting notions of difference which often undergird thinking that shapes equity-related policy and practice. Reconceptualizing identity and difference in ways that convey its discursive constitution may serve as a starting point for university women's commissions to become more effective in achieving their goals. Based on the findings from this study, it is clear that university women's commissions need to continue efforts to avoid the homogenization of women as a category and work to acknowledge and convey multiplicity and fluidity of identities when articulating policy problems and solutions.

The findings of this study also support deCastell and Bryson's (1997) contention that gender equity is "conceptually contested terrain," (p. 98) and that the uncritical acceptance of policy problems and solutions like "gender equity" may serve to undermine the emancipatory goals guiding commission work. University women's commissions need to question assumptive concepts embedded in their policy-making efforts. Taken-for-granted terms like gender, equity, diversity, safety, outreach, must be critically examined in an effort to uncover the range of conceptualizations and potential consequences of their usage. Further, when dealing with questions related to gender, race, class, and sexuality, the goal of such conceptual work should not be to arrive at new and improved categories. Rather, the findings of this study point to the need to resist the appeal of static frameworks and strive to formulate policy recommendations based on configurations of identity that are provisional rather than definitive. I am suggesting that women involved in policy-making efforts do more to acknowledge how dominant discourses of gender, whiteness, heterosexuality, and professionalism constitute subject

positions and privilege particular perspectives. Recognizing how we are discursively positioned through policy may be a viable means of interrupting static category schemes that often undergird thinking that guides inequitable practices.

Relatedly, deCastell and Bryson (1997) suggest that efforts toward advancing institutional gender equity need to begin with women themselves setting the terms and conditions of their participation. Based on the findings of this study, I concur with their claim that women need to transform the space in which equity work is typically negotiated by “taking ourselves seriously in terms of our own. . .gendered, raced, and classed identities and material positionings within the context of so-called emancipatory discourses” (p. 100). Women involved in what is intended to be emancipatory work need to be self-reflexive. By this, I mean participating in a process of reflection, critical examination and analytic exploration of one’s own role in the policy-making process (Fonow & Cook, 1991; Lather, 1991a; Reinharz, 1992). Feminist reflexivity provides an imperative for the researchers/policy-makers to acknowledge, reveal and label their own values and be held accountable for their interpretations (Gill, 1995).

While I am aware that many women are fully engaged in this process, we must continue to do more to work together and hold each other accountable for developing a critical awareness of our subject positions. White women involved in commission work need to take responsibility for recognizing their whiteness and how the discursive shaping of racial privilege has material consequences and contributes to their assumptions about the status of women in universities. As Weedon (1999) contends, “to recognize the social and cultural status of the category ‘white,’ which most often seems natural to white people, involves conscious effort on the part of white women” (p. 176). Faculty and

professional women must be conscious and critical of their positional power and how that power can contribute to shaping a discourse of difference that may exclude vast numbers of primarily working class women whose issues are not adequately understood or represented. Further, women's commissions must do more to foreground sexuality and interrupt heterosexist assumptions that may undergird their policy-making efforts.

For some, these recommendations are offered as a starting point, for others, they are a challenge to sustain ongoing efforts. I have focused on the importance of shifting discourses and changing predominant ways of thinking about difference among women because new ways of thinking are likely to bring new possibilities for practice. Women involved in commission work are engaged in policy-making efforts that may have potentially far-reaching consequences in higher education. Yet, even when we understand university women's commission reports as a potential site for contributing to transformative change, the pragmatics of implementing a disruptive approach—an approach that does not “fit in” is another matter altogether. Those committed to reconceptualizing predominant ways of understanding women in relation to the university and difference among women are faced with the risk of not being heard or being systematically silenced when they attempt to present policy problems and solutions in ways that do not “fit in.” A discursive approach is significant in this regard as it provides a way of understanding policy shifts at the level of cognition (Katzenstein, 1998). Finding ways to provide discursive interruptions that can somehow be sustained amidst their enmeshment in a web of dominant discourses is a serious challenge that continues to face those involved with university women's commissions and other groups invested in promoting equity in higher education.

