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CENTERING WOMEN: DISCOURSES AND ENACTMENTS OF GENDER AND PEDAGOGY AT A GIRLS SCHOOL

DISSERTATION

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

By

Betsy Eudey, M.Ed.

* * * * *

The Ohio State University
2001

Dissertation Committee:
Dr. Patricia Lather, Adviser
Dr. Suzanne Damarin
Dr. Helen Marks

Approved by:

[Signature]
Adviser
College of Education
ABSTRACT

This study concerns discourses and enactments of gender and pedagogy by faculty members at A Girls School (AGS - a pseudonym), an independent, single-sex, college-preparatory school serving infants through twelfth graders. I have attempted to describe how discourses of gender and feminism play a role in the pedagogical philosophy and practices of teachers within a single-sex school committed to the education and empowerment of girls. The project involves an ethnographic case study of current teachers including a discourse analysis of institutional documents. The ethnographic case study includes interviews and observations with twelve faculty members during the 1997-1998 academic year. Setting a context for the case study, I engaged in a discourse analysis of archival documents related to institutional mission, long-range planning, and the school’s 1990 decision to remain a single-sex institution. Further, I analyzed texts that were offered as “recommended readings” for faculty, and placed these works alongside additional texts on girls’ schooling and feminist pedagogy.

Based on observations and faculty interviews, the centering of women’s experiences was widespread in both the informal and formal curriculum. The faculty participants attempted to enhance girls’ understanding of women’s contributions, experiences, and challenges, and to create a counter-discourse to traditional sex role socialization. While striving to eliminate discourses of “difference,” these faculty
members also called upon these discourses when attempting to justify separate education for girls.

As observed in institutional documents and classroom settings, discourses of sex and gender permeate the institutional environment, and have direct links to institutional mission and curriculum. While the faculty members in the study generally do not name their teaching philosophies as gendered, the manner in which they teach and the hoped for outcomes all specifically take into consideration their students as females. Discourses of opportunity, voice, empowerment, confidence, and competence permeate faculty discourses related to educational aims. Such discourses are also found in institutional documents, suggesting a shared campus culture. Given these aims, surprisingly none of the faculty participants named their work as feminist, nor felt that the institutional mission included feminist agendas.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am greatly indebted to the faculty, administration and students at AGS for allowing me the opportunity to share in the AGS experience and learn from their examples and insights. Only a small portion of what I have learned is included in this dissertation, and I expect I will be drawing upon this experience for the rest of my academic career. I regret that this project has taken longer than anticipated to complete, but hope that the faculty and administration will still find this document of value as they continue into the institution’s second century.

My doctoral studies at The Ohio State University have allowed me to learn from faculty, staff, and students too numerous to list, but all of whom have shaped my understanding and passions in important ways. I am especially indebted to Mary Leach and Patti Lather for sharing with me the joys of gender studies, qualitative research, post-structuralism, post-modernism, and history, and for providing me with support and encouragement when I needed it most. I also need to thank Gerald Regan for developing in me a joy of philosophy and providing me with the opportunity to teach as a new student of educational foundations. Bob Rodgers must be thanked for all of his support throughout my years at OSU, his willingness to accept me into the doctoral program, and the insight he has offered me regarding student development. Further, Suzanne Damarin and Helen Marks helped me greatly by serving as members of my dissertation committee. Finally, I wish to thank my colleagues in Residential Life and Student Gender and Sexuality Services for making being a working graduate student well worth the effort.

I also want to thank my colleagues at the University of South Carolina Spartanburg for encouraging me throughout my writing process, and helping me to recognize the fruits of my labor.

On a personal note, I wish to thank Dixie and Gwen Eudey for the support they have given me throughout my collegiate and graduate career. I also need to thank Nathaniel Mielke for sticking with me through the long hours of writing and lapses in progress, and for finding ways to keep me sane and happy no matter my progress. Mary Jane and Paul Mielke must be thanked for providing me with a “room of my own” in which to spend countless hours writing without distraction or need. Finally, thanks to my roommates and friends who have provided encouragement, insight, and friendship throughout my graduate years.

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VITA

1989 ...............................................A.B. Psychology, University of California Davis

1992 ...............................................M.Ed., Higher Education and Student Affairs Administration, University of Vermont

1995-1997 .......................................Graduate Teaching Assistant, The Ohio State University

1997-1998 .......................................Acting Coordinator, Women Student Services, The Ohio State University

1998-Present .................................Director/Instructor, Center for Women's Studies and Programs, University of South Carolina Spartanburg

PUBLICATIONS


FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Education
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Focus of the Inquiry

This study concerns the enacted performances and discourses of faculty members at A Girls School (AGS - a pseudonym), an independent, single-sex, college-preparatory school serving infants through twelfth graders. I have attempted to describe the manner in which discourses of gender and feminism have played a role in the pedagogical philosophy and practices of teachers within a single-sex school committed to the education and empowerment of girls. I will be describing the meeting of theory with academic practice, and the reception of feminism and/or gender as educational and/or pedagogical interventions in the school. In particular, the study examines the faculty perceptions of the value of single-sex education for girls, teaching philosophy and methods utilized to support girls’ education and development.

At its core, this project addressed the intersection of gender with schooling. The project includes a discourse analysis of recent institutional documents, and an ethnographic case study of current teachers. In the document analysis I was most interested in the discourses of gender as included in the school’s mission statements and long-range plans, and in the documents related to the school’s 1990 decision to remain a single-sex institution. The document analysis drew upon the school’s archival resources
and is supplemented by school-based studies and interviews with current faculty and administrators. The ethnographic case study includes interviews and observations with twelve faculty members teaching at the school during the 1997-1998 academic year. The interviews focused on the teachers' perceptions of their own teaching and the gendered nature of the institution. Additionally, I observed classrooms, school functions and meetings as appropriate to the research project. I approached this work from a feminist perspective, utilizing qualitative, ethnographic research methods. I expect my study to present one perspective on the institution and its enactment of gender and feminism, and that this perspective will be colored by my own interests and philosophical positioning.

**Why This Project?**

Throughout my doctoral work, issues of gender played a key role in my studies and research. As I began thinking about my dissertation project, I was committed to studying the intersections of gender and education, and to learning more about women’s experiences with schools. My strong interest in women’s history led me to seek a school site at which I could conduct an historical study. When I discovered that a local girls’ school, AGS, was nearing its centennial, conducting a history seemed to hold great possibilities for a research project.

I met with a member of the AGS administrative team to talk about my interests, and to see if there was a good fit between my interests and the site. I had never been inside the school before, and was not altogether certain what I would find. The administrator, who would become my “gatekeeper,” was very welcoming, and shared with me her perceptions of the institution, the archival resources that might be available,
and issues that she felt were possibly rich topics for investigation. As we talked of historical changes at the school, I became especially interested in the administrator’s discussion of the institution’s struggle in the late 1980s to expand school facilities, and the ensuing negotiations with their “brother” institution over shared facilities and coordinated classes. This period was described as a watershed period in which the school affirmed its commitment to girls’ education, and began to focus more intentionally on gender-sensitive and feminist pedagogy. She suggested that because this transition coincided with a wealth of new research on the gendered nature of schooling, it further bolstered the school’s ability to address girls’ developmental and academic needs. She saw this period as strongly influencing the current direction of the institution and enhancing the quality of the AGS educational experience.

I believe I was drawn to this period in the school’s development because the time period matched the time when I was first learning about feminist pedagogy and starting to think critically about women’s education. In the late 1980s and early 1990s I was working as a student affairs educator and completing a Master’s degree in Higher Education and Student Affairs Administration. Throughout this time I was reading works on women’s and girl’s psychological development, women’s leadership styles, women’s educational history, and on girls’ schooling generally, comparing these works with my personal and professional experiences. I found many of the works enlightening and empowering, and others to be representing stereotypical, essentialist perspectives that caused me great concern. As I entered my doctoral studies in 1993, I was committed to pursuing additional studies on women’s education, and to eventually develop a research
agenda on gendered educational experiences. As I thought about this dissertation project, I became very interested in seeing the connections and disconnections to the manner in which AGS faculty were affected by works that shaped my own understanding of gendered education.

The administrator's pride in the institution was clear as she talked about the quality of the teachers and the students' accomplishments. As we talked and toured the school, she showed me the many ways in which she felt feminist pedagogy was guiding the teaching: desks in circles not rows, students working in groups, pictures of women on the walls, and comfortable, informal interactions among the students and teachers. She also indicated classrooms where new teachers had not yet caught on to the culture, and mentioned that one way you could tell when a teacher had been enculturated was a change in the classroom's appearance. I was intrigued by the perception that the physical manifestations signaled a philosophical, pedagogical transformation and I saw this as an interesting area of inquiry. I was also excited to hear that this school was enacting feminist practices, and I soon found myself pondering many questions. Was feminist pedagogy occurring in any of the classrooms? Was there a correlation between classroom appearance and teaching philosophy or style? Was there an institutional culture that was discernible and shared? How would the teachers describe their work?

I was soon aware that I was drawn to two complementary issues, the transitions and commitments in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and the current enactments of philosophical and pedagogical commitments that appeared to be informed by the earlier transitions. The project seemed to offer a combination of history, philosophy, pedagogy,
and gender. When I again met with the AGS administrator and explained my desire to engage in a qualitative study that looked into these issues, she was excited by the direction I wished to go. Because it is important to me to do research that is as valuable to the researched as it is to me, I was pleased to learn that this project was viewed as potentially beneficial to the school. Upon proposing the project to AGS’ administrative team, it was clear that they shared my enthusiasm for learning more about teachers’ classroom practices and teaching philosophies and saw the connection between these and the institutional transitions. The specific focus on discourses of gender and feminism and the use of an interpretivist framework emerged after extensive engagement in the setting and in conversation with the faculty participants and administrative team.

A private girls’ school as a setting for research was somewhat foreign to me, for throughout my schooling I have attended coeducational, public schools. While my personal educational experience has generally been very positive, I also recognize situations in which my gender played a key role in my treatment, comfort, and discomfort as a student. This research project is an attempt to learn more about how teachers in one “successful” school for girls view their work and how their views may add to the perspectives that are currently offered on the best schooling of girls. I am informed by Marcia Westkott’s (1990) statement,

the difference between a social science about women and a social science for women, between the possibilities of self-exploitation and those of liberation, is our imaginative capacity to inform our understandings of the world with a commitment to overcoming the subordination and devaluation of women. (p. 65)
As a feminist researcher, I am looking for feminist actions/inactions in the school environment which expand or constrict the students’ understanding of women’s social positioning and the means by which to increase women’s participation as full members of society. This lens may not reflect the intentions of the participants, but rather my personal interest in gender and schooling. The interactions of my expectations and interests with the participants’ discourses and enactments proved exciting to the project as we negotiated meanings and topics for discussion.

Why A Girls School?

Initially I was drawn to girls’ single-sex schools, and A Girls School in particular, because they are sites where gender, most specifically the female gender, is acknowledged and valued within a broader social context that continues to devalue women’s contributions. Unlike most institutions, girls schools can operate assuming female experiences as normative, and can serve as sites where many gendered assumptions about ability, role, essence, and possibilities are challenged and analyzed. Further, a female-only environment provides a site where girls can take center stage, and where theories on girls’ development, learning styles, abilities, and relationships can be tested outside the gaze of male peers. AGS is an especially interesting site for me because it specifically markets itself as a site where girls are given the support and freedom to excel in academics, athletics, and the arts, and espouses a commitment to the full development of girls. Certainly a lot of research still needs to be done in coeducational schools because that is where a majority of students will be educated, but I think that it is also important to have more information on single-sex environments, and especially those
that are seen as successfully educating girls. Because AGS has received national recognition for its educational excellence, it seems a valuable site for studying teaching philosophy, pedagogy, and mission.

**Why Qualitative Methods?**

Addressing my research projects from a framework that emphasizes openness, meaning, language, and multicausality, qualitative research methods are clearly appropriate. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) generically define qualitative research as multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studies use and collection of a variety of empirical materials... that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individual lives. Accordingly, qualitative researchers deploy a wide range of interconnected methods, hoping always to get a better fix on the subject matter at hand. (p. 2)

For this project, I will be conducting an ethnographic case study and document analysis, utilizing discourse analysis.

**Why An Ethnographic Case Study?**

Vidich and Lyman (1994) define ethnography as “the science devoted to describing ways of life of humankind... a social scientific description of a people and the cultural basis of their peoplehood” (p. 25). Ethnographic methods require the researcher to look at the research site as a culture, with participants acting in ways which both support and undermine the maintenance of the culture. Seeing schools culturally means looking at institutionally-supported behaviors, patterns of speech, beliefs, means of entree and enculturation, rituals, and interactions among members. The study of culture through
both an historical framework and interviews with faculty members provides a context from which to understand teaching at AGS.

I name this a case study because no attempt was made to ensure that the participants represented the total faculty in terms of sex, race, grade level(s) taught, years of experience in single-sex education, or any other demographic categories. The project includes all those who were interested in participating, and as such this volunteer sample can in no way be assumed to represent the faculty as a whole as generally desired in ethnographic research. Even so, the faculty participants in this case study present perspectives that are rarely offered in studies on girls' schooling, exposing areas for further consideration and more comprehensive ethnographic study.

**Why Discourse Analysis?**

Fairclough (1995) argues that all social institutions have a culture, and that members of these institutions develop patterns of behavior and speech that help to maintain the institution. He asserts that Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides "an analytical framework - a theory and a method - for studying language in its relation to power and ideology" (p. 1). This relational component places the analysis of language within a social and historical context, analyzing the manner in which the two constitute, maintain, and modify one another. Although I conducted this study from an interpretative standpoint, I found Fairclough's explanations of "critical" discourse analysis still fit well with my project. A discourse analysis of texts produced in AGS documents, faculty interviews, and observations uncovers patterns of meaning-making within the specific institutional setting. Faculty use of such terms as gender, feminism, femininity, self-
esteem, and voice will be central to the analysis, for these terms are value-laden, political, and often difficult to find consensus in terms of meaning and source. The discourse analysis will explore the manner in which institutional members use these and other terms, and the role they play within the institutional culture.

**Why Document Analysis?**

History provides a context for understanding some of the meaning making that occurs institutionally and individually, for contextualizing some of the discourses that are created and left out, and for showing the origins of institutional practices and commitments. Further, by looking at a major period of institutional transition, a researcher can better understand the institution's culture, and some factors that have shaped the institutional purposes and practices. I have therefore included a chapter in which I examine discourses of gender in archival sources related to institutional mission, long-range planning, and the transitions that occurred in the 1980s and 1990s. The chapter also includes background information on the founding and growth of AGS, and other studies conducted at the school. The document analysis therefore provides a glimpse into institutional history, helping to provide a context for the analysis of the interviews and classroom observations.

**Why an Interpretive Feminist Lens and Not a Critical Feminist Lens?**

My interest in the gendered nature of education is directly related to my political interest in the status of women, and my self-identification as a feminist. As Westkott (1990) suggests, feminists “have stressed the idea that girls and women have grown up and have lived in social contexts that are opposed to their needs as human beings,” (p. 60)
and Nielsen (1990) asserts that feminist standpoints “involve a level of awareness and consciousness about one’s social location and this location’s relation to one’s lived experience” (p. 24). My choice of AGS as a research site drew upon my desire to study teaching within a school that claimed to be aware of the social construction of gender and its influence on girls’ lives.

Nielsen (1990) notes that feminist researchers generally challenge the subject-object separation espoused in more traditional methodologies, and instead see value in engaging in conversation with participants and utilizing the project as a means of mutual benefit. Indeed, it is my appreciation of the faculty at AGS and my desire for mutual benefit that compels me to avoid viewing this project through a critical lens. As a researcher I have conducted this project with the participants, working in collaboration with them to identify salient issues, examine experiences, and explore meaning. This collaboration has direct implications for what Cook and Fonow (1990) deem “concern for the ethical implications of feminist research and recognition of the exploitation of women as objects of knowledge” (p. 73). I began this study aware that prior research had left members of the administration feeling objectified, and I intentionally avoided engaging a critical lens that might replicate a sense of exploitation or devaluation. Further, I wanted to produce a document that “made sense” to the AGS faculty and administration, and therefore embraced an epistemological standpoint that could be reported in a common discourse rather than engaging in a less-familiar critical or post-structural language. Although I have written this document from an interpretive standpoint, I have attempted
to present data in a manner that would allow for a critical reading by those who embrace such a standpoint.