While the findings of this study contend that university women's commission reports contribute to discourses that may in fact reinforce the status quo, this conclusion is not meant to negate the value of the work that university women's commission have done and will likely continue. Rather, it is meant as an opportunity to re/evaluate work-in-process and to consider the limits and possibilities of such efforts. The findings from this study, then, provide an opportunity for women's commissions, and others involved with equity policy initiatives, to work toward more effective policy-making by re/considering ways in which the discursive shaping of policy may have unintended consequences and may ultimately undermine their social and political goals.

Where to Go from Here: Possibilities for Further Research

This study of the policy discourses of university women's commission reports provides a jumping-off point for further analysis related to women's commissions as well as the discursive shaping of equity-related policies in higher education and other arenas. While I do not necessarily see related research following any particular trajectory with my study as a starting point, I am hopeful that it might fuel thinking for multiple and diverse research initiatives as did the many studies that sparked my interest in bringing this project to fruition. I believe there are several possibilities in which inquiry could proceed and which merit further elaboration here.

One of the more obvious possibilities for further inquiry is to extend this very study by examining more policy reports developed by women's commissions (or similarly situated groups) at different types (i.e. private, public, liberal arts, religiously-affiliated, historically black, community colleges, comprehensive, elite) of postsecondary institutions. As Katzenstein (1998) has pointed out, "institutions do more than structure

people's daily routines; they also assign value to what people do, and they shape the very self-definitions people come to hold" (p. 33). Variations in institutional culture in higher education have been documented (Tierney, 1990; 1991) and thus provide an imperative for considering how institutional differences in postsecondary institutions may be implicated in the discursive constitution of subject positions produced through university women's commission policy reports.

While my study describes the discourses provided by policy reports of women's commissions, another avenue for further inquiry involves the examination of the *process* by which these particular discourses (rather than others) came to be taken up and provided by the commission reports. Such an analysis involves grasping "the interactions (and disjunctions) between different sites or levels in the policy process" (Shore & Wright, 1997, p. 14). Such an endeavor is highly focused on context and would likely incorporate intensive analysis of secondary materials (as described in chapter three) as well as data from interviews with past and current commission members at the focus institutions. This approach would provide important insights about the ways in which particular discourses coalesce to define policy problems and solutions and come to appear as if they were the only ones available.

I am also hopeful that this study might prompt the use of policy discourse analysis as a method for analyzing other policy initiatives. As Shore and Wright (1997) contend, "policy increasingly shapes the way individuals construct themselves as subjects" (p. 4). Policy discourse analysis provides a specific method for identifying the discourses and subject positions re/produced and made available through policy-making efforts. Making the case that policy provides an important focus for anthropological inquiry, Shore and

Wright (1997) assert that “from universities and schools to public agencies and large corporations, policy is increasingly being codified, publicized and referred to by workers and managers as the guidelines that legitimate and even motivate their behaviour” (p. 5). Thus, there is increasing acceptance by researchers across a range of disciplines, not only in the social sciences, but the humanities as well, that policy—and policy discourses in particular, is an important arena for further inquiry (Apthorpe, 1997; Ball, 1990, 1994; Blackmore, 1995; Cruikshank, 1996; Fairclough, 1995; Fine, 1988; Griffith, 1992; Hansen, 1997; Kitzinger & Thomas, 1995; Scheurich, 1994).

Referring to the need for multiple theories to address the scope and complexity of policy analysis, Ball (1994) calls for a “toolbox of diverse concepts and theories. . . .to replace the modernist theoretical project of abstract parsimony with a somewhat more post-modernist one of localized complexity” (p. 14). Policy discourse analysis, a hybrid methodology designed to specifically examine the discourses and discursive shaping of subject positions through policy, provides an enhancement to the policy analysis toolbox. I am hopeful that policy discourse analysis can contribute to further research initiatives, including my own, that will work to open up space for thinking differently and in the process, contribute to constructing more equitable practices in social relations.

APPENDIX A

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APPENDIX B

This appendix provides contextual information related to the University Women's Commission Reports examined for this study. I have drawn upon information provided by the commission reports to develop profiles of commission work at the University of Maryland, University of Michigan, The Ohio State University and Pennsylvania State University. The majority of information included in each profile was paraphrased or excerpted directly from commission reports.

I developed these profiles in the early stages of coding and analyzing data for this study. My intent in making them available here is to give readers a glimpse of the data in which I was immersed. I have included (as available) data related to the genesis of each commission—their mission statement and/or charge given to them by the University President or other authority. I have also incorporated background information as it was provided by the reports and a summary of the primary issues addressed by the commissions at each institution.

University of Maryland, College Park
A Profile of Women's Commission Efforts
1973-1994

TIMELINE

1973 (December): Chancellor's Commission on Women's Affairs established.

1974 (July): *Status of Women Report* (focus on students) issued from the Chancellor's Commission on Women's Affairs.

1975 (September): Athletics Subcommittee of Commission issues a report: *Title IX Implications for the College Park Campus*.

1978: Chancellor's Commission on Women's Affairs' Committee on Classified Employees issues a report.

1978: Returning Students Report issued by Chancellor's Commission on Women's Affairs.

1981: Chancellor's Commission on Women's Affairs issues a summary report of its activities from 1978-1981.

1983: Personnel Practices Committee of the Chancellor's Commission on Women's Affairs issues report on secretarial/clerical inequities.

1984: Report of the Title IX subcommittee

1986: Chancellor's Commission on Women's Affairs issues report entitled: *The Education of Women Students at the University of Maryland College Park: Issues and Opportunities*.

1989: Study of Part-time Faculty

1989: *Women on Campus: A Status Report* issued by the President's Commission on Women's Affairs.

1990: *Women on Campus: A Status Report* issued by the President's Commission on Women's Affairs.

1993: *Women on Campus: A Status Report* issued by the President's Commission on Women's Affairs.

1994: *President's Commission on Women's Affairs: Summary of Issues 1974-1994* is issued.

CHARGES & MISSIONS

1973 (December): Chancellor's Commission on Women's Affairs established. Consisted of 13 members charged with "addressing concerns of women" (University of Maryland President's Commission on Women's Affairs, 1994, p. 2).

Charges and missions were not listed in the other reports.

ISSUES ADDRESSED

1970s

- women students
- women faculty salaries
- women's athletics.
- safety and security for women
- salary equity, security and flexible work hours
- hiring and promotional practices, nontraditional and stereotyped job classifications, and part-time employment.
- campus child care
- diversity

1980s

- sexual harassment
- study of the classified staff including job titles, longevity, merit system, employee development and upward mobility, comparable worth
- maternity, paternity, adoptive parent leave and leave for care of family members who are ill.
- salary differences
- inclusive language
- athletics.
- sex bias in the classroom and general climate for women
- childcare concerns
- part-time faculty to look at the need for appropriate titles, compensation, departmental integration and professional development.

- salaries, numbers of women in administrative positions, faculty and graduate assistants and other statistics.
- diversity
- child care
- classified staff issues
- eldercare
- inclusive language
- faculty equity

1990s

- numbers of women employees
- gender and race comparisons of salaries
- student leaders
- degree attainment for women in nontraditional fields.
- impact of budget cuts on faculty, staff and students in the College of Human Ecology and seven other departments
- campus administrators by gender and race
- associate staff issues
- employment participation rates and salary differentials, with some attention given to impact of ethnicity. Included special section on women as administrators.
- examined the impact of budget cuts on faculty and staff in one college and 7 departments that were eliminated.

ONGOING THEMES:

Networking: establishing and maintaining liaisons with various campus departments and people. Women's Studies, Office of Present and VPs, Campus Senate, Office of Human Relations, Black Women's council, Multi-Ethnic Student Education, Public Information, Health Center, Women in Athletics. Also, AAUW branch, NWSA, Feminist Studies, National Assoc. for Women in Mathematics and women legislators.

Status Reports

First produced in 1989 followed by 1990, 1993 and 1994.