Significance of the Study

I believe that this study provides insight into a particular population that has received little research attention, teachers in independent, K-12 girls schools. While much has recently been written on the gendered nature of schools (AAUW 1992, 1993, 1998; Orenstein, 1994; Sadker and Sadker, 1994), little has been written specifically on the intersection with teaching within primary and secondary settings, and even less within single-sex settings for these grade levels. Most of the literature on feminist pedagogy addresses collegiate environments (see AAUW 1998; Maher and Tetreault, 1994; Shrewsbury, 1993), and gender-sensitive pedagogies are most often studied within coeducational contexts (Lee, 1998; Maher and Tetreault, 1994). Further, as Lee (1998) suggests, the majority of research on private single-sex schooling in the United States involves religiously affiliated (primarily Catholic) institutions, whose mission and student populations have been found to be quite different from those in the small number of independent private schools in this country.

Dissertation studies conducted by Haithe Anderson (1993) and Brenda Arnett Petruzzella (1995) at AGS both provided insight into students’ experiences at the institution, with Petruzzella’s additionally including faculty views on girls’ self-esteem and educational experiences. By complementing these studies with analyses of pedagogy and philosophy, a more comprehensive picture of the institution is available, highlighting the overlaps and discontinuities between perceptions and experiences.
This study is also valuable within the larger educational discussions regarding benefits and uniqueness of single-sex educational environments. The AAUW (1998) has firmly stated that single sex schooling for girls does not necessarily create a positive educational experience, but instead that a variety of factors must combine to foster girls’ success. They argue that the educational mission and pedagogical aims are two important factors that influence the degree to which single sex schooling is empowering for girls. My study of AGS focuses specifically on these issues, especially as they relate to gender.

Finally, as a teacher of educational philosophy and history, I am very interested in the practical applications and influences of educational theory in practice. In this study I am able to explore the manner in which educational theory and research has influenced institutional policy, practice, discourse, and perspective.

Limitations of the Study

Because participation in this study was voluntary, there is no way to know how representative the perspectives offered are of the totality of perspectives available at the site. Given the visibility of myself as a researcher, and the likelihood that participant’s responses would not be able to be kept completely anonymous in the documents written about the study, only those faculty who felt comfortable placing themselves in the public eye would chose to participate. The twelve faculty members who chose to participate in the study are not a representative sample; some disciplines are not included, faculty in the upper school and men are over-represented in the sample, and all participants are Caucasian although a minority of the faculty represent other racial/ethnic groups. While the make-up of the sample does not limit the quality of the case study, it may place limits
on the generalizability of the findings to other settings or indeed to AGS as a whole. However, as a qualitative study, this project is not intended to be immediately generalizable to other settings, regardless of the size or configuration of the sample. I would also caution that this study is not intended to evaluate the benefits or liabilities associated with single-sex schooling in general, or the overall quality of education at AGS. As the 1998 AAUW report on single-sex schooling asserts, categorical evaluations of the benefits of single-sex schooling and institutional standards of quality are complex, requiring the measurement of a multitude of variables, most of which have not been included in this project.

I would have liked to spend more than a year with the faculty, and to have attended a broader variety of classes and institutional events so that an even richer understanding of institutional structures and individual practices and discourses could be included. I greatly enjoyed the time I spent at the school, and the opportunities I had to talk with the teachers about their perceptions and experiences. While more data would not necessarily have provided greater understanding, it might have offered nuances that I missed due to a more limited number of interactions. I also expect that the delay between data collection and presentation of interpretations to the faculty participants may have limited their interest in reviewing the dissertation draft and offering feedback on the work. While I believe that the study sufficiently meets the standards of sound research, had I had the opportunity to increase my engagement at the site or complete this project sooner, I would have done so.
Organization of the Dissertation

I have chosen to break with the traditional organization of a dissertation, for the traditional means seemed to constrain the readability and meaningfulness of the text. Immediately following this introduction, I will offer an account of the research methods undertaken, a topic usually addressed in the third chapter. My reasoning is simple: after exploring the methods used, the structure of the remaining text is understandable to a non-specialist audience. The ethnographic methods utilized include discourse analysis that extends to both the interviews as well as “documents” of importance to the institutional context. This being the case, texts included in the general review of related literature (the traditional chapter two) also serve as a form of document analysis for the project. By reordering the chapters, I have placed the more general literature review, which situates the project among/alongside related works, next to an analysis of institutional documents. These chapters are followed by an analysis of interviews and observations conducted with twelve of the school’s current teachers surrounding their perceptions of single sex schooling and the role of AGS, teaching philosophy and enactments related to gender. The final chapter will offer concluding remarks regarding the significance of the study and possibilities for future research.

Summary

This project involves an examination of the intersections of gender and teaching at A Girls School. I have briefly explained my choices to combine a document analysis and ethnographic case study, and to engage in qualitative research viewed through a feminist lens. Further, I have examined the significance and limitations of the study, and clarified
the organization of the dissertation document. As noted above, the next chapter will include a detailed description of the research methods utilized in the study, providing background information before beginning the exploration of teaching philosophy and methods at AGS.
CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY: ETHNOGRAPHY AND DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

This chapter explores my positioning as a researcher at A Girls School, and the overall design of the study. I will describe the site and sampling selection, methods, data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethics of the project to provide a clear picture of the dissertation design and execution. As mentioned previously, this project involved a qualitative study utilizing discourse analysis of archival resources, texts on girls’ schooling and development, faculty interviews and classroom observations.

Framing the Research

Throughout the development and enactment of this project I struggled to situate myself methodologically. This struggle is not so much one of ideology, but of situating myself in a manner that provided a rich analysis of the data while conducted in a manner that is understandable and meaningful to those participating in the study. I entered the site from a positionality that was both post-positivist and feminist, but then vacillated among desires to enact interpretive, critical, and post-modern modes of analysis. I came to see that although each of the modes of analysis would indeed provide the rich analysis I was seeking, the interpretive mode was the most likely to be fruitful in supporting and enhancing the connection between the participants and the project.
While I may later decide to revisit this data from either a critical or post-modern mode of analysis, my core commitments as a researcher are to post-positivism, feminism, and also naturalistic research methods, and these have remained in tact throughout the project. According to Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) “for positivism it is the discovery of universal laws, or at least explanations of particular phenomena framed in terms of universal laws, that is the goal. For naturalism, on the other hand, the only legitimate task is cultural description” (p. 19). Recognizing the frequency with which women’s (and non-majority) experiences have been negated from or homogenized within theory (Code, 1991), I have grown suspect of universal laws, and have come to appreciate descriptive works that present “slices of life” which may be overlooked in a project seeking only normative experiences.

Feminist Positioning

Central to my research is my self-identification as a feminist researcher. Referencing Eichler (1986) in a chapter on feminism and research, Virginia Olesen (1994) notes that for feminist researchers,

it is important to center and make problematic women’s diverse situations and the institutions and frames that influence those situations, and then to refer the examination of that problematic to theoretical, policy, or action frameworks in the interest of realizing social justice for women. (p. 158)

Inspired by works commissioned by the American Association of University Women (for example, AAUW, 1992; Orenstein, 1994; Sadker & Sadker, 1994), I have a strong desire to explore gendered experiences in education, especially in an attempt to understand ways in which girls and women are educated fairly, supportively, and powerfully. I chose AGS
as a research site because I would be able to address an understudied aspect of girls’
education.

Beyond the content of my research, my feminist positioning has an influence on
methodology. As Fonow and Cook (1991) suggest, feminist research involves reflexivity
between the researcher and the researched (texts, individuals, settings). In this manner,
the researcher and researched influence one another, leading to understandings and
meaning-making that would be absent in a more distanced or positivist research design.
While not without limitations, I see “researching with” the participants as an important
aspect of this project as we developed trust, and shared understandings and
interpretations.

Ethnography

When I entered the project, the questions I wanted to ask appeared to best lend
themselves to qualitative inquiry, for I was looking for descriptions, explanations, and
interpretations, particularly those offered in the language of the participants. Hammersley
and Atkinson note, “according to naturalism, in order to understand people’s behavior we
must use an approach that gives us access to the meanings that guide that behavior”
(1983, p. 7). Qualitative methods, broadly described, appear to provide the most
appropriate means of accessing the meanings that I desired to expose. Marshall and
Rossman (1995) suggest that generally, qualitative study

entails immersion in the everyday life of the setting chosen for study, values and
seeks to discover participants’ perspectives on their worlds, views inquiry as an
interactive process between the researcher and the participants, is both descriptive
and analytic, and relies on people’s words and observable behavior as the primary
data. (p. 4)
Clearly these methods fit the intent of my study as I am looking for manner in which discourses of gender and feminism are offered by the participants themselves, offered in their own words taking into account their intentions and interpretations.

It was also clear to me that I was looking at a specific institutional culture, and I thus was committed to utilizing ethnographic methods within the qualitative frame, for ethnographic research focuses especially on questions of culture within a particular setting. According to Patton (citing Goodenough),

the critical assumption guiding ethnographic inquiry is that every human group that is together for a period of time will evolve a culture. Culture is that collection of behavior patterns and beliefs that constitute "standards for deciding what is, standards for deciding what can be, standards for deciding how one feels about it, standards for deciding what to do about it, and standards for deciding how to go about doing it." (1990, p. 68)

I looked for the cultural aspects of teaching at AGS, utilizing observations and interviews to gain a sense of institutional culture and its relationship to mission, teaching, and discourses of gender. As mentioned earlier, I name this project an "ethnographic case study" rather than an ethnography because I am not involved in a broad study of the faculty culture at AGS, but instead have included as participants/subjects only those faculty members who volunteered to participate. As noted by Robert E. Stake (1994), "the purpose of case study is not to represent the world, but to represent the case… the utility of case research to practitioners and policy makers is in its extension of experience" (p. 245). I will be looking at discourses as produced and reproduced in the campus culture, but will not assume that the sample represents the discourses of the school culture at large.
(Critical) Discourse Analysis

Based on my knowledge of institutional culture, I expected that an important aspect of the study was the language used by the institutional agents to describe, define and create their school environment. I entered the site especially interested in discourses of feminism and gender, looking for the "network of meanings" of the terms and ideas expressed by the teachers as they relate to issues of gender and feminism. I decided to utilize discourse theory, and more specifically "critical" discourse analysis as defined by Fairclough (1995). Discourse theory looks at the way words are used to describe and express ideas and experiences, construct meaning for the individual, reflect the culture of the individual and/or institution, and construct a sense of unity or disunity to others. Best and Kellner (1991) note that discourse theory assumes that "it is language, signs, images, codes, and signifying systems which organize the psyche, society, and everyday life" (p. 27). In this study of AGS teachers, I looked at the discourse surrounding "how and why they do what they do" analyzed alongside observations of their work to gain insight into further meanings of their "words and deeds" and to compare this alongside/against other representations of feminist and gender discourse.

My sense of discourse analysis is based primarily on Fairclough (1995) as he offers a "critical" approach to analysis. Although I chose not to approach this project from a critical theory perspective, I find that Fairclough’s work informs my interpretive work in a manner that extends the depth of interpretation beyond more traditional explorations of discourse analysis. Describing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) he notes, "my view is that ‘discourse’ is use of language seen as a form of social practice,
and discourse analysis is analysis of how texts work within sociocultural practice. Such analysis requires attention to textual form, structure and organization at all levels” (p. 7).

He defines critical discourse analysis as “integrating (a) analysis of text, (b) analysis of processes of text production, consumption and distribution, and (c) sociocultural analysis of the discursive event (be it an interview, a scientific paper, or a conversation) as a whole” (p. 23). In this study, the “texts” I analyzed include written documents, interviews, conversations, and observations of classroom teaching within the context of the institution. As Fairclough notes, “texts are constituted from other already produced texts and from potentially diverse text types (genres, discourses)” (p. 2). This statement addresses the historicity of text and discourse; what is said and thought in the present is constituted from/among past interactions and experiences with texts and discourses both within and without the specific social context of the current institutional setting.

Describing the method of CDA, Fairclough offers three levels of analysis, “The method of discourse analysis includes linguistic description of the language text, interpretation of the relations between the (productive and interpretative) discursive processes and the text, and explanation of the relationship between the discursive processes and the social processes” (p. 97). Lisa Weems (1997) notes that Fairclough’s attention to social processes emphasizes the historical context of discourse. She notes, “while CDA emphasizes the variable aspects of discourse (the polysemy of texts and the historical variability of discourse), CDA also insists on the relative stability of discursive formations. The ‘order of discourse’ are marked by and produce relatively stable power arrangements” (p. 7). This interplay of current textual practices within the personal,
institutional, and a broader societal context necessitate an historical analysis alongside the ethnographic study.

Central to Fairclough's view of social institutions is the existence of "ideological-discursive formations" (IDFs) that are affiliated with specific groups or sub-groups within an organization or institution. "There is usually one IDF which is clearly dominant. Each IDF is a sort of 'speech community' with its own discourse norms but also, embedded within and symbolized by the latter, its own ideological norms" (p. 27). Within AGS, I believe the administration, teachers, trustees, and students operate within overlapping IDFs, with those of the school leadership (administrators and at times trustees) providing the publicly espoused IDF. Among others, the discourses of gender, femininity, feminism, self-esteem, voice, fairness, safety, and equity, have informed my research, as well as the texts offered through my interviews and observations at AGS.

To me, what is most interesting about IDFs is the development of "taken for granteds" which gain the authority of "knowledge." In this study I have attempted to expose the "taken-for-granteds," exploring what individual teachers mean by terms that on their face appear compatible, but upon exploration offer different meanings. Fairclough suggests that distinctions between "knowledge" and "ideology" become blurred and distorted within institutions, and thus a goal of critical discourse analysis is the "denaturalizing" of language, exposing assumptions and "taken-for-granteds" and evaluating structural impacts of conflations of knowledge and belief. However, it is often difficult for the researcher to avoid becoming "unconsciously implicated in the reproduction of ideologies" (p. 45) even when intentionally working to uncover them.
The link between IDS and speech is expanded as Fairclough further addresses the spoken word. He states,

Verbal interaction is a mode of social action, and that like other modes of social action it presupposes a range of what I shall loosely call ‘structures’ - which are reflected in the “knowledge base” - including social structures, situational types, language codes, norms of language use. Secondly, and crucially, that these structures are not only presupposed by, and necessary conditions for, action, but are also the products of action; or in a different terminology, actions reproduce structures. (p. 35)

He continues, noting

it is... necessary to see the institution as simultaneously facilitating and constraining the social action... of its members: it provides them with a frame for action, without which they could not act, but it thereby constrains them to act within that frame. Moreover, every such institutional frame includes formulations and symbolizations of a particular set of ideological representations: particular ways of talking are based upon particular ‘ways of seeing.’ (p. 38)

Fairclough suggests that individuals are generally unaware of the ways of seeing and talking unless they are intentionally subjected to scrutiny. Although more interpretive than critical, this dissertation project strives to uncover the structures that have shaped discourse and expose their possible influences on the teacher participants.

While I am at best a novice reader of the works of Michel Foucault, I see some strong similarities between Fairclough’s discussion of structures, and my developing sense of Foucault’s concept of “archaeology,” and the uncovering of “grids of intelligibility” as offered in the History of Sexuality, Volume I. Providing a detailed examination of the development of Foucault’s archaeology, Ferguson (1995) states,

Archaeology examines the regularities of the various systems/forces that are interacting, making it possible to better understand practices... Using Foucault’s vocabulary, archaeology allows for the examination of discourse and its relationship to the non-discursive environment... archaeology is an attempt to
understand how discourses are developed and how discourses place constraints on thought and behavior. (pp. 10-11)

Ferguson continues by noting,

His [Foucault's] method of analysis opens new interpretations by offering alternative ways of seeing the objects of study... at the heart of Archaeology is the study of what Foucault calls discursive formation which is a means to examine the space between practices and rules or between the history of ideas and empirical positivism. (p. 15)

Whether addressed through the lens of Fairclough or Foucault, it is clear that research into the interrelatedness of structures, beliefs, perceptions, and discourses is a rich area of analysis.