Appointing Women

"The commission has always seen an ongoing need to monitor the appointment of women to high level positions" ((University of Maryland President's Commission on Women's Affairs, 1994, p. 5).

Financial Equity

pension plan equity
financial management workshops

Women's Health

Safety/Security

"Safety concerns of women on campus have always ranked at the top of the list"
(University of Maryland President's Commission on Women's Affairs, 1994, p. 7).

University of Michigan
A Profile of Women's Commission Efforts
1972-1996

TIMELINE

- **1972 (February):** Report of the Professional and Administrative Staff Women's Group to the Commission for Women
- **1972 (June):** *Annual Report* of the Commission for Women
- **1972 (December):** Commission for Women Committee Reports issued.
- **1973:** *Office of the President Commission for Women Report* issued.
- **1976:** *Commission for Women* report issued.
- **1978:** *Commission for Women* report issued.
- **1979:** *Commission for Women* report issued
- **1992 (February):** Women at the University of Michigan Vol. I: A Statistical Report on the Status of Women Students, Faculty and Staff on the Ann Arbor Campus
- **1993 (December):** Women at the University of Michigan Vol. II: A Statistical Report on the Status of Women Students, Faculty and Staff on the Ann Arbor Campus
- **1994 (April 15):** The Michigan Agenda for Women Leadership for a New Century Office of the President The University of Michigan
- **1996:** Women at the University of Michigan Vol. III: A Statistical Report on the Status of Women Students, Faculty and Staff on the Ann Arbor Campus

CHARGES & MISSIONS

In January of 1971, President R.W. Fleming appointed twelve University employees to the Commission for Women, which was charged with the review of the Affirmative Action Program, the study of policies and procedures which may contribute to discrimination, and the education of the University community in the subtle nuances of sex discrimination (University of Michigan, 1972, p. 16).

February, 1992: A Statistical Report on the Status of Women Students, Faculty and Staff on the Ann Arbor Campus

This report was prepared at the request of President James J. Duderstadt who asked a committee to produce a report "that will clarify our understanding of where we are in achieving equality for women in the University." Its purpose is to provide an accurate measure of the relative standing of women in the University, to identify areas where inequities exist, and to provide a benchmark for setting goals and measuring continued progress (University of Michigan, 1992, p.1).

1994

The Michigan Agenda for Women is a series of strategic actions aimed not only at gender equity, but also at creating an institution that fosters the success of all women in all facets of University life. Beyond a deep commitment, we need a bold strategic plan characterized by firm goals and actions. Programs will be tested against these goals, and our progress will be accurately measured and shared with the broader University community (University of Michigan Office of the President, 1994, p.3-4).

Goals:

- To create a University climate that fosters the success of women faculty, students, and staff by drawing upon the strengths of our diversity.
- To achieve full representation, participation, and success of women faculty in the academic life and leadership of the University.
- To make the University the institution of choice for women students who aspire to leadership roles in our society.
- To make the University the employer of choice for women staff who seek satisfying- and rewarding careers and to provide opportunities for women staff who seek leadership roles.
- To make the University the leading- institution for the study of women and gender issues.

ISSUES ADDRESSED

1970s

- review policies
- study to see if discrimination really does exist
- educate
- salary inequity for both academic and non-academic personnel

- non-discriminatory treatment of women at all stages of employment
- unique employment problems faced by women

1977-78

- maternity disability to be treated as would any other medical disability under University policy.
- safety
- issues of importance to the secretarial staff
- Equal Rights Amendment.
- women would be looked at as individuals, human beings first
- clericals would be seen as a valuable human resource
- Affirmative action
- status stereotyping
- equal pay for equal work
- equitable representation on decision-making bodies on the faculty administrative positions
- bias against women in admissions, hiring, promotion, access to training, career or academic counseling
- sexist language
- athletics
- support for working parents (childcare, especially in infant and pre-teen; flexible schedule; personal business days)
- career development
- issues related to women and work
- increased availability of childcare
- promoting the image of the secretary as a professional

ISSUES (1980s)

not available

ISSUES(1990s)

- expanded roles for University of Michigan women in higher education.
- increasing the presence and participation of women faculty and staff at the ranks where women are underrepresented with special attention to increasing the presence and participation of women of color.
- ensure that women of color are full beneficiaries of all components of the Michigan Agenda for Women.
- internal periodic assessments of gender patterns in compensation and resource allocation to staff, faculty, and students and remedy identified inequities.