**Institutional Context**

As noted earlier, Fairclough's sense of the historical influences on present discourses and texts suggests that a thorough analysis cannot be completed without the inclusion of some “historical” data in order to expose context. To this end, Chapter Four opens with a very brief description of the founding and growth of AGS, followed by discourse analyses of the institution's long-range plans and its struggle to address issues of expansion and growth as the institution's “brother” institution (CPS) did the same.

The documents were primarily obtained through the institution's archives (see Appendix A), and the data supplemented by studies conducted at the school and interviews with institutional members. Read alongside the literature review and analysis of interviews and observations, the document analysis provides additional insight into the school context and the formation of discursive structures, IDF'S, meanings, and practices.
Research Design

My study examines teaching at AGS. My aim is to describe the beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes related to teaching within an all-girls, college-preparatory, independent, private school. I describe and explain that which occurred in the natural setting. I use ethnographic methods including interviewing, observing, and analyzing documents to gain insight into curriculum, methods, philosophy, goals, and history. I use discourse analysis as my overall analytic strategy, foregrounding the data from the site and the insight generated thereby.

Site and sample

For my site I selected an independent, private, all-girls, K-12, college preparatory school in the Midwest. This institution was selected for many reasons. First, when I began my search for a research site, I was predominantly interested in conducting an historical study of a girls school. I intended to research the development of curriculum and educational philosophy over time. AGS became a desirable site for this project, for it was nearing its 100th anniversary as a single-sex school. Upon contacting the school and meeting with a member of the administration, I learned much about the institution and the potential for research. After several meetings it became clear that while my initial interest in conducting a longitudinal history could prove to be an interesting project, the more contemporary question of present philosophical and curricular practices emerged as a more beneficial project for both the institution and me. Through my research, I would be providing the school administrators and faculty with an examination of its espoused ideologies and pedagogical practices which they could consider as they plan for the
school’s future. Because I believe strongly that research should be done with institutions, not on them, I felt that selecting a topic of interest to institutional members would enhance the value of my project. Because it seemed that both the school and I could benefit from this research project, AGS appeared to be a desirable site.

Another benefit of AGS as a research site was its geographical location. The school was close enough to my home that I could maintain my current employment, attend classes, and still spend a significant amount of time at the research site every week. Had the school been further away, my engagement with the teachers would have been more limited, and my data less rich. Further, its close proximity allowed me to visit the campus at many different hours of the day, thus increasing the diversity of experiences I could observe.

Additionally, AGS had shown a willingness to participate in research projects in the past, and had generally developed a positive relationship with my doctoral institution. Many of the school’s teachers had attended classes at the University, and were familiar with faculty with whom I worked. This relationship initially allowed me greater credibility and access as a researcher. While engaged in the early stages of my research at AGS, members of the administration and I came to discover that a prior project conducted at the school was not completed to the satisfaction of the institutional leadership. The desire to avoid such a situation in the future led the administration to develop clear guidelines for participating in research projects, and led me to select a methodology that might assist in repairing relations between my University and the school. I regret that I was unable to complete this project within the time frame I had initially negotiated with
the administration, for my delays might also have harmed the administration’s willingness to trust researchers from the University. Although these are issues that later influenced the project and may effect future research at the school, at the time of my site selection I was warmly welcomed and encouraged to begin work.

Finally, I was drawn to AGS because of its strong reputation as a K-12 school. It has received the highest possible accreditation, its students perform well on standardized tests, students are admitted to four-year colleges at a near 100% rate, enrollments are high, retention is high, and community and parental support is high. By measures most often looked at to determine the “success” of a school, AGS would be rated highly successful. Through analyses of observations and conversations, I hoped to gain insight into the pedagogical interventions that contribute to the positive academic outcomes.

I conducted the majority of my research during the Autumn Term of 1997, and completed interviews and observations as needed in the Spring Term of 1998. A major concern for me was confidentiality, for the school is relatively small and close-knit, and my presence as a researcher would be highly visible. I wanted to ensure the anonymity of sources while also being able to include the “voices” of the teachers. At the same time, I wished to include a diverse group of teachers in order to gain insight into the range of methods and perspectives that have proven successful within this school setting. I decided to interview and observe as many teachers as were willing to participate, and to be up front with them about my concerns regarding anonymity/confidentiality. While introducing my project at a faculty meeting (August, 1997), I requested participation in the study and discussed my desire to work collaboratively with the teachers in
determining the display of ideas so as to remain true to the respondents without disclosing identities. In all, 17 teachers agreed to participate in the project, and among these, twelve were included in the study (the other five either were not able to complete the project, or chose not to participate after indicating initial interest).

Entrée and Commitments

As mentioned earlier, a member of the administrative team served as my “gatekeeper” for this project. This woman helped to introduce me to the institutional setting, provided me with access to archival sources, and facilitated my initial conversations with the full administrative team and faculty. In the first several months of the project, she and I met periodically to discuss progress, although the identities of the faculty participants were always kept confidential.

Although I had entered the site intending to review archival materials, and study teaching philosophy and methods, the structure of the project was still quite loose. Several months into the project, in talking with the gatekeeper I discovered that another study that had been conducted at the school had not been shared with the institutional members. Via the gatekeeper, I made copies of this document available to members of the administrative team, and soon learned that there were many concerns with the project’s methodology and presentation.

The concerns related to the prior study led the administrative team to reconsider entrée to the institution, and to set more concise guidelines for the conduct of research at the institution. The sense of betrayal was most specifically directed at the researcher, but also reflected upon my doctoral institution and upon qualitative research generally. In
order to continue my project at AGS, among other things, I was asked to clarify my project, provide a progress report mid-way through the study, share the document with the faculty participants and administrative team prior to defense, and report the general findings to the entire faculty upon completion. These requirements asked for a greater degree of institutional influence or oversight than is traditionally desired in ethnographic research, however did indeed fit with my feminist desire to "research with" the participants. Through the rest of the project, I worked with the gatekeeper to ensure compliance with the new requirements, and to obtain access to the administrative team and faculty when reporting was needed.

While it might have been easier to discontinue the project in order to select another site where there were fewer concerns about the scope and presentation of my research, I felt compelled to remain at AGS for several reasons. First and foremost, twelve faculty members had already begun participation in the project, and I felt obligated to respect their commitment by seeing the work through to completion. Second, I was learning a great deal from my interviews, observations, and archival studies, and I wanted to see where this would lead. Further, I was concerned that my leaving the project would add to the sense of betrayal the institutional leadership felt regarding qualitative studies conducted by students at my campus. Finally, I would still be able to conduct a meaningful project under the guidelines offered, even if it would influence the choices I made regarding methods and analysis. In the end, I saw my work as involving a "reparative methodology" that satisfied the standards of sound research while also
helping to ease relationships between my doctoral institution and AGS, and hopefully increasing comfort with on-site qualitative research projects.

Methods

Eisenhart and Borko (1993) offer Spindler's 1982 criteria for good ethnography as the standard by which ethnographic research is generally evaluated. Summarizing, they state,

[Spindler's] criteria included the following: observations must be contextualized, prolonged, and repetitive; hypotheses, questions and instruments for the study should emerge as the study proceeds; judgments about what is most significant to study should be deferred until the orienting phase of the field study has been completed; participants' views of reality are revealed by inferences drawn primarily from direct observation and various forms of ethnographic interviewing; sociocultural knowledge - both implicit and explicit - that participants bring to and generate in social settings should be revealed and understood. (p. 50)

In selecting research methods for this project, I attempted to address each of these criteria by utilizing a combination of interviews, observations, and document analysis which offered me multiple exposures to the teachers' discourses and enactments of gender in their pedagogical philosophy and meaning-making within the institution.

Throughout the first months of the Autumn term, I conducted one-hour initial interviews with each participating faculty member (N=12) in which I gained a general sense of the teacher's thoughts on teaching at AGS. These initial interviews provided me with data that informed the direction of my study and gave me initial insight into institutional culture. Over the next several months I engaged in both formal and informal follow-up conversations to gain deeper insight into issues and ideas that arose over the course of the study. Informal conversations were also held with members of the
administrative team (N=4) as necessary to gain insight into institutional history, goals, and programs. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) note, "it is not uncommon for ethnographers to regard solicited accounts as 'less valid' than those produced among participants in 'naturally occurring situations'" (p. 110). While I can understand that words and deeds do not always match, I believe that much can be learned by how people describe their world, and what they choose to offer as data useful to the project. While individual accounts cannot provide a "full story" due to the necessary biases and perspectives that one brings to a social situation, I challenge describing such accounts as "less valid" than the perspectives found in natural environments. I consider the participant's ability to reflect, synthesize and position experiences as equally valuable to research as experiences that are observed as they occur.

This being the case, in addition to interviews, I observed each of the faculty research participants during the Autumn term and into the Spring term (N=61) as useful to the project. I attended classes, meetings, and ceremonies to gain insight into pedagogical discourse and enactments. I only attended events to which I was invited, and held confidential any information that the respondents and/or their colleagues or students requested. Through prolonged engagement and observation, I expect to have obtained a breadth and depth of data that should provide the richness I desired in my descriptive study.

Notes and interpretations from the observations were shared with the participants, and their feedback was requested on questions related to these notes. After the initial one-hour interview, each participant was given interview transcripts and asked to respond
to a set of questions and interpretations I had developed based on the interview. I received verbal responses in follow-up interviews or during class observations, and received some written comments as well. During or after class observations the faculty was very open to my questions, and would often freely offer their interpretations or descriptions of class activities without prompting from me. After completing the initial data collection, it took me nearly three years to complete the analysis. During this delay the faculty and I did not discuss the data or my developing analysis. The participants received a complete draft of the dissertation in March, 2001, and were asked to review the document to ensure that their statements were fairly and accurately presented, and that they were comfortable with the degree of anonymity offered. The faculty participants were encouraged to provide written responses to the document, and/or to meet with me personally to discuss the draft. Sadly, only four of the twelve participants provided feedback, however these four had only editorial concerns with the document, and were greatly interested in the interpretations. In addition to the faculty readings, I received feedback from the gatekeeper, who found the document very informative and felt much could be learned from the project.

By reading data obtained from interviews alongside data from observations, I was able to see areas of congruence and incongruence, and develop new questions that helped to clarify meanings, interpretations, and descriptions. Taken alone, neither the interviews nor the observations would have provided the richness that is possible from the combined methods. The combination of discourses and enactments proved essential to a deep description of teaching at AGS.
Further, I conducted an analysis of documents that were related to the institution's pedagogical commitments and the teacher's activities. For the faculty, this included a mix of course syllabi and lesson materials, course readings, and personal readings. I also looked at institutional publications, meeting minutes, parent and alumni correspondence, community newspapers, and archival materials related to the 1990 decision to remain a single-sex institution. Further, I analyzed those texts circulated to faculty for in-service training purposes and selected texts included in the school's SEED program. As Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) note,

> Rather than being viewed as a (more or less biased) source of data, official documents and statistics should be treated as social products; they must be examined not simply used as a resource. To treat them as a resource and not a topic is to trade on the interpretative and interactional work that went into their production to treat as a reflection or document of the world phenomena that are actually produced by it. (p. 137)

Indeed, Chapter 4 is devoted to the examination of institutional documents for just that purpose. Through the combination of interviews, observations, and document analysis, I sought themes that highlighted the ways in which teachers make meaning of their teaching roles. Looking beyond the manifestations, I used discourse analysis to unpack the language used to describe teaching and purpose, and the degrees of congruence between "words" and "deeds." By obtaining data from these three different methods, I expect to have found a greater richness of meaning than from one method alone.

**Data analysis**

As noted above, the primary focus of the data analysis was conducted through discourse analysis of both verbal and written communications at the school, placed
alongside and against observations conducted within the school setting. Seeking to identify and disrupt the hegemonic structures that normalize perspectives, discourses, and behaviors, the analysis attempts to expose and explore the manner in which the faculty participants make meaning of their work at AGS. Fairclough (1995) states that “the theory of hegemony highlights both how power relations constrain and control productivity and creativity in discourse practice, and how a particular relatively stabilized configuration of discourse practices (‘order of discourse’) constitutes one domain of hegemony” (p. 2). While I address the potentially hegemonic practices within the institution, I am also concerned that my focus on “gender” and “feminism” in this project may have constrained the understanding of philosophy and action that I encountered at AGS. As I pursued questions related to gender difference, political ideologies, and specific teaching styles based on the student population, I question which discourses I helped to privilege, and which I silenced or simply did not hear. Through member-checking I hope that these limitations were mitigated, but I cannot be certain that this occurred.

Fairclough suggests, “textual analysis should mean analysis of the texture of texts, their form and organization, and not just commentaries on the ‘content’ of texts which ignore texture... At issue here is the classical problem of the relationship between form and content” (pp. 4-5). The manner in which discourses are offered, reproduced, supported, rejected, or avoided can be as interesting as the content of the texts themselves, and I was challenged to continually address the form as it may impact the research site, the participants, and myself as researcher. The third and fourth chapters
offer an analysis of institutional documents, texts which are recommended reading for faculty and parents, and the manner in which these shape and reinforce institutional actions.

Central to the study is the manner in which discourses of gender have been used to promote, evaluate, and justify AGS as a single-sex institution and to guide action by institutional members. Fairclough highlights that

Discourse is shaped by structures, but also contributes to them. These structures are most immediately of a discoursal/ideological nature - orders of discourse, codes and their elements such as vocabularies or turn-taking conventions - but they also include in a mediated form political and economic structures, relationships in the market, gender relations, relations within the state and within the institutions of civil society such as education. The relationship of discourse to such extra-discoursal structures and relations is not just representational but constitutive: ideology has material effects, discourse contributes to the creation and constant recreation of the relations, subjects (as recognized in the Althusserian concept of interpellation) and objects which populate the social world. (p. 73)

Through a review of archival documents from the mid-1980s to the present, changes in discourse are readily apparent. When the documents are read alongside the interview and observation data, the relationships between structures, actions, and perceptions become more apparent.

This is supported by Fairclough’s assertion that “discourse practice ensures attention to the historicity of discursive events by showing both their continuity with the past (their dependence upon given orders of discourse) and their involvement in making history (their remaking of orders of discourse)” (p. 11). As AGS addressed issues of expansion, curriculum, enrollment, and mission, the use of texts, both ones they created and ones they cited, effected the understanding of the past and the possibilities for the
future. The language and timing of letters to AGS constituents provides insight into one of the many ways in which one can maintain a sense of control and inevitability of success among continual reformulations of goals and opportunities.

Central to my positionality as a researcher at AGS were my gender, educational history (advanced degrees, all schooling at coeducational public institutions), current professional status (educational theorist with collegiate, but no K-12 teaching experience), feminist perspectives, racial similarity to a majority of the student body (Caucasian), and a variety of issues about which I may not be aware. Fairclough suggests that “social categories which do not have... manifest consequences may nevertheless be necessary to the analysis of a text in the dimension of discourse practice - they may be relevant to the field of practices within which the text is located even if they are not manifestly consequential for the text itself” (1995, p.11). What I was told and what I had access to are linked to my role as a researcher. I may have had access to information that would not normally be shared with others because I have interest in topics that may not be generally discussed in daily conversation. Conversely, I may have been shielded from information from fear of the implications of public sharing of these insights, or perhaps because I had not earned the right of access to certain information.

**Trustworthiness.**

Guba and Lincoln (1989) provide a framework for establishing/verifying/judging the trustworthiness of “fourth generation evaluation” by offering categories of assessment that parallel those of the positivist framework. They note, “these criteria... are called parallel, or foundational, criteria because they are intended to parallel the rigor criteria
that have been used with the conventional paradigm for many years” (p. 233). These traditional criteria are internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity. Guba and Lincoln assert that these traditional criteria cannot be applied to post-positivist evaluation because of the disparate premises of the frameworks. By describing the parallel categories, and illustrating how I might respond to each in my own research project, I will examine the purposes of each in the identification of my research as valuable/credible/meaningful/powerful/good/quality.