- evaluate and restructure faculty tenure and promotion policies to better reflect the contemporary nature of University teaching, research, and service and the increasing diversity of our faculty.
- opportunities for the full participation of women staff, faculty, and students in decision making processes.
- appointment and retention of 10 senior women faculty over the next five years.
- more women to key University leadership positions (executive officers, deans, directors, chairs and other senior positions).
- career development awards program for women faculty members who make significant service contributions to the University
- program of career development and training for those faculty and staff with potential for academic or administrative leadership roles.
- address the concerns of women of color, including opportunities for staff and faculty advancement.
- special challenges faced by women students of color.
- child care, elder care
- address gender and racial equity concerns
- gender equity in opportunities for varsity competition for men and women
- violence against women
- sexual harassment.
- study of women and gender issues

The Ohio State University
A Profile of Women's Commission Efforts
1971-1992

TIMELINE

- **1971 (March):** Ad Hoc Committee on the Status of Women released the *OSU Status of Women Report*.
- **1975:** Commission on Women and Minorities assigned charge by Board of Trustees.
- **1977 (April):** *Commission on Women and Minorities Vol. I: Summary and Recommendations* issued.
- **1977 (April):** *Commission on Women and Minorities Vol. II:* issued.
- **1977 (April):** *Commission on Women and Minorities Vol. II:* issued.
- **1991:** President's Commission on Women charged by President Gordon E. Gee.
- **1992 (July):** *The Report of the President's Commission on Women* issued.

CHARGE & MISSION(S)

1971

Not available

1977

To study and evaluate current programs for broadening educational and employment opportunities for minority groups and women in all functions and activities of The Ohio State University, including programs specifically designed to meet the needs of disadvantaged students.

To inquire into and report on existing conditions, practices, and policies that result in any form of discrimination against or disadvantage for minority groups and women.

To delineate clearly and specifically the achievements as well as the weaknesses of the University's Affirmative Action Programs, and to suggest appropriate ways in which the University's efforts may be enhanced.

To communicate to the University and its various constituencies the significance and importance of the University's affirmative action efforts, and the need for increased sensitivity in this regard in employment as well as educational opportunities. In addition, to encourage the development and recruiting programs that will enhance educational and employment opportunities.

And, in view of the above, to make such recommendations as in the Commission's view would sustain, strengthen, and improve the whole concept and program of affirmative action at The Ohio State University (The Ohio State University Commission on Women and Minorities, 1977, p. vi).

1992

Charged by President Gordon Gee in Spring, 1991, with producing a plan of action and recommendations regarding a wide range of women's issues, the President's Commission on Women began work by examining more than 100 published reports from other Universities and from groups at the Ohio State University in order to chart the progress or lack of progress women have made at this University, to compare our progress to that of women at other institutions, and to identify key gaps in our data base (The Ohio State University President's Commission on Women, 1992, p. 6).

This Commission is charged to look at the representation, needs, and opportunities for all women at the University. Its focus will be inclusive of family and work concerns of today, and its efforts will be inclusive of students, faculty, and staff. The Commission is charged to produce a plan of a action and recommendations on:

1. A systematic policy review for the institution with respect to render equity;
2. The unmet needs of women at the University
3. The coordination of women's programs and services in this community of scholars;

and

4. An ongoing Commission or office for the coordination of women's issues and policy concerns on campus (The Ohio State University President's Commission on Women, 1992, p. 7).