Offered as the parallel to internal validity, credibility is the “isomorphism between constructed realities of respondents and the reconstruction attributed to them” (p. 237). It is the strength of the link between what the researcher says went on and what the participants or respondents experienced. While it would be impossible for the researcher to completely recreate the experience of the respondents, the credibility of the research requires that the reconstruction be as true as possible, and that it acknowledges those areas in which reconstruction is impossible. Guba and Lincoln provide six techniques by which to enhance the likelihood of credibility: persistent observation, prolonged engagement, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, progressive subjectivity, and member checks. I will examine each of these as it relates to my research project.

Guba and Lincoln’s first technique is prolonged engagement. I spent an average of ten hours a week over the course of the Autumn term of 1997, and up to five hours a week for several months thereafter meeting with faculty and observing school activities (classes, meetings, ceremonies). I interviewed participants periodically over the Autumn term, allowing all involved to have time to reflect upon experiences, build upon
information originally offered or gathered, and to develop a sense of trust, rapport, and co-responsibility for the project. Throughout this engagement I sought to observe a breadth of experiences that the participants encountered, and to hear them express their ideas in a variety of ways. While still a “slice of life,” the length of engagement enhanced the likelihood that I would identify patterns and themes in the individual’s work. I also expect that the prolonged engagement afforded the development of rapport with the respondents in ways that enhanced our ability to work together on the project.

Second, Guba and Lincoln encourage persistent observation at the research site. While spending time at the school, I observed the participants in a variety of situations. In addition to watching and interviewing teachers, I examined documents that they produced, and policies and practices that they espoused. The use of observation, interviewing and document analysis enhanced the depth of my awareness, and lead to a richness which one method alone would not necessarily allow. The observation in many settings allowed themes to emerge, as well as drew attention to exceptional cases.

Third, peer debriefing offers an “outsider” view on the project. Periodically throughout my research project I had colleagues (n=4) review my notes and tentative interpretations and hypotheses. Having been friends and/or colleagues for many years, yet having quite different backgrounds and academic interests, they were able to (supportively) recognize and challenge assumptions I made, and provide different readings of texts than I may have given my closeness to the data. These colleagues were not chosen to validate me, but rather to challenge my assumptions, question my methods, and encourage me to continue in my pursuits. They served as my sounding board when I
was blocked, and helped me to draw connections when I had become too immersed to see clearly. As I became engaged as an observer, I knew I might become open to new awarenesses as well as blinded by my familiarity. The peer debriefers helped me to capitalize on my insights as well as to see areas of neglect, especially regarding taken-for-granted understandings of terms and the organization of analysis.

Guba and Lincoln's fourth technique is *negative case analysis*. I have acknowledged entering my project with hypotheses, and was committed to continually scrutinizing these hypotheses as the data was collected and analyzed. I looked for patterns, themes, and theories to emerge from the data, but did not expect that each case would fit exactly into identified categories. "Outlier data" expanded the richness of the study by challenging the status quo, and providing alternative perspectives from which to view discourses and enactments. I continued to evaluate and re-evaluate my work until I (and my current debriefer) felt that I have satisfied this check.

*Progressive subjectivity* is offered as the fifth technique. I have kept a journal of my research experiences, tracing the progress of my thoughts and hypotheses, as well as the challenges I faced in my work. I acknowledge that in planning my project I assumed that faculty members would have different goals and means for educating girls, and varied levels of satisfaction with the mission of the institution. As I worked through my project, I needed to check these hypotheses, ensuring that I had not allowed these a priori assumptions to cloud my openness to contradictory data. I allowed my initial assumptions (constructions) to serve as a grounding or staring point for my data collection, but then I continually analyzed and reanalyzed the data to allow it to guide my
further study. The initial assumptions served as a base, but the data itself guided the
direction and growth of the project, and formed the basis of my final reading.

Finally, *member checks* complete Guba and Lincoln’s technique. Each participant
in the study had the opportunity/responsibility to review my re-creation and analysis of
experiences and statements in which they were involved. I conducted these checks on
both individual and group levels since my data collection was conducted in both these
formats. As noted earlier, I provided each participant with written analyses of the initial
interview, and sought feedback on these interpretations as well as others garnered through
the classroom observations. Once the dissertation was drafted, faculty were asked to
review the document and provide feedback taking into account possible changes in
perceptions over the three-year gap between the completion of data gathering and their
receiving the document. Of the twelve participants, two phoned to share their
impressions, and two others provided written feedback on the draft version. I also spoke
on the phone with the gatekeeper regarding the document. I worked with these
participants to negotiate editorial changes in a manner that respected their opinions while
also respecting my interpretations and aims as a researcher. I believe that this process
afforded the respondents an opportunity to better understand their own ideas and
experiences while also seeing them alongside/against the experiences of colleagues. By
our sharing the responsibility for the data, I expect that we will all have learned from this
project and developed a relationship that will enhance the quality of the finished product.

I wish that more of the participants had responded to my repeated requests for
feedback on the draft, not only because it would address my desire for “member
checking," but also because it would have enhanced my sense of "researching with" the participants. Without the constraints of graduation deadlines and the distance between my current home and AGS, I would have liked to have offered more time for feedback, or created opportunities for focus groups or more face-to-face contact with each participant. Because all participants had a chance to review my initial interpretations during data collection, the four (in addition to the gatekeeper) who did respond were wholly comfortable with the content of the document, and all participants had an opportunity to review the entire draft, I feel I have minimally satisfied the technique of member-checking, although feedback from all participants would certainly have been more desirable.

Guba and Lincoln offer the concept of transferability as the parallel construction to external validity. By providing "thick description" of the research site and participants, the researcher offers the reader the opportunity to decide how the study may or may not be similar to others that they may encounter. Guba and Lincoln assert that one needs to "set out all the working hypotheses for this study, and... provide an extensive and careful description of the time, the place, the context, the culture in which those hypotheses were found to be salient" (pp. 241-2). For my study, I looked at one institution, and only a portion of the faculty and staff who work at this school. I also conducted the research during a specific period of the academic year and within a historical context in the development of the school and of theories surrounding single-sex schooling. The institutional size, regional location, gender and racial makeup of the campus community, and numerous other factors influenced the data I collected. At the same time, my
personal positionality necessarily effected the data and analysis, and thus as the researcher I become part of the culture of the study. As I progressed in my project, I worked with my faculty participants and debriefers to identify the salient features that required identification to better set a context for the analysis.

*Dependability* is offered as the parallel to reliability. To ensure the reliability of my project, I used my research journal as an account of the progression of my analysis of data. I recorded in this journal the decisions I made regarding selection of data collection sites, respondents, texts, categories of analysis, exclusion of data, and other salient issues. This journal was made fully available to my debriefers, and utilized to trace the evolution of theories, actions and interpretations. While my final project is the result of reformulations of theories, the data remains available as constants that can be referred to for reference and consultation.

While I have offered information as to how my research design supports Guba and Lincoln’s conceptions of valuable/meaningful research, I am not fully comfortable with the weight that is placed upon these criteria as the basis of identifying or verifying quality/good/useful/correct/valid research. I agree with Scheurich (1996) when he asserts that

> the power function of validity is as a boundary line or as a policing practice. Validity is the name of the policing practices that divide good research from bad... separate acceptable (to a particular community) research from unacceptable research... split emancipatory research from oppressive research... and so on, given one’s epistemological prejudice. (p. 8)

While post-positivism claims that validity is not being sought, but instead trustworthiness, each serves a policing function hoping to ensure ethical processes and...
some degree of “truthfulness” in the works, even if it is clearly understood that “truth” is a social construct rather than a fixed reality.

Scheurich identifies myriad ways in which the use of validity constructs or requires the “other” being researched to be manipulated into something which can be identified as “same.” In my work, I hope I have avoided this push toward sameness, while still providing a study that has salience for me and those involved in the research. The methods I have described above provided me an opportunity to gain rich data, and to allow those closest to the work the opportunity to shape its analysis and meaningfulness. Throughout the project I solicited and incorporated feedback from the participants on my interpretations and areas of interest.

The worthiness of my research should be scrutinized based upon my ability to complete the endeavor that I have named as my project. I observed, interviewed and read. I used my prior knowledge of gender and schooling to guide my questions and thoughts, but did not allow them to overshadow the uniqueness of the situation into which I had entered. During the fieldwork, I attempted to challenge my assumptions and those of the participants as we collectively reviewed data and perceptions of themes and meanings. I have attempted to acknowledge my positioning within the research, and to trouble the opportunities and constraints this placed on me and the project. I do not claim my work as transferable to any other situation, but instead offer it as a description of voices and experiences that may help others to formulate their own questions about experiences in which they are engaged. I have attempted to avoid the “victory narrative” and claim my work only as a slice of life, but one which is rich, and from which one can learn.
**Good research on teaching**

The research that I conducted at AGS did not occur in a vacuum, but rather is in some ways representative of research in general, and of my doctoral institution specifically. If my project is completed ethically and the findings are of interest or value to the participants and institution, institutional members are likely to continue to welcome researchers and perhaps even develop a more positive impression of researchers and projects in general. Conversely, if I fail to meet these standards, I will likely discourage participation in future projects, and will have failed to respect the participants and the school. While the above sections provide standards for evaluating research in general, Eisenhart and Howe (1992) espouse five criteria for assessing good research on teaching that extend the examination of research *within the specific context of education*. These standards are intended to ensure that interactions among practitioners and researchers are meaningful, and not simply activities to lead to credentialing or promotion. The five criteria, explained in more detail below, include contribution to knowledge in the field, the fit between techniques and processes, the effective application of data, value constraints, and comprehensiveness.

The first standard involves the project’s *contribution to knowledge in the field*. The authors state, “research studies must be part of and build upon, some tradition of scholarship - be it scholarship in the area of educational theory, practice, or both. Another way to say this is the study’s (potential) contribution to debates about educational theory or practice must be clear” (p. 95). By placing this study alongside prior research on single-sex schooling, pedagogical style, and girls’ educational
experiences, my study provides an additional story which can expand the understanding of single-sex schooling for girls. Further, given the limited published data on teaching in K-12 girls schools, the study may open up interest in new areas of inquiry.

The second standard looks at the fit between research questions, data collection procedures, and analysis techniques. This standard assures that one does not choose the most convenient or expedient methods, but instead the methods most suited to the type of data which one intends to collect. For the current study, this means ensuring that interviews, text analysis, and classroom observations were the best methods for answering questions related to teaching philosophy and practice. The use of discourse analysis helped to address the nuances of meaning and understanding related to teaching at an all-girls school. As described earlier in this chapter, the selection of qualitative methods, ethnographic study, archival analysis and discourse analysis appears to be the most appropriate means to answer the research questions that emerged as valuable at the site. This links closely to the third standard noted below.

Third, Eisenhart and Howe describe the effective application of specific data-collection and analysis techniques. This standard is specifically related to researcher competence, one's best implementation of methods and techniques. The authors assert that perfection is likely impossible, but that researchers should make clear the limitations of their work, and strive for the best study given the context and skills of the researcher. This standard appears self-evident, for the right methods incorrectly or incompletely utilized will clearly limit the quality of a project. Perhaps this standard is best seen as
addressing the fit between the researcher(s) and the techniques and methods of analysis that best suit the study.

As a fourth standard, the authors next offer the concept of *value constraints*. In a later publication describing the 1992 standards, Eisenhart and Borko (1993) delineate two types of value constraints, internal and external. “External value constraints have to do with whether the research is valuable for informing and improving educational practice - the ‘so what?’ questions.... Valid studies must also be worthwhile” (102). The authors encourage the broad sharing of research outcomes to multiple audiences, ensuring the insights will become part of a broader discussion of the issues in question. I shared draft copies of the document with each of the participants and the administrative team, and am scheduled to present the findings to the AGS administrative team, and then to the entire AGS faculty at one of their monthly staff meetings in Fall, 2001. Additionally, a bound copy of the approved dissertation will be donated to the AGS library, with additional copies given to any institutional members who desire one. In hopes that other educators can learn from and build upon my project, I intend to continue sharing my findings at professional conferences and through publications.

In contrast, “internal value constraints refer to research ethics... they have to do with the way research is conducted vis-à-vis research subjects” (104). As noted below, I have taken care to represent the faculty and the institution in as honest and respectful manner as possible. I have attempted to provide the participants with multiple opportunities to provide feedback on my interpretations and research questions, and to
request modified presentations of data if it appears to misrepresent them or exposes them in ways that are uncomfortable.

As a summary standard, Eisenhart and Howe (1992) offer the category of comprehensiveness that “encompasses responding in a holistic way to the first four standards, balancing them, and going beyond them” (p. 108). I have shown attention to each of the first four standards, but must leave it to others to ascertain my success at balancing and superseding them. Given the time and personal commitments that both the institutional members and I have put into this project, it is important that this project leads to heightened insight into teaching. I believe the that delay in analyzing the data collected will have some impact on the usefulness of the project to the institution as a whole and the participants specifically, however I also believe that the project provides an interesting view of teaching that holds salience over time.

Because prior projects conducted at the school have not all been received favorably, the quality of this project has implications beyond the research findings; a poor study may limit others’ possibilities for research at this site, or may cause institutional members to be wary of any theoretical work related to teaching and girls’ education. I intentionally approached the analysis in a way that would maximize maintaining connection with the participants, using a standpoint that was understandable, while also methodologically rigorous. As noted by my gatekeeper, the concerns with the prior project were largely related to misrepresentations of methods and focus, although they were also concerned with the data presentation. I therefore chose a focus and ideological standpoint that were supported by and meaningful to the institutional members (in
particular the participating faculty), while acknowledging that additional foci and standpoints would also prove interesting and informative.

**Ethics and politics**

I conducted my study only with adults who consented to participate in the research project. I submitted a proposal of my research methods to my university’s human subjects committee, and received approval to conduct this research, and utilized a standard release form for each respondent to complete which verifies the individual’s willingness to participate in the project. Materials were made available to each participant describing the project, the expectations of participants, potential risks and benefits, and the anticipated uses of the data collected. As noted above, each respondent had the opportunity and responsibility to member-check the data and analyses related to his/her experience, and to review the completed project(s) based upon the data. The respondents had the right to have materials excluded or edited if desired.

Additionally, as I negotiated entree to the research site, AGS began to develop guidelines for the conduct of research at the institution. Although I complied with the contract in terms of the conduct of my research, I failed to complete the project within the proposed time frame. This complicated my ability to maintain institutional and participant trust. While my delay in project completion may not have been avoidable, I hope that the disconnection between myself and the participants did not undermine the quality of the study or the willingness of the institutional members to continue to participate in research projects.
The confidentiality of data is a difficult issue for me. I have done all that I can to protect the rights of those who are involved in the study. I have presented the data and analyses in such a fashion as to maintain the confidentiality of sources as much as they desire. However, given the renown of some of the individuals at the institution, and my visibility as a researcher observing and interviewing select faculty members, it is unlikely that pure anonymity is possible. I worked closely with all respondents to ensure that I did not include information in a manner with which they are uncomfortable. At the same time, I did not want to exclude data that provides a rich slice of life because of its controversial nature. The nuancing of the confidentiality issue greatly depends upon the rapport I was able to develop throughout the process and the skill with which I present the data. In general, I believe the faculty participants have felt enough safety within their work environment to have their perspectives cited even when the identity of the participant is discernible by institutional members.

Conclusion

The preceding has described my role as a researcher and the methods I have utilized to conduct my research. While the presentation of this information is valuable, and indeed necessary, I fear that the technical language may have diluted the passion with which I have entered this project. As a feminist researcher, I am strongly committed to exploring issues of women’s (and other oppressed people’s) subordination and devaluation, as well as their liberation and inclusion. As a student and teacher of educational history and philosophy, I am fascinated by the development and meaning of schooling contexts and educational practices, and the intersections of theory and practice.
The methods described above appear to be the best means to answer questions that arose as I, as a situated researcher, entered a specific school site within a specific historical moment. This dissertation reflects those questions and interpretations that I, through my interactions with institutional members, deemed meaningful given the lenses through which I encountered them. My relationship to and influence upon the project must be acknowledged and appreciated, both for what I offered to the project, and the limitations placed upon it by my positioning. The next chapter will provide a non-traditional literature review that combines a textual analysis of works that serve as “recommended readings” for faculty alongside/against texts that have shaped my understandings and discourses related to schooling, gender, and pedagogy.
CHAPTER 3
REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON GIRLS, SCHOOLING AND PEDAGOGY

Among the items received by new faculty at A Girls School (AGS) is a list of recommended readings entitled *Girls and Women, Schooling and Knowing: A Basic Bibliography*. This chapter will provide a document analysis of these twelve recommended readings, examining the themes and discourses presented. The analysis will be conducted by reading them alongside/against additional texts on girls and education that have been especially useful to my understanding of gendered educational experiences. This analysis will therefore serve as a review of literature related to single-sex schooling, perspectives on girls’ experiences in American culture and schools, and gender-sensitive or feminist teaching practices. Looking at the discourses both present and absent from the AGS readings will provide insight into the aims of the institution, and the general understanding of gendered schooling that is a hoped for “common knowledge” among the faculty.

The twelve texts (Table 3.1) cover a range of subject matter, but especially draw upon girls’ psychosocial development and its relationship to schooling. With the exception of the American Association of University Women (AAUW, 1992) report on shortchanging girls, all texts were popular-press books, that received national and
international attention. The views expressed have become part of the common understanding of those with even a rudimentary interest in girls and schooling. While the

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<th>Table 3.1: Recommended Readings</th>
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<tr>
<td>A Room of One's Own (Woolf, 1989/1929)</td>
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<td>The AAUW Report: How Schools Shortchange Girls (AAUW, 1992)</td>
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<td>The Difference: Growing Up Female in America (Mann, 1994)</td>
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<td>Failing at Fairness: How America's Schools Cheat Girls (Sadker &amp; Sadker, 1994)</td>
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<td>In A Different Voice (Gilligan, 1982)</td>
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<td>Meeting at the Crossroads: Women's Psychology and Girls' Development (Brown &amp; Gilligan, 1992)</td>
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<td>Mother Daughter Revolution: From Betrayal to Power (Debold, Wilson &amp; Malave, 1993)</td>
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<td>Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls (Pipher, 1994)</td>
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<td>Schoolgirls: Young Women, Self Esteem, and the Confidence Gap (Orenstein, 1994)</td>
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<td>Women's Ways of Knowing: Development of Self, Voice and Mind (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger &amp; Tarule, 1986)</td>
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<td>You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation (Tannen, 1990)</td>
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recommended readings include no academic articles or professional texts, most are based upon psychological studies conducted within schools or among girls and women. Nestled among the contemporary texts, Virginia Woolf's (1989/1929) *A Room of One's Own* provides the only historical account of the female experience, perhaps one that hints to the conditions available at the founding of the institution.

**Gendered Schooling**

Schooling in America is one of the strongest institutions for reproducing cultural norms, enculturating citizens, and at times transforming society. That schooling has played a large role in replicating and reinforcing gender norms has been widely addressed
The 1992 study *How Schools Shortchange Girls* (American Association of University Women) brought nation-wide attention to the unequal educational experiences of boys and girls in American schools. The report begins, “whether one looks at achievement scores, curriculum design, self-esteem levels, or staffing patterns, it is clear that sex and gender make a difference in the nation’s public and elementary schools” (p. 2). Published twenty years after the passage of Title IX of the Education Amendments, the document shows the negative social and cultural outcomes of inferior educational opportunities, pervasive bias against girls and women in educational testing, and lack of inclusion of non-domestic female experiences in the content of the formal curriculum. Further, the study highlighted works that showed unequal teacher attention and support to male and female students, and styles of teaching which favored male patterns of learning and interacting. These inequities were shown as pervasive at all levels of schooling, and that such inequities were in part based on gender-linked expectations of students that led to unequal levels of achievement. Published soon after AGS’ decision to remain single-sex (and as my own interest in gendered schooling was growing), this report provided a strong general introduction to the variety of negative influences schooling has on girls’ development, and the necessity to address these appropriately to ensure women’s self-esteem and full achievement and contributions to society.

The AAUW study showed that achievement gaps in math are closing, and girls are taking more higher-level courses than in previous years. However, studies also showed
that girls had lower confidence in their science abilities than boys, even when the girls’ actual achievement was high. The data also showed that girls’ interests in science tended to lean more toward the natural sciences, while boys preferred the physical sciences. Such differences have implications for future career choices as well as general self-esteem. As a woman who began college as a pre-medical student and changed majors at the end of my first year, the data on women and science achievements have always fascinated me. Entering AGS I was curious about the girls’ math and science opportunities and achievements, and the manner in which the school addresses girls’ academics generally.

The study also drew attention to forms of sexual harassment occurring in coeducational settings that teachers and parents attributed to “boys being boys” rather than actions requiring institutional intervention and remedy. In 1993, the AAUW issued a follow-up report on this issue entitled, *Hostile Hallways: The AAUW Survey on Sexual Harassment in America's Schools* providing additional detail on the pervasiveness and impact of sexual harassment at middle and high schools. Taken together, the 1992 and 1993 reports opened a discourse of school failure and harm. Girls were shown as receiving second-class treatment and being psychologically and intellectually harmed by the very schools that were expected to support them.

One of the strongest sections of the 1992 document is the discussion of three forms of curricula, the formal curriculum which addresses the content of course materials, the “classroom as curriculum” which looks at the manner in which materials are taught, and the “evaded curriculum” which refers to “matters central to the lives of students and
teachers but touched upon only briefly, if at all” (p. 75). The study suggests that schools must assess all three areas to obtain a complete picture of a school’s educational quality. Attempts to “expand the canon” and develop a more “multicultural” curriculum have led to assessments of the formal curriculum at most schools, however the manner of teaching is less often attended to in terms of gender-sensitivity, and the evaded curriculum continued to be debated as schools assess their roles within a broader educational context (AAUW, 1992). Issues of sexuality, depression, suicide, and eating disorders have especial impact on girls, yet many believe these topics are beyond the responsibility of schools and are more appropriately addressed by family, community organizations, and religious outcomes. Further, the study questions the implications of evading issues of morality and values, and the affective lives of students “by insisting on a dichotomy between feelings and emotions on the one hand, and logic and rationality on the others, schools shortchange all students. Classrooms must become places where girls and boys can express feelings and discuss personal experiences” (p. 80).

The report concludes with recommendations for improvements beginning with a call for stronger enforcement of Title IX (an issue still being addressed today). The report also recommends teacher training and assessment on equitable classrooms, development of gender-equitable curricular methods and materials (along with funding for their development and assessment), the inclusion of social issues in schooling, a review of standardized testing and the role such tests play, and especial attention to enhancing girls’ experiences and competencies with math, science, and vocational education. Finally, the report calls for women and girls to play a stronger role in educational reform, making sure
attention is paid to race and social class. While the report focuses on inequalities faced by girls, the recommendations are intended to enhance educational experiences for all students. No specific statements are made recommending single-sex schooling as a panacea for problems faced by girls, however future studies sponsored by the AAUW (1993, 1998) attended more directly to the difference between public and private school emphases on the above-mentioned recommendations.

The culmination of years of research and individual articles, the 1994 publication of Myra and David Sadkers' *Failing at Fairness: How America's Schools Cheat Girls* extends many of the ideas presented in 1992 AAUW report. Providing startling evidence of the unconscious and subtle preferencing of boys even among teachers who were aware their actions were being monitored for gender bias, the Sadkers offer evidence of the silencing of girls and curricular structures that limit success. The Sadkers refer to the “secret sexist lessons and the quiet losses they engender,” (p. 1) even in the face of efforts to alleviate bias and provide better educations for all students. A central theme for their work was that “schools that fail at fairness deny boys a wide range of options and prepare girls for poverty” (p. xxi).

Perhaps the greatest contribution of this text is their detailed description of means by which teachers fail to attend to girls. Describing the ratios of boys to girls who are called on by teachers, the manner in which probing questions are directed more to boys, the impact of wait-time teachers allow between the time a question is asked and responses are required, are all related to differential impacts on girls. The public media were drawn to this topic, and the Sadkers discussed their research on a wide-range of television and
radio programs, heightening attention to the myriad ways in which girls' educational experiences were being hindered. Paying particular attention to the activity of teaching, the Sadkers suggested that attending mostly to male students was a response to male aggressiveness and assertiveness and their need for discipline. They noted that these behaviors exhibited by males reflected male socialization, but when female students enacted "appropriate" sex-role behavior (cooperation, passivity, caring) they were by default less likely to garner attention by teachers. Within the text and through myriad television reports on the book (including an interview with Jane Pauley that is shown to new AGS teachers), the imagery of boys dominating coed classrooms is vivid, and the frustration experienced by girls readily evident.

While acknowledging that enrollments in single-sex schools were diminishing, the Sadkers assert, "schools without boys seem to be good for girls" (1994, p. 233). Referencing studies conducted by Lee (see below) and others, the Sadkers showed that "girls in single-sex schools have higher self-esteem, are more interested in nontraditional subjects such as science and math, and are less likely to stereotype jobs and careers. They are intellectually curious, serious about their studies, and achieve more" (p. 233). The observations the Sadkers conducted in single-sex schools provided glimpses into academically rigorous classrooms where girl students interacted freely with one another and their (mostly) female teachers. While their interviews and observations at girls' schools provide much support for assertions that the girls schools are less limiting than coeducational settings, they report that some students felt unprepared for interactions with boys or limited their self-perceptions of abilities to compete with boys. Before continuing
the examination of the AGS recommended readings, the next section will explore several
texts that specifically address single-sex schooling. These are works that are noticeably
absent from the recommended reading list, but provide a strong bridge between
examinations of gendered schooling and research on girls’ experiences generally.

Research on Single-Sex Schooling

Missing from the AGS recommended readings were the vast number of academic
articles and books related to single-sex schooling. Indeed, few of the recommended
readings focus specifically on teaching, although most address the contribution school
environments make in girls’ development. The lack of readings related to pedagogy
suggests that the administration believes faculty need greater knowledge about girls’
experience than about the methods that best support girls’ development. Based on
interviews with the faculty that will be presented in chapters five and six, the faculty
participants often lacked a pedagogical discourse related to girls’ education, although they
were well versed in girls’ developmental needs.

Brown and Gilligan’s (1992) Meeting at the Crossroads studied girls in a single-
sex school, however the aim of the text was to address girls’ development, not pedagogy.
To get to the heart of issues related to single-sex schooling, one needs to go outside the
reading list to draw in works by educational researchers. Perhaps the most prolific
researcher on single-sex schooling, Valerie Lee (alone or as a co-researcher) has utilized
primarily quantitative studies to assess the benefits and limitations of single-sex
schooling for males and females in both independent and religiously-affiliated
institutions. (1986, 1990, 1992, 1994, 1998) In an early study, when compared to
coeducational schooling, single-sex schooling for girls appeared to have positive outcomes on self-esteem, achievements in math and science, academic orientation, and overcoming sex-role stereotyping. Lee and Bryk (1986) caution that “perhaps the most difficult selection hypothesis to counter is that families specifically choose single-sex schooling because of presumed benefits for their children. In particular, perhaps families with higher academic orientations and educational aspirations are more likely to choose this schooling option” (p. 391). They do suggest, however, that especially for girls, the sophomore-to-senior gain in aspirations “tends to support a school effect rather than a selection-hypothesis explanation,” (p. 392) indicating that a mix of small class size, positive adult role models, academic courses, and perhaps a school’s religious affiliation may contribute to the positive school environment. They also indicated that single-sex schooling may in fact serve to sensitize young women to their occupational and societal potentials in an atmosphere free of some of the social pressures that female adolescents experience in the presence of the opposite sex. Adolescence is a critical period for the formation of attitudes about oneself. It may be that some separation of students’ academic and social environments removes the distractions that can interfere with the academic development of some students. (p. 394)

The degree of separation and the timing are two issues that are of particular interest to me. As public schools are experimenting with single-sex classrooms within coeducational environments, this question of degree is especially important. In terms of timing, much of the research on girls’ development suggests that adolescence is a particularly sensitive time in the development of self-esteem, and that perhaps this is a time when separation from boys may be desirable. What is not generally addressed are the potential benefits of single-sex education at the pre-adolescent stages. Because AGS
is a pre-kindergarten through 12th grade institution, I hoped the faculty would be able to provide insight into the benefits of single-sex schooling for younger girls.

Building on this earlier work, Lee and Marks (1990) studied the “sustained” effects of single-sex schooling on attitudes, behaviors, and values in college. While there were great similarities between students who attended coeducational and single-sex schools, the researchers found several areas where attending girls’ secondary schools had noteworthy lasting effects.

Single sex school students of both genders attended colleges that were more selective than their coeducational Catholic high school counterparts... four years later, [girls school attendees] still held significantly less stereotypic views on women’s appropriate roles than their coeducational counterparts, although the focus had switched from the environment of the family to that of the workplace... many of the sustained effects of single-sex secondary schooling are identical to those Astin catalogued for single sex colleges (greater academic involvement, satisfaction with college,... and aspirations for advanced graduate degrees and leadership positions). (p. 588)

Attempting to address the lowered aspirations and goals indicated by girls in coeducational environments, the authors recommended more intentional institutional attention to developing girls’ aspirations through increased female role-modeling, targeted curricular efforts, and perhaps the creation of single-sex math and science courses. The authors were careful to note, however, “the issue addressed in this study was not how single-sex schools produce effects that persist through college, but whether they do,” (p. 589) thus any recommendations must be studied more carefully before implementation. Lee and Marks suggest that the “how” needs to be uncovered; my study of AGS faculty attempts to address the role teachers play in promoting/supporting/enhancing/creating these positive effects.
In a 1994 study on sexism in independent schools, Lee, Marks, and Byrd identified the existence of “a clear tension in even the most academically demanding girls schools (often voiced by the schools’ heads) between trying to provide educational environments that are relational and, at the same time, to hold to demanding intellectual standards that develop independence” (p. 114). These tensions were compatible with findings from earlier research (i.e. Lee and Marks, 1992) that indicated “that families and students who choose all-girls’ schools are likely to be seeking either safe and traditional environments for ‘young ladies,’ or academically demanding educational environments in which girls are free to flourish - not both” (p. 114). Their study indicated that, when compared to independent coeducational and boys’ schools, girls’ schools were most likely to include “events” addressing “gender equity,” however they were also seen as sites where students were occasionally unnecessarily dependent upon the faculty and could encounter non-rigorous instruction.

Lee, Marks and Byrd (1994) suggest that because girls’ schools “have no historical tradition of preparing young women for professional achievement that is comparable to men’s,” (p. 115) they must find ways to address the conflicting demands of those who see girls schools as safe, traditional environments, and those who are seeking an educational environment which is specifically designed to overcome the perceived sexism and limited opportunities within coeducational institutions. Testimony to this tension, Lee’s research indicates that, generally speaking, single sex schools are good for girls, however, her research also supports Judy Mann’s statement that “schools that
coddle girls aren’t doing them any favors. Coddling is another form of sexism — and it can show up in private or public schools” (1994, p. 127).

The prior statement notwithstanding, Judy Mann praises girls’ schools for their ability to place women’s and girls’ experiences center-stage.

In coeducational schools, however, the needs of boys are paramount and their values, their style of learning, and their noisy mode of communicating dominate. Academically demanding girls’ schools can teach us a great deal about how to redress gender imbalances in public education, to find a new blend of styles that will benefit both boys and girls. The goal of the best academic girls’ schools is one all schools should strive for. That is to produce students - boys and girls- who emerge from the educational process as leaders, and as smart, confident, and kind people who will go on to create a vastly improved society over what we have now. (p. 132)

The tension between traditional gender roles and liberatory educational experiences seems a rich area for examination, and one which I hoped to explore through my interviews and observations. The school’s mission statement seemed to promote an educational experience that meets Mann’s vision of a demanding girls’ school. Mann’s book The Difference, resides on the AGS reading list, and will be discussed in more detail below.