SUMMARY OF ISSUES ADDRESSED

1971

- admissions procedures for undergraduates, graduates and professional schools-- making sure admissions procedures were not discriminatory
- making sure dental hygiene was also open to men

- counseling and advising
- need for more female faculty role models
- study departments for discrimination
- where are women deterred from future study by individual faculty members?
- recruitment of women students
- recruit more women into high ranking administrative positions
- recruit more women faculty
- salary differences between male and female TAs
- change policies and procedures within personnel to allow for more women to be promoted
- maternity leave questions
- committee assignments
- childcare
- curriculum
- health care services for women

1977

Focus on Affirmative Action as it related to:

- students
- staff
- faculty
- regional campuses
- university governance
- child care
- and, salary equity analysis
- resolution of discrimination complaints
- data collection and analysis
- advocacy for minority and women's concerns
- training and awareness programs related to affirmative action
- monitoring compliance with affirmative action
- promotion and tenure

1992

- create a campus climate that allows women full participation, productivity, and realization of potential.
- value the unique experiences and differences of women in the context of their academic, professional, and family roles.
- the official language of the University changed to gender-neutral.
- the needs of a diverse work force and equitable career progress of women staff, students, and faculty.
- enhance the status, development, and quality of life for women.

ONGOING THEMES:

In a letter to President Gee on September 8, 1991, the Chair of the Commission on Women summed up the Commission's conclusions about campus climate today:

The major and most general finding of the Commission is that the campus climate for women at The Ohio State University is virtually unchanged from that described in the Report of the 1977 Ohio State University Commission on Women. indeed, for women of color, the climate may well have worsened. Women still confront an environment that ignores critical gender differences, places impediments in the ways of women striving to reach their full potential, and fails to recognize and respect women's professional abilities and achievements. (The Ohio State University Presidents Commission on Women, 1992, p. 23).

As noted earlier, a number of major themes emerge from a comparison of past reports on the status of women:

- Sexual harassment is commonplace.
- The campus climate is hostile to women.
- Affirmative Action has been ineffective; efforts are without coordination, and built-in mechanisms for accountability are few and far between.
- The official language of the University is still too often sexist.
- Affirmative Action is not viewed as everyone's business and is not seen as relevant by many.
- Fair and equal opportunity for women to pursue their educations and careers is not the norm.
- A comprehensive centralized data base regarding women, their recruitment, and their retention does not exist.
- Women are underrepresented in key leadership positions.
- Women students are underrepresented in many disciplines and departments.
- The faculty of many departments are exclusively white and male.
- Women faculty are clustered in the lower ranks and underrepresented in upper ranks.
- Women provide more teaching and service than do their male colleagues.
- Women faculty are leaving the university prior to tenure at disproportionate rates.
- Women staff members are clustered at lower levels and at the lower pay grades within levels.
- Inadequate training exists for staff women to assist them in advancing their careers.
- Frequently, women are not provided with annual evaluations and lack information regarding evaluation criteria.

- The number of women students (undergraduate and graduate) has been increasing since the late 1960s in the absence of proportionate increases in women faculty and administrators.
- Women faculty and students receive proportionately less intramural research support than do their male equivalents. (The Ohio State University Presidents Commission on Women, 1992, p. 11)

**Pennsylvania State University
A Profile of Women's Commission Efforts
1981-1994**

TIMELINE

- **1981:** 18 women were appointed by President Oswald to serve on the first Penn State Commission for Women.
- **1982:** *Summary Report of the Pennsylvania State University Commission for Women*
- **1985 (March):** *A Proposal for a Study of the Status of Women at the Pennsylvania State University* submitted to President Bryce Jordan.
- **1985 (October):** Strategic Study Group on the Status of Women appointed.
- **1986 (November):** Strategic Study Group Recommendation Package #1 released.
- **1987 (April):** Strategic Study Group Recommendation Package #2 released.
- **1987 (July):** Strategic Study Group Recommendation Package #3 released.
- **1987 (December):** Strategic Study Group Recommendation Package #4 released.
- **1988 (March):** Strategic Study Group Recommendation Package #5 released
- **1988 (March):** Strategic Study Group Final report released.
- **1989 (June):** *Annual Report on the Status of Women at Penn State* released.
- **1992 (May):** *Report of the Penn State Commission for Women to the Penn State Board of Trustees Affirmative Action Committee.*
- **1992:** *Annual Report of the Commission for Women and Annual Report on the Status of Women at Penn State 1991-92* released.
- **1993:** *Annual Report of the Commission for Women and Annual Report on the Status of Women at Penn State 1992-93* released.
- **1994:** *A Vision for an Equitable University: An Assessment and Update of the Recommendations of the Strategic Study Group on the Status of Women* prepared by the Penn State Commission for Women 1993-94.