Responding to the increased attention public attention to single-sex schooling, and especially attempting to address assumptions that have justified the creation of single-sex classrooms within public schools, the American Association of University Women convened a roundtable of prominent researchers to discuss the current status of research on single-sex education. Reported in a document released in March, 1998, thus appearing toward the end of my research at AGS, the participants reached consensus on six statements:
There is no evidence that single-sex education in general ‘works’ or is ‘better’ than coeducation; No matter whether in a coed or a single-sex setting, educators and policy-makers need to work further to identify the components of a ‘good education’; single-sex educational programs produce positive results for some students in some settings; the long-term impact of single-sex education on girls or boys is unknown; no learning environment, single-sex or coed, provides a sure escape from sexism; and single-sex education covers so broad a gamut as to defy most generalization. (pp. 2-3)

It is the first of these assertions that has garnered the most attention, although the overall meaning of the statement goes unexamined. The statement asserts that there is nothing inherent about single sex education on its face that makes it better than coeducational settings. How one identifies the quality of a school cannot be determined by its gender configuration alone, but a complex set of variables. The latter five points further develop the assertions from the first, providing clarification on the status of understanding about single-sex schools. The statements supported the need for more research on single-sex school settings, and different types of studies than have been done in the past so as to expand the information and the scope and richness of understanding.

The roundtable attendees also agreed upon four qualities of “good” education, based on a school’s success at

preparing students to participate in democratic deliberation and citizenship...
preparing students to assume “adult roles within their communities” and introducing “alternatives to what exists in the community”... preparing students to work in groups of people with diverse backgrounds, solve semistructured problems, and support themselves according to their needs... and preparing students to achieve professional satisfaction, though not necessarily a high income. (p. 4)

These standards are clearly focused on qualities of the learners rather than their accomplishments on standardized tests or on specific educational or vocational
attainments. A key point of discussion related to the degree of sexism present in classrooms, regardless of the gendered classroom configurations. “[Patricia B.] Campbell noted that girls in single-sex programs ‘with a feminist orientation’ appeared to perform better than girls in similar programs where students never explicitly discussed questions of women’s and men’s relative status in society” (p. 6). As noted above, single-sex programs have struggled to support traditional feminine roles and perspectives, and/or to serve as a site to provide opportunities and perspectives that support women’s expanded opportunities and liberation. Further, the cultural context within which the schools are situated, and their role in reproducing or challenging that culture, must be added to the equation. That the administrator I first met with at AGS presented the school as intentionally feminist in its teaching practices led me to look for ways in which the tensions noted here are played out in the classroom.

In closing the roundtable, the participants agreed upon several key points that attach some positive outcomes to single-sex schooling, and several areas requiring continuing investigation. Summarized, the participants agreed,

something about single-sex classes makes them preferred by many girls over coed classes... single-sex classes can be alternately empowering (because they are a ‘safe’ place for learning and discussion) or oppressing (because they may reinforce sexual stereotypes)... single-sex classes have effects on other classrooms... and the appeal of single-sex classes to policymakers often has little to do with the classes’ effectiveness. (p. 8)

Such remarks again highlight the difficulty in identifying exactly what about an individual institution or a category of institutions best supports positive educational experiences. What is clear is that for some students, single sex schools provide a
valuable educational option that can support personal development and participation in public and private realms.

In the literature review included in the AAUW report, Pamela Haag addresses the differences between those who “have advocated experimental single-sex environments because they may minimize the deleterious effects of gender stereotypes” and those who “sometimes champion single-sex programs for the degree to which they reinforce students in normative — and traditional — gender roles” (p. 13). Haag closes by offering a summary of the research findings. First, the contradictory data on the benefits (or lack thereof) of single-sex schooling suggests that contexts beyond gender must be influencing students’ experiences, achievements, attitudes. Second, peer influence remains a key factor in student socialization, attitude, and achievement. Beyond socio-economic class, Haag’s review did not attempt to discern what factors influenced the development of the peer culture, however these have been addressed in depth by others who have attempted to address issues of self-esteem (see Orenstein, 1994; Mann, 1994). Third, “these studies view policy and training interventions as particularly valuable. Jimenez concludes that ‘there are important managerial incentives, teacher practices, and social interactions in female single-sex settings... that result in enhanced achievement’” (p. 34). Given the range of influences on student success, generalizations about the benefits of single-sex schooling are likely assumptions at best.

Another important component of the report was an attempt to address class and race influences on educational outcomes. Summarizing American and international
research that suggests that single-sex schooling provides a positive educational experience for students (especially girls), Cornelius Riordan (1998) states,

The academic and developmental consequences of attending one type of school versus another type of school are virtually zero for middle-class or otherwise advantaged students, by contrast, the consequences are significant for students who are or have been historically or traditionally disadvantaged - minorities, low- and working-class youth, and females (so long as the females are not affluent). Furthermore, these significant effects for at-risk students are small in comparison with the much larger effects of home background and type of curriculum in a given school. (pp. 53-4)

Indeed, many faculty involved in the interview stressed that family background was one of the most important factors to student success at the school. As AGS continues its efforts to diversify the student population, such data supports the resolve to provide opportunities for students traditionally underrepresented at AGS. Taking into consideration a variety of factors that influence education, Riordan offers twelve rationales that provide “support for the contention that single-sex schools may be more effective academically than mixed sex schools, especially for minorities and white women,” (p. 55) although these rationales are less “applicable” for girls from higher socioeconomic statuses. The rationales are:

1. The diminished strength of youth-culture values;
2. A greater degree of order and control;
3. The provision of more successful role models, especially student role models;
4. A reduction in gender differences in curriculum and opportunities;
5. A reduction in gender bias in teacher student interaction;
6. A reduction in gender stereotypes in peer interaction;
7. The provision of a greater number of leadership opportunities;
8. A pro-academic parent/student choice;
9. Smaller school size;
10. A core curriculum emphasizing academic subjects taken by all students (organization of the curriculum)
11. Positive relationships among teachers, parents, and students that lead to a shared-value community with an emphasis on academics and equity (school social organization);
12. Active and constructivist teaching and learning (organization of instruction) (pp. 55-56)

Rationales 9-12 incorporate Valerie Lee’s (1998) recommendations of qualities of “good” schools, qualities that Riordan strongly supports. Riordan suggests that when all these components are in place, or when a compatible subset of the twelve are present, students will succeed regardless of the gendered composition of the school or the classes students attend. Riordan’s rationales appear to share responsibilities among students, parents, teachers, and school administrators. Having completed the majority of my research prior to the publication of these rationales, I am interested in seeing areas of complementarity between Riordan’s statements and the teachers’ descriptions of the positive qualities of AGS.

Describing concerns with current research on single-sex schooling, Patricia B. Campbell and Ellen Wahl (1998) state, “few studies have explored qualitatively or quantitatively what in fact does take place with regard to content, pedagogy, interaction, social organization, or climate in differently constituted classrooms.... The purposes and premises underlying different attempts at single-sex education are rarely included as part of the outcomes that are measured” (p. 65). My initial sense was that the correlations would be strong. Building on this theme, they note,

The role of the teacher as leader, rule-maker, and shaper of the social organization is key to making education work. But teachers’ roles and responsibilities have not been given the attention they deserve in the studies or in gender issues in education generally. Indeed, there have been only minimal attempts of any sort to develop, monitor, and evaluate truly equitable classroom environments, and to
analyze how equity and excellence are linked with respect to opportunity, treatment, and outcome in these settings. (p. 67)

Primarily studies have addressed only student characteristics and family background, but left out attention to teachers. Overall, the articles contained in the 1998 AAUW Report highlight the need for more research on the structure of single-sex schools and the efforts taken by faculty to address issues of gender. The AGS leadership gave this study close attention upon its release. Its addition to the list of recommended readings for faculty would add detailed research on single-sex schools to the list of readings that more generally address girls’ development and socialization.

While much of the data on single-sex schools indicates that teachers play a valuable role in creating gender-sensitive and empowering environments, a variety of conditions appear to influence the quality of education students receive. Central to the quality are the students, and their experiences both within and outside schools. Much has been written on the developmental challenges faced by girls and young women, and the expectations placed upon them from a variety of sources, and these will serve as the focus of the next section. Entering this section, we return again to texts included on the AGS list of recommended readings.

Gendered Lives: Women’s Voices and Experiences

Around the same time that the Sadkers began compiling data on biased schooling, Carol Gilligan (1982) published her ground-breaking text, In a Different Voice, challenging Lawrence Kohlberg’s celebrated moral development theory. Aware that education and psychology relied upon “developmental theories” to explain human
behavior and predict “healthy” growth, Gilligan drew attention to what she saw as a male/masculine bias to this theory. Gilligan’s work centered around the manner in which women and girls attempted to resolve moral dilemmas, utilizing “different” language and priorities than male research participants. Her research suggested that when women and girls look at specific dilemmas the moral nature of the dilemma “arises from conflicting responsibilities rather than from competing rights and requires for its resolution a mode of thinking that is contextual and narrative rather than formal and abstract” (p. 19). Gilligan is careful to note in the text’s introduction that this relational, contextual, narrative means of resolving dilemmas is not distinctly female, but rather an alternative mode to the analytical, rational mode which she perceives as a more “masculine” way of viewing the world and one’s role within it. She suggests that the masculine/feminine, male/female, voices described throughout the text serve to “highlight a distinction between two modes of thought and to focus a problem of interpretation rather than to represent a generalization about either sex” (p. 3). She suggests that social/cultural influences work alongside/against “reproductive biology” to shape individual development. Because the relational voice she discovered in her research was primarily offered by female subjects, it was presented as a “woman’s” voice in the text, and for readers who did not closely attend to the early disclaimers, it represented “the” voice of women.

Gilligan’s work sparked a wide range of studies that explored the manner in which rational, analytical frameworks limited perceptions of women’s and girl’s development, and led to extensions to fields outside of psychology, most specifically,
education. This attention to a possible “masculine” bias to theory, coupled with studies addressing racial and cultural biases, continues in the present as researchers attempt to uncover the myriad influences on individual development and perception. Summarizing the value of the 1982 study Gilligan states, “for women, I hope this work will offer a representation of their thoughts that enables them to see better its integrity and validity, to recognize the experiences their thinking refracts, and to understand the line of its development” (p. 3). She continues by asserting a hope that her work expands the understanding of human (moral) development, stating, “the discrepant data on women’s experience provide a basis upon which to generate new theory, potentially yielding a more encompassing view of the lives of both the sexes” (p. 4).

Extending Gilligan’s work on voice to the cognitive realm, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule’s (1986) book, Women’s Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind aims to,

examine women’s ways of knowing and describe five different perspectives from which women view reality and draw conclusions about truth, knowledge, and authority. We show how women’s self-concepts and ways of knowing are intertwined. We describe how women struggle to claim the power of their own minds. We then examine how the two institutions primarily devoted to human development - the family and the schools - both promote and hinder women’s development. (p. 4)

Through interviews with 135 women, the authors questioned the participants about such topics as relationships, self-image, education, decision-making, personal growth, and hopes for the future. The forms of knowing, which the authors do not claim to be essentially gendered but based solely on interviews with women, are presented as both facilitating and hindering individual growth and possibilities. The authors show
schooling as a primary site for the development and validation of ways of knowing, and
suggest that "connected" teachers, those who engage in Paulo Freire's (1970) "problem-
posing education," can create educational settings that assist women in developing their
voices if they

emphasize connection over separation, understanding and acceptance over
assessment, and collaboration over debate; if they accord respect to and allow
time for the knowledge that emerges from firsthand experiences; if instead of
imposing their own expectations and arbitrary requirements, they encourage
students to evolve their own patterns of work based on the problems they are
pursuing. (p. 229)

These educational interventions and actions will be echoed in much of the literature on
feminist and gender-sensitive pedagogy (see below). The direct link between
classroom/school actions and women's full development makes this is very powerful
book for educators. These discourses of connection, understanding and collaboration are
emphasized throughout the work, followed by suggestions to modify family and school
structures to affirm and foster these styles.

The need to support girls' and women's voices has become a theme throughout
the discourse on the education of female students, and girls' schools have been noted as
sites where voice is readily encouraged and enhanced (Haag, 1998). However, I believe
that the meaning of "voice" has changed somewhat from its use by such authors as
Gilligan (1982) and Belenky et al. (1986). Anne G. Rogers (1993) speaks of voice not
only in terms of forms of representation, but also as a form of entitlement, as the
ability/authority to offer one's opinions freely without hesitation or fear of co-optation.
While Gilligan exposed the privileging of certain modes over others within theory,
Rogers extends this by attending to the manner in which voices are taken seriously (or truly heard) based on the socio-cultural entitlements speakers and listeners bring to bear while engaged in speech. In this way, addressing women's "voice" does not only mean simply adding a "female" perspective to a situation, but looking at the context in which a woman feels comfortable and competent to be included in conversation.

Speaking of voice in terms which link to Rogers', Judy Mann's (1994) *The Difference* attempts to uncover ways in which girls are "silenced" and the means by which they can regain their voices. She again acknowledges schools as an essential location for supporting or limiting voice, suggesting that schools play a primary role in building and supporting girls' confidence. The links between confidence, voice, and success are explored throughout the text, with silence one of many negative outcomes of poor attention to girls' development.

Mann notes the research of Catherine G. Krupnick who studied classroom interactions and teacher attention. Krupnick found that the students with the "fastest mouths" got control of the class, not those with the most insightful responses. Those who initially become engaged in a discussion or activity are those who are most likely to dominate the entire class period. Krupnick suggests that teachers must be careful not to allow such domination to occur, and must utilize teaching styles which draw all students into the conversation. Such domination clearly occurs in both single-sex and coed classrooms, however Sadker and Sadker (1994) note its greater link to boys, and that when boys in coed classrooms are allowed to dominate the conversation, messages are sent to the girls that they are second-class citizens.
Mary Pipher's work with women with eating disorders (and her subsequent book *Hunger Pains: The American Women's Tragic Quest for Thinness*) led her to investigate girls' experiences and the cultural influences which harm women's sense of self. As a therapist working with adolescent girls, Pipher began to explore the lives of girls and the dramatic changes they experienced in their early teens. She found that girls were losing their voices, their sense of self and confidence as they attempted to negotiate the social and cultural influences on their lives. Her new text, *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls* (1994) is named for a character in Hamlet who lives only for Hamlet's approval instead of maintaining the self she had developed prior to their meeting. A tragic character, Ophelia dies soon after being spurned by Hamlet, never succeeding in pleasing those for whom she has given up everything. Pipher suggests that not only are our teenage girls giving up their selves, they are doing so knowingly, sadly, but willingly. Pipher notes, "Simone De Beauvoir believed adolescence is when girls realize that men have the power and that their only power comes from consenting to become submissive adored objects. They do not suffer from the penis envy Freud postulated, but from power envy" (p. 21).

Pipher identifies three factors that make adolescent girls so "vulnerable." Developmentally they are in constant change, physically, hormonally, emotionally, and intellectually. Second, culture invades girls' lives with messages of sexism, lookism, and capitalism that limit the possibilities that girls see for their current and adult lives. Finally, "American girls are expected to distance from parents just at the time when they most need their support,"(p. 23) turning instead to peers who are experiencing the same
traumas and mixed messages. Pipher sees the disconnection of children from parents as a major factor in girls’ failure to maintain their wholeness through their teenage years. She notes “most parents today are not the agents of culture, but rather the enemies of the cultural indoctrination that their daughters face with puberty. They battle to save their daughters’ true selves” (p. 67). While the parent-child connection is vital, it is a small stretch to see the role teachers can play in supporting girls’ positive development as well.

Pipher asserts that parenting plays a key role in girls’ self-esteem and their ability to interact confidently with others. She further notes that smart girls are not shielded from these problems. In fact, ironically, bright and sensitive girls are most at risk for problems. They are more likely to understand the implications of the media around them and be alarmed. They have the mental equipment to pick up our cultural ambivalences about women, and yet don’t have the cognitive, emotional and social skills to handle this information. They are paralyzed by complicated and contradictory data that they cannot interpret. They struggle to resolve the unresolvable and to make sense of the absurd. It’s this struggle to make sense of the whole of adolescent experience that overwhelms bright girls. (p. 43)

Given the types of students who attend private, college-preparatory institutions, such statements have particular importance to schools like AGS. All is not lost, however. Pipher suggests that if girls are given the tools and support to understand and confront the negative cultural influences surrounding them, they can make choices that keep their “true self” alive.

Pipher finds the desire to lose oneself, to avoid being invaded by the contradictions between self and society, can lead to minor behavior and attitude changes, or more serious problems with substance abuse, eating disorders, self-mutilating
behaviors, depression, sexual promiscuity, and suicidal behaviors. She argues that to successfully avoid such problems, or to limit their degree of destructiveness, girls need support, understanding, and a sense of assurance that the difficulties and contradictions they are facing are surmountable.

Given the variety of challenges faced by adolescent girls, those teenagers who appear not to be facing difficulty may in fact be the most in trouble. Pipher suggests,

The girls who seem the happiest in junior high are often not the healthiest adults. They may be the girls who have less radar with which to pick up signals about reality. While this may be protective when the signals come fast and furious, later they may miss information. Or they may be the girls who don’t even try to resolve contradictions or make sense of reality. They may be relatively comfortable, but they will not grow. (p. 267)

The message is clear, beware the happy teenager. Not only may angst be natural, it may also a sign of a healthy adolescent. Continuing with the recommended readings, the examination on texts focuses on girls’ sense of self as they negotiate the challenges of female adolescence.

**The Importance of the Inward Gaze: Development of Self-Esteem.**

Attending less to “voice” and more to issues of “self esteem” Peggy Orenstein’s 1994 book *Schoolgirls: Young Women, Self-Esteem and the Confidence Gap* (commissioned by the AAUW) provides another narrative report on girls’ experiences in coeducational public schools. Based on a qualitative study conducted in two middle schools in central California, *Schoolgirls* provides insight into issues of sexual harassment, determinants of girls’ self concepts, gender equity, the inclusion of female experiences in the formal curriculum, teaching philosophy and action, and intersections of
race and class with gender. Rather than limiting her study to interviewing female students, Orenstein includes the voices of parents, teachers, administrators, and male students, allowing the reader to see the multiple influences on and interpretations of girls' experiences inside and outside of school.

Orenstein asserts that a recurrent theme throughout her study was that being a girl was seen as a "liability" by both boys and girls. Further, being smart is a liability as surely as unattractiveness. Answering a question I posed above, Orenstein states, "girls with healthy self-esteem have an appropriate sense of their potential, their competence, and their innate value as individuals. They feel a sense of entitlement: license to take up space in the world, a right to be heard and to express the full spectrum of human emotions" (p. xix). Based on her descriptions of girls' lives, a sense of entitlement is missing, competence and value is based upon external evaluation (especially from male peers), girls feel unsupported in combating oppressive statements and actions, and potential is limited from a combination of the above factors. In fact, it is a wonder that girls thrive at all given the accounts offered by Orenstein. Clearly there are factors that encourage participation in schooling and society, but this text helps to expose the myriad factors that dispel the notion that schooling is an open, safe, equitable site that can help open up opportunities for all. Often public rhetoric positions schooling as the site for opportunity, yet Orenstein shows that even girls who appear to be succeeding suffer from low self-confidence and feel disenfranchised from full participation in schooling and society.
Orenstein suggests that if girls are unable to build confidence when young, this will lead to many problems in the future.

Without a strong sense of self, girls will enter adulthood at a deficit: they will be less able to fulfill their potential, less willing to take on challenges, less willing to defy tradition in their career choices, which means sacrificing economic equity. Their successes will not satisfy and their failures will be more catastrophic, confirming their own self-doubt. They will be less prepared to weather the storms of adult life, more likely to become depressed, hopeless, and self-destructive. (p. xvii)

While many may accept that such outcomes are likely for girls graduating from “poor-quality” schools or who are living in impoverished conditions, Orenstein challenges the reader to acknowledge that even girls attending schools with lauded academic programs, girls from privilege, girls who are earning good grades, are facing similar obstacles and challenges because they are female. Orenstein recognizes, however, “the pressures of poverty, discrimination, and the inadequacy of education facing all students at [the study’s urban site] often overshadowed the gender differences reported in the AAUW survey [Shortchanging Girls]” (p. xxv). An overall shortchanging of students cannot be ignored, however the gendered influences must be included in the evaluation of the academic experience. Thus the seemingly privileged background from which many of the girls’ school students hail should not be seen as sufficient to ensure their future success; all students face challenges regardless of their background.

Addressing a link between silence and competence, Orenstein suggests that students who fail to talk in class are not afforded essential growth opportunities. “Students who talk in class have more opportunity to enhance self-esteem through exposure to praise; they have the luxury of learning from mistakes and they develop
perspective to see failure as an educational tool” (p. 12). Whether in a coeducational or single-sex environment, students can be silenced, however Orenstein suggests that within coeducational settings boys speak more than girls. Rarely in Orenstein’s study do teachers actively work to improve the school climate for girls, or serve as allies or mentors to students. In fact, teachers are often represented as ignoring harassing behavior, reinforcing stereotypes of male entitlement and feminine deference, failing to appropriately respond to complaints, and continuing to support an explicit and hidden curriculum which privileges male experiences. Clearly missing from the text was a critical mass of teachers who supported girls’ development and achievement, or who cared individually about students. Without such support, it is little wonder girls continue to devalue themselves.

Continuing on the theme of self-esteem and in agreement with many of Orenstein’s findings, in Meeting at the Crossroads, Lyn Mikel Brown and Carol Gilligan (1992) explore girls’ development by studying girls at Laurel School, a private all-girls school in Cleveland, Ohio. The study shows that although the girls may be academically achieving, that in fact their self-esteem was significantly lower than the researchers had expected. As was noted in the section on “voice,” Brown and Gilligan found that adolescent girls encounter a period of “dissociation and disconnection that plays a central role in these girls’ development” (p. 17). They suggested that girls become aware that their sense of self often contrasts with external demands and assumptions placed by society, and most importantly for heterosexual girls, by boys. As the girls’ “authentic”
self contrasted with their perceptions of what others appeared to want from them, Brown and Gilligan note:

Girls reaching adolescence adopted survival strategies for spanning what often seemed like two incommensurate relational realities. And girls enacted this disconnection through various forms of dissociation: separating themselves or their psyches from their bodies so as not to know what they were feeling, dissociating their voice from their feelings and thoughts so that others would not know what they were experiencing, taking themselves out of relationship so that they could better approximate what others want and desire, or look more like some ideal image of what a woman or what a person should be like. (pp. 217-8)

They suggested that teachers can play a positive role in helping to expand the possibilities girls see for themselves. This study helped the participating teachers and administrators see the way they too were self-regulating, providing models for the girls to follow which kept them from questioning authority, speaking freely, and relating comfortably with others. Until the adult women changed their behaviors and thoughts, how could they help the students to keep their voices and passion? The teachers were being too “nice” to each other, and therefore were unable/unwilling to speak freely, share deeply, or connect with one another. As Brown and Gilligan state, “a smoothly running girls’ school within a patriarchal society and culture seemed an oxymoron” (p. 220). As one of the Laurel School administrators relates in the book,

Unless we, as grown women, were willing to give up all the ‘good little girl’ things we continued to do and give up our expectation that the girls in our charge would be as good as we were, we could not successfully empower young women to act on their own knowledge and feelings. Unless we stopped hiding in expectations of goodness and control, our behavior would silence any words to girls about speaking in their own voice. Finally, we dared to believe that one could be intelligently disruptive without destroying anything except the myths about the high level of female cooperativeness. (p. 221)
The concept of being “intelligently disruptive” as presented here does not suggest a coordinated political project, but rather activities that challenge social conditioning in a measured manner.

Continuing their discussion of faculty actions, Brown and Gilligan discuss the appropriateness of teacher’s expressing their full humanity; whether or not teachers could share their full “voice” within the school setting. They state,

one of the most difficult questions for the women teachers was whether it was legitimate for them to show girls their sadness and their anger and also whether they could reveal such feelings without losing control of themselves and of the girls. It seemed easier and also safer for women to try and model perfection for girls — perfect women, perfect relationships — and yet women’s images of perfection were at odds with what girls know about women and experience in relationship. Thus women’s success in being perfect role models for girls depended in part on girls’ tacit agreement not to know what they know — their willingness to suspend their disbelief. (pp. 230-1)

In this manner, the teachers are in a double-bind. If they reveal their challenges and fears, they may come across as overly vulnerable or political, or could create a fatalistic attitude among their students. If they fail to acknowledge the challenges they face, students may see the faculty as failing to be honest with them, or as perpetuating the systems of power that the faculty claim need challenging.

In 1995 Gilligan, this time working with Jill Taylor and Amy Sullivan, published *Between Voice and Silence*, a longitudinal (3 year) qualitative study of 26 high school girls from an urban public school, specifically girls who were deemed “at risk” for school dropout and/or early motherhood. This study attempted to increase understanding of voice and experiences often silenced or missed in research, those of poor and working class girls, attending especially, although not exclusively, to Caucasian experiences. The
text addresses girls’ experiences in schools, including their relationships with teachers. Conducted in an urban, coeducational public school, the institutional setting is very different from AGS (however as AGS continues to recruit and accept students from diverse racial and economic backgrounds, the students’ life experiences, and prior and current schooling experiences, may not be so different from those explored in the text).

One of the strongest aspects of this text is the researcher’s discussions of their attempts to increase their own abilities to really listen to girls, and to understand the girls’ experiences. The authors explore their own biases and growth in their ability to work successfully with girls from backgrounds dissimilar from their own, suggesting that even “experts” are in a continual process of learning and growth. As the only text that directly focuses on race and class influences on girls, *Between Voice and Silence* offers AGS faculty a comfortable point of entrée into discussions of diversity among female students.

Central to the discourses offered on voice and self-esteem is a sense that boys and girls, men and women, have different experiences and means of expressing themselves. Mann (1994) suggests that it is difficult to discuss difference without becoming essentialist, stereotypical, or making difference equate to better and worse. She talks of women having private conversation along the theme: “girls are different from boys, boys are different from girls, but we don’t quite know why, and we are not sure whether it’s even something we ought to be discussing publicly” (p. 29). The difficulty of discussing “difference” is apparent in the interviews conducted for this study as well. The problem with discussing difference comes down to questions of causality and impact; if males and females are different, how does this occur and what does that mean? If there are indeed
differences beyond the obvious physical differences, do these occur naturally/genetically, socially/culturally, a combination of nature and nurture, or in some other manner? If indeed there are differences, should these differences be valorized as providing rich diversity to our world, or should some be seen as preferable even if attributed to one gender and not another?

A Room of One’s Own

The only recommended text not yet addressed, Virginia Woolf’s (1989/1929) *A Room of One’s Own* includes the text of two lecture papers delivered at Newnham and Girton Colleges in which Woolf espouses a woman’s need for privacy and money in order to allow her full creativity and talent to bloom and be expressed. As an early challenge to patriarchy, she questions the superiority of man, indeed she suggests that men have manufactured female inferiority as a means to heighten their own stature. While initially appearing liberatory, she also sees womanhood as a “protected occupation,” and questions what would become of women if allowed to labor as men do. In many ways, although interested in identifying male privilege, she does not much value women giving up some of the benefits of domestic life. In total, these essays cover several important issues regarding women’s opportunities and representations, but in a manner that makes this text difficult to place within the discourses of the other texts included on the reading list and in this chapter.

Among the greatest contributions of Woolf’s essays is her exposition of the differing representations of women in poetry and fiction compared with those in history. “If woman had no existence save in the fiction written by men, one would imagine her a
person of the utmost importance: very various, heroic and mean; splendid and sordid; infinitely beautiful and hideous in the extreme; as great as a man, some think even greater” (p. 43). She continues by noting,

imaginatively she is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history. She dominates the lives of kings and conquerors in fiction; in fact she was the slave of any boy whose parents forced a ring upon her finger. Some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips; in real life she could hardly read, could scarcely spell, and was the property of her husband. (pp. 43–4)

Woolf suggests that the lives of middle class women didn’t place them in roles deemed worthy of historical record, thus are suppressed the stories of women upon which to model one’s life or from which to draw strength and inspiration. While she faults men for not being able to understand and represent women’s experiences, she also asserts that because of their subordinate status, women could not contribute as men have. Without education, leisure, and autonomy, women did not have the opportunity to develop the genius necessary to become great writers.

While the essays provide strong statements about the manner in which society can limit a woman’s full self-expression and contributions, Woolf also limits women by suggesting that the purity of spirit and self which is the grounding of good writing (her main focus) is only attainable by those who are born into comfort and have not had to earn their money or privacy. Her view that happiness effects productivity certainly can be extended to all members of society, however Woolf intentionally does not address her ideas to working-class women. As Mary Gordon suggests in her forward to the 1989 publication of the book, “Woolf is firm. Genius needs freedom; it cannot flower if it is
encumbered by fear, or rancor, or dependency, and without money freedom is impossible. And the money cannot be earned; it must come to the writer in the form of a windfall or a legacy, or it will bring with it attachments, obligations” (p. viii).

Reflections on the Readings

The AGS list of recommended readings provides strong insight into the institutional dialogue regarding girls’ experiences. The discourses of the book titles alone highlight the negativity associated with growing up female; girls are cheated, shortchanged, betrayed, misunderstood, silenced, lack confidence, and need saving. Girls are also “different,” which doesn’t necessarily imply something negative, but certainly places them out of the norm, and therefore identifies their experiences and them as marginalized. According to the book titles, girls (and women) need their own place in the world, and must find their own voice and power.

Several of these books border on pathologizing adolescent girls. As evidenced by four texts published in 1994, the issue of poor self-esteem rises as a major psychological concern for girls, leading to such problems as academic failure, low career aspirations, subordination to men and boys, eating disorders, alcohol and drug use, early sexual activity, and self-mutilation (Debold, Wilson, & Malave, 1994; Mann, 1994; Orenstein, 1994; Pipher, 1994). While girls face challenges throughout their lives, adolescence is presented as a particularly damaging period for girls. Debold et al. note that during adolescence girls “become overwhelmed by how little they feel valued and trusted by adults, by the idealization and exploitation of their budding sexuality, by violence, and by increasing injunctions to be silent. Too often they give up their resistance and give in to
what society wants them to be” (p. xv). The loss of self to “society” and its demands resonates throughout the texts on self esteem, with schools and families being called upon to provide the necessary intervention to ensure healthy development.

Although adolescence is pathologized in many of these works, the readings also report that women have contributions to make that have not been properly understood or respected. Gilligan’s (1982) work on a different voice for moral reasoning, Belenky et al’s (1986) study of women’s cognitive development, and Tannen’s (1990) exploration of conversational patterns all highlight the manner in which what is construed as “normal” or indeed “right” has been based upon masculine patterns of gender socialization. These authors argue that women’s talents and achievements have been disregarded or disparaged because their patterns of moral reasoning, cognition and conversation fail to conform to models that have received approval in the public arena. As women continue to enter the paid workforce, their gender socialization works against them as institutions continue to privilege “masculine” patterns of rationality, linearity, specificity, and directness over traditionally feminine patterns of connection, relation, story-telling, and abstractness. While the recommended texts provide only an introduction to the benefits of recognizing and valuing “women’s ways,” the applications of these insights are widespread whether one is looking to modify gender socialization to improve women’s opportunities in a patriarchal society, or trying to enhance the quality of institutional structures to incorporate traditionally feminine patterns of behavior and thought.

The terrain of gender socialization is at best difficult to travel. While we would like to believe that great advances have been made since the publication of The Feminine
Mystique (Friedan, 1963) and the gains won during the second wave of feminism, many authors (Debold et al, 1994; Mann, 1994; Orenstein, 1994; Sadker & Sadker, 1994) continue to find that patterns of socialization encourage males to be strong, aggressive, unemotional leaders and females to be caring, compassionate, nurturing supporters. According to these texts, girls are indeed getting the message that it is acceptable to work outside the home, that athleticism and intelligence are positive female attributes, and that one’s life can and should include interests outside of home and family. At the same time, however, girls understand that there are liabilities associated with being too smart, too athletic, too driven, too independent. If one’s abilities and aspirations appear too high, there is fear that this may threaten one’s success in engaging in heterosexual dating relationships. Indeed, Orenstein (1994) describes girls’ intentional subordination of self by attempting to be quiet and compliant “good girls” in the academic realm (pleasing teachers), and by extension non-threatening to male students to whom they might be attracted. While popular culture is often named as a culprit in perpetuating negative self-image in girls, these texts also highlight the role parents (especially mothers), teachers and peers play in maintaining gender-specific behaviors that degrade women and girls.