- **1994 (May):** *Temure Track Faculty Study Summary and Recommendations* released.

CHARGES & MISSIONS

1981

The Commission for Women was proposed as a vehicle to develop a positive environment for Penn State women, to assist in identifying leadership potential, to sensitize the University community to the importance of role models for women students; and to facilitate the recruitment, retention, and development of women faculty, staff and students (Pennsylvania State University Commission for Women, 1982, p. 1).

The Commission for Women was charged by the President to:

1. Serve as a visible University body whose primary purpose is to contribute to a vital climate for women to achieve academic success;
2. Serve as a central focus and forum for issues and concerns of women at Penn State
3. Serve as a coordinating mechanism and information clearinghouse of programs for women.
4. Serve as an advocate for women's concerns by providing advice and consultation or conducting special studies where appropriate (Pennsylvania State University Commission for Women, 1982, p. 1).

1985

In the fall of 1985, the Strategic Study Group was appointed by President Jordan and the Chair of the Commission for Women, and was charged to conduct a University-wide investigation of the status of women at Penn State and to make recommendations as appropriate. Dr. Kathryn Moore (Professor, Higher Education, and Director, Center for the Study of Higher Education) was appointed Chair of the Strategic Study Group and Dr. Michael P. Johnson (Associate Professor, Sociology and Women's Studies) was hired as Research Director.

The Strategic Study Group identified four issue areas, and subgroups were organized for each:

1. Institutional climate, quality of life, and image
2. Academic program, and services
3. Conditions of employment
4. Recruitment, retention, and advancement opportunities

Each of the subgroups was charged to examine the issues in its domain across all categories of women (Pennsylvania State University Strategic Study Group on the Status of Women, 1988, p. 1-2).

ISSUES ADDRESSED

1983

- developed guidelines for facilitating response by the commission to vacancy announcements for executive, administrative, faculty and staff positions.
- internal promotion
- non-sexist language.
- sex equity
- needs of the "adult returning student"

1985

- improve recruitment/retention of women in nontraditional programs
- sexual harassment
- disparities in salaries between men and women faculty
- underrepresentation
- faculty salaries
- recruitment and retention of women students, faculty, staff and administrators
- equity in salaries and benefits
- dual career couples
- child care that considers single parents' needs
- grievance and advocacy mechanisms
- over and underuse of women on committees
- subtle forms of discrimination
- physical education/rec. facilities
- sexual harassment
- nontrad. career paths
- campus security
- monitoring procedures
- professional develop.
- search process for faculty and administrators
- flex-time and permanent part-time positions
- comparable worth between clerical and technical workers
- assignment of assignment of graduate research and teaching assistants
- contract renewal
- admissions
- advising and counseling
- residence requirements for advanced degrees

- access to faculty development grants
- access to classes and courses of study; access to student employment
- placement services; and women's studies and the curriculum

1986, November

- job assessment and evaluation,
- recruitment of women faculty,
- part-time benefits and compensation
- recruitment of women administrators

1987, April

- family-responsive and flexible employee benefits,
- clerical advancement and development
- retention and advancement of women faculty
- sexual harassment of students

1987, July

- chilly classroom climate
- dual career recruitment and retention
- employee relations and representation

1987, December

- women of color
- sexual minorities
- returning adult students
- sexual harassment in the workplace
- sexual violence against women
- women's athletics
- health services for women students
- family care policy
- women's studies
- curriculum integration
- non-tenure track faculty
- staff exempt and staff nonexempt employees
- leadership share
- advocacy for women.