Certainly the recommended texts have much to say about the socialization that occurs in educational settings, and the impact of school structures and faculty interventions on girls’ sense of self. As the AAUW (1992) and Sadker and Sadker (1994) report, teachers at all grade levels have been shown to spend more time attending to male students than to females, provide more pro-academic instruction to males, consciously or unconsciously track males and females differently, privilege male over female
experiences and contributions in the formal curriculum, and predominately conduct their classes based on what have been deemed masculine learning styles. According to these works, schools that specifically attend to female development and empowerment appear to assist girls in overcoming rigid gender socialization, and single sex schools for girls can often provide such an environment.

While these recommended texts do indeed draw attention to negative aspects of the female experience, it is important to see the hope and promise that they include. Drawing attention to these problems is directly linked to a belief that girls and women have enormous abilities and talents that are going unrecognized and untapped. Privately, girls share with researchers their “true” interests and knowledge, their understanding of the world around them, and the sacrifices they are making to be accepted and valued. These authors all believe that once women’s experiences and behaviors are understood, our society can be transformed in ways that support members more equally and allow women and girls to live more authentic lives. These works are intended to lead toward greater possibilities for all by enhancing the opportunities for women. The awareness of gender socialization is not merely an exposition of problems, but a call to action.

As has been examined earlier, schools can serve as one such site for action. Returning to Riordan (1998), single-sex schools can be especially effective in supporting development when they include such characteristics as positive role models, reduction in gender differences in the curriculum and opportunities, reduction in gender bias in teacher-student interaction, reduction in gender stereotypes in peer interaction, heightened leadership opportunities, pro-academic parents and students, a solid core curriculum,
positive social organization of the school, and active and constructivist teaching and learning. While not all girls' schools provide these opportunities, if these characteristics are present, they are likely to help shield girls from negative influences and help develop individual strengths.

The intended role of *A Room Of One's Own* on the reading list has confounded me throughout this project. At times I see this as a general reminder of women's subordinate status at a time when AGS was in its first quarter of existence. I have also seen it as a metaphor for the value of single-sex schools, to support girls' needs for a separate space for learning and thinking. This metaphor fails, however, because the needed separation Woolf espouses is from daily demands and monetary constraints, not from men and sex role expectations. The book serves well to remind teachers of women's exploitation and the neglect of women's experiences in history, therefore setting the stage for finding ways to supplement biased representations. I also view the book as celebrating the virtues of wealth and independence, and am certain this is not the reason for its placement on the list.

Certainly there are important messages to be found in this book even if I cannot place the text adequately alongside the other readings. However, more than the others perhaps, this book provided a message to me as a researcher. Feeling overburdened with paid work, volunteer commitments, financial responsibilities, and personal needs, I found myself lacking the creativity and "genius" to complete the written portion of the project. Not until I could take a break from my commitments and find a "room of my own" could I truly focus on my writing and immerse myself in the data. While I may not ever be able
to live the type of life that allows permanent separation from worldly responsibilities, Woolf gives me the license to periodically claim my own space.

These questions and concerns lead to the next section of this literature review, a general introduction to conceptions of gender and feminism. The struggle between identifying categories which are scientifically or socially useful, and making essentialist statements based upon these categories is impossible to reconcile, but provides a rich area for research on discourse.

Conceptualizing Feminism and Gender

None of the recommended readings aimed to address feminism directly or to provide an account of women’s subordination from a systems perspective. Such an omission likely reflects the interests and sensitivities of the faculty and administration, and may influence the discourses uncovered in the study. Given this, I believe that a general discussion of terms related to “feminism” and “gender” may provide a cursory framing of the project. Although these descriptions are by no means assumed to be the only interpretations of the terms, they hint to the fluidity of meanings attached to them, and the politics of definition generally. Indeed, these explorations of terms provide a starting point for discussion of feminism and gender and the meaning attributed to these concepts by the faculty participants..

Susan M. Hartmann (1998) suggests a simple definition of feminism, namely “a recognition and critique of male supremacy combined with efforts to change it” (p. 277). Black (1989) provides a more detailed description by identifying three categories of feminism, feminism as an ideology or belief system, feminism as a social movement or
political struggle, and feminism as an analytic or academic perspective. For the purposes of this study, each of these categories is likely to apply.

The action component of feminism is a common theme among those who attempt to define this term, as echoed in Lisa Maria Hogeland's discussion of the distinctions between gender consciousness and feminist consciousness, "gender consciousness takes two forms: awareness of women's vulnerability and celebration of women's difference."

She notes that feminists have helped to increase gender consciousness, but cautions that this awareness and celebration can be used both to support feminists' agendas, or to develop means to maintain the status quo. She clarifies by asserting,

> gender consciousness is a necessary precondition for feminist consciousness but they are not the same. The difference lies in the link between gender and politics. Feminism politicizes gender consciousness, inserts it into a systematic analysis of histories and structures of domination and privilege. Feminism asks questions - difficult and complicated questions, often with contradictory and confusing answers - about how gender consciousness can be used both for and against women, how vulnerability and difference help and hinder women's self-determination and freedom. Fear of feminism, then, is not fear of gender, but rather a fear of politics. Fear of politics can be understood as a fear of living in consequences, a fear of reprisals. (1998, p. 305)

The links between fear and silence, as noted earlier, limit public discussion of the nuances of understanding and meaning, and maintain an aura of mystery (in its most negative connotation) which prevents examination into the true nature of feminist action and intention.

Another component espoused in many definitions of feminism includes a social component, an intention to act for the collectivity of humans, not just for self-interest. In her critique of individualism, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese develops an argument for
attending to community as a goal of feminism, rather than individual benefit. Quoted at length, she notes,

Minimally justice should offer women the same opportunities for individualism as men. The history of gender relations and the differences in male and female biology constitute powerful barriers to the simple inclusion of women in the individualistic market and polity. Women require discrete opportunities. Or, rather, they require a new conception of the economy and polity that can take account of sexual asymmetry without subjugating women to men. Women’s needs cannot be defended in the name of atomistic individualistic principles. They must be fought for in the name of social justice for all - not individuals viewed as so many atoms, but individuals viewed as responsible and interdependent members of society, from which their rights derive. Like it or not, we are embarking on an age of distributive justice and social, in contrast to innate, rights. The measure of freedom and dignity that we manage to build into that inescapably collective society will depend heavily on the principles in the name of which we build it. (1991, p. 86)

Such a frame requires feminists to actively challenge institutions that have supported women’s (and others’) subordination, and to seek social change to enhance all people’s quality of life. However, children of the upper- and middle-classes are likely to come from families that have benefited financially and socially from the status quo. Girls’ school students may need to challenge their own privilege if they embrace feminist ideals. Given the myriad developmental and academic challenges adolescent girls face, embracing feminist ideologies proves to be both a liberating and self-confrontive experience. If AGS is indeed enacting feminist pedagogies and practices, I wonder how the teachers negotiate this difficult terrain with the students.

A key question surrounding naming ideological, or indeed political, positioning is a concern about imposing a designation upon others. Asking a question that echoes those of administrators at AGS, theorist Rosalind Delmar asks,
can an action be ‘feminist’ even if those who perform it are not? Within contemporary feminism much emphasis has been laid on feminism as consciousness. One of the most distinctive practices of modern feminism has been the ‘consciousness-raising group.’ If feminism is the result of reflection and conscious choice, how does one place those individuals and women’s groups who would, for a variety of reasons, reject the description ‘feminist’ if it were applied to them? Does it make sense to ascribe to them a feminism of which they are unaware? What, in the framework provided by ‘feminist consciousness’, is then the status of ‘unconscious’ feminism? (1994, p. 8)

Throughout this project I have had to check my perceptions of actions and statements that appear to me to be feminist, but are not identified as such by those enacting or stating them. As Delmar contends,

there are those who claim that feminism does have a complex of ideas about women, specific to or emanating from feminists. This means that it should be possible to separate out feminism and feminists from the multiplicity of those concerned with women’s issues. It is by no means absurd to suggest that you don’t have to be a feminist to support women’s rights to equal treatment, and that not all those supportive of women’s demands are feminists. In this light feminism can claim its own history, its own practices, its own ideas, but feminists can make no claim to an exclusive interest in or copyright over problems affecting women. Feminism can thus be established as a field... but cannot claim women as its domain. (p. 9)

Throughout this project, even if the outcomes of practices lead to ends that would be supported by feminists, I have not claimed these as the product of feminist work unless so named by the participants. Similarly, it may be possible for individuals to claim to be engaging in feminist projects whose outcomes do not appear to lead to changes in women’s situatedness in society.

Returning to terms addressed in Fox-Genovese’s discussion of biology and gender relations, clear distinctions are made between sex as a biological construct, and gender as a socially-constructed identity. “Although sexual differences can be reduced to the
reproductive system ... sex differences do not account for gender, for women’s social, political, and economic subordination or women’s childcare responsibilities” (Hare-Mustin and Marecek, 1994, pp.53-4). Echoing this distinction, Maggie Humm notes that “a central task in contemporary feminist theory from Kate Millett onwards is to distinguish between sex and gender so that expectations of sex roles can be altered if they are not perceived to be biological” (1990, p. 201). Thus when one speaks of a single-sex school, this simply means that only those who are biologically female can enroll. When speaking of gender-sensitive institutional practices, social, political, economic, and biological conceptions of “women” and “men” will be taken into consideration. Entering this project, I was especially interested in the faculty members’ perceptions of their pedagogy as either “gender-sensitive,” or “feminist” or both.

Recognizing physical differences between men and women, and indeed boys and girls if clothing/self-presentation is taken into account, is inescapable in our society. As Simone de Beauvoir (1989/1952) states,

To go for a walk with one’s eyes open is enough to demonstrate that humanity is divided into two classes of individuals whose clothes, faces, bodies, smiles, gaits, interests, and occupations are manifestly different. Perhaps these differences are superficial, perhaps they are destined to disappear. What is certain is that right now they do most obviously exist. If her functioning as a female is not enough to define woman, if we decline also to explain her through ‘the eternal feminine’ and if nevertheless we admit, provisionally, that women do exist, then we must face the question: what is a woman? (pp. xx-xxi)

She continues,

the terms masculine and feminine are used symmetrically only as a matter of form, as on legal papers. In actuality the relation of the two sexes is not quite like that of two electrical poles, for man represents both the positive and the neutral, as is indicated by the common use of man to designate human beings in general;
whereas woman represents only the negative, defied by limiting criteria, without reciprocity. (p. xxi)

The normativity of the male experience, rather than the identification of transformed categories of neutral or normal which negate the privilege of traditionally masculine or patriarchal positionings, serves to mask the maintenance of male-dominance even when/if women achieve “equality” with men. A female-centered institution like AGS provides opportunities to challenge what is seen as “traditionally masculine” modes of operation, and challenges institutional members to explore the possibilities available in such an environment. As I began my research, I was interested to see if the school indeed functioned differently than other schools I had attended, and to what degree this might be attributed to intentional anti-patriarchal practices.

Hare-Mustin and Marecek (1994) draw attention to the paradoxes inherent in gender theorizing, for one cannot comfortably both claim the sameness of the sexes (seeking equality) and promote a special value or difference which is women’s (i.e. caring, or a “way of knowing”) without some resistance. “Some believe that affirming difference affirms women’s value and special nature. Others believe that insisting on equality (that is, no difference) is necessary for social change and the redistribution of power and privilege” (pp.67-8). They conclude by noting, “the representation of gender as male-female difference obscures and marginalizes the interrelatedness and commonalities of women and men. It also obscures institutional sexism and the extent of male authority” (p.69).
Throughout this study faculty are seen to struggle between discourses of sameness and difference, attempting to name what they intuitively see as the benefits of girls schooling without essentializing or pathologizing “women” or the “female experience.”

A further complication to gender theorizing is taking into account the intersections of gender with race, ethnicity, class, religious affiliation, sexual orientation/identification (including transgendered identification which not only confronts gender, but also “sex” as a category), and a myriad of other biological and social influences on individuals and groups. Sandra Lipsitz Bern cautions that the inclusion of cross-cultural influences may impede the progress of a more heterogeneous women’s project, stating “if feminists are to keep from getting mired in yet another set of impasse-producing dichotomies, they must not allow their newfound appreciation for the differences among women to undermine the long-standing feminist project of creating a social world in which the category of woman is no longer synonymous with the category of inequality” (1993, p. 93). The struggle/desire/need to identify similarities while respecting differences among women creates much the same struggle as found when defining differences and similarities among women and men; historically the middle-class, Caucasian, heterosexual female experience is taken as “neutral” as well as “positive”, leaving “other” women to represent an interesting and valuable “opposite,” whose experiences are slowly being incorporated into a transformed concept of the “neutral.” Within an institution like AGS whose students are primarily upper- or middle-class, Caucasian, and (perceived as) heterosexual, the disruption of limiting categories requires especial attention by those committed to expanding the students’ field of possibilities.
Pedagogy

The desire to create classroom environments that support women and women's experiences have led to philosophical and practical discussions of "best methods" for teaching girls in single-sex and coeducational settings. Central to these methods is a concern for "gender-sensitive" practices. As described by Barbara Houston (1985), schooling cannot be adequately enacted within a "gender-free" framework, if such a positioning requires either "disregarding gender by obliterating gender differentiations which arose within the educational sphere" or ignoring gender altogether as a category of discussion or attention" (p. 122). Instead, she suggests the only acceptable meaning of a gender-free education would be one which is free of gender bias, but that such a positioning is rather limiting. She suggests gender sensitivity as an alternative, noting what differentiates a gender-sensitive strategy from a gender-free one is that a gender-sensitive strategy allows one to recognize that at different times and in different circumstances one might be required to adopt opposing policies in order to eliminate gender bias. . . . the superiority of the gender-sensitive perspective is secured by the fact that it can yield a methodology that is self-correcting. For it is a view that can acknowledge that gender is a set of relations between the sexes, a process that is constantly organizing and reorganizing our social life. It can recognize the dynamic nature of the gender system, one that exerts pressures, produces reactions, and generates changes. (p. 131)

Entering AGS I expected the teachers to support gender-sensitive practices, but I was uncertain the degree to which these would be enacted. Would this effect teaching style, student expectations, the formal curriculum, the co-curriculum, etc.? I wondered if the teachers were able to name the ways in which their teaching was gender-sensitive, or if their philosophies and practices were attributed to other sources. I also wondered if the
faculty acknowledged a difference between “gender-sensitive” and “feminist” pedagogies, and where the concept of “femininity” fit into this.

Because I had been told that feminist pedagogy was practiced at AGS, I was surprised that the school’s recommended readings included no texts specifically on feminist pedagogy. Among the most “popular” texts on this subject is Maher and Tetreault’s (1994) *The Feminist Classroom*. Describing its development, they state that feminist pedagogy evolved from “many different sources: the consciousness-raising practices derived from the women’s movement and other movements of the 1960s, the progressive tradition in American education created by John Dewey, and the more general forms of ‘liberal teaching’ espoused by Paulo Freire and others” (p. 9). Perhaps the clearest statement about feminist pedagogy comes from Dorothy Berkson, quoted in Maher and Tetreault (1994), “the reason we call this feminist pedagogy is because those of us here who are doing it came at it through thinking about feminist theory. We have chosen to call it feminist because we arrived at it through that route. I call myself a feminist teacher because that is the particular mode of analysis that I use to arrive at what I am trying to do” (p. 13). Therefore, those who engage in feminist pedagogy are intentionally enacting feminist ideologies. If one is not entering one’s teaching from a feminist perspective, feminist pedagogy is not happening. In a comprehensive article on defining feminist pedagogy, Carolyn Shrewsbury (1993) claims

at its simplest level, feminist pedagogy is concerned