1988, March

- leadership share
- structure and quality of university worklife
- structure and quality of the academic environment.

1991-92

- tenure track faculty study
- professional development needs of technical staff workers
- women's athletics

1993

- affirmative action and diversity in a time of fiscal restraint
- women's leadership share
- campus climate for women
- the needs of women and their families
- professional development opportunities for women
- mentoring opportunities.
- issues of concern for women and other underrepresented groups

1993-94

- inclusive classroom
- academic support services
- women's athletics
- violence against women
- sexual harassment
- backlash against affirmative action and diversity programs
- students, employees, and visitors with disabilities
- 'chilly' classroom climate issues
- diversity courses.
- faculty research interests
- child care
- climate for women in athletic programs
- women's health care
- services for adult learners and women students
- professional development programs
- educational benefits and promotional opportunities
- promotion and tenure
- women within the central administration.
- mentoring programs
- non-tenure track faculty
- salary
- benefits
- domestic partners.
- flexible work schedules

APPENDIX C

Phase 1

Problems	Solutions	Images (of women)
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Phase 2*

access not enough	improve climate	administrators
lack of advancement	professional development	faculty
athletics	policy	staff
climate	leadership	students
curriculum	enhance funding (programmatic)	athletes
financial/program support	salary equity	family
leadership as problem		difference
salary inequity		victims

*Note: Coded solutions do not necessarily correspond to the adjacent coded problem.

Phase 3--subcodes

access not enough • underrepresentation • overrepresentation • exclusion • isolation • admissions policies and practices • devaluation of women	improve climate • gender-neutral language • Women's Studies/ women in curriculum • safety initiatives • improved medical care • promote awareness of sex discrimination • support non-traditional research • implement women's advocacy administrator • awards, recognition programs for women • support groups	administrators • executives • leaders • managers • role models • faculty • "high ranking" • professional • senior level
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<p>(lack of) advancement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • discrimination in promotion, tenure • over-qualified women • lack of role models • committee appointments • part-time faculty, lecturers 	<p>professional development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mentors/role models • workshops/training • networking • recognition/awards • outreach • conferences • career counseling • sabbaticals 	<p>faculty</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tenure track • adjunct/lecturers • part-time • junior • senior • role models • PhDs
<p>athletics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • inequitable funding • inequitable support • lack of opportunities • recreation (inequitable opportunities and facilities for women) 	<p>policy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improved systems for data collection • sexual harassment • incentives • affirmative action • family-friendly • maternity leave • monitor implementation • spousal placement • Title IX enforcement • part-time benefits • partner benefits 	<p>staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clericals/secretarial • operating staff • classified staff • civil service • technical service • “lower ranks” • part-time
<p>climate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of cooperation • secrecy/exclusion • inflexible work hours • gender stereotypes • insufficient availability of child care • insufficient medical care • poor retention rates • invisibility • workload inequity 	<p>leadership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more women leaders • increased commitment to equity (from current university leadership) • leadership training (for women) • improve accountability (of leaders) • rewards 	<p>students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • undergraduate • graduate • returning/adult • athletes • employed • leaders
<p>curriculum</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • insufficient support for women’s studies 	<p>enhance funding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • collect data • programs to support 	<p>athletes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • varsity • recreational

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • androcentric curriculum • availability • support for returning students 	<p>women</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • child-care facilities • women's athletics • recruiting women faculty & leaders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • coaches
<p>financial/program support</p>	<p>salary equity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improve systems • collect data (to prove that inequity exists) • pay women equitably 	<p>family</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mothers • wives • care-givers • child-bearers
<p>leadership as problem</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of advocacy (for "women's needs") • all male leadership • lack of commitment (to equity) • lack of accountability 		<p>difference</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • women of color • diverse women • mature women • professional • sexual minorities • Black • Asian-American • Hispanic • Native American • lesbians • all women
<p>salary inequity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sex discrimination • definitions of "work" 		<p>victims</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fearful • frustrated • at-risk • scared • isolated • unsafe

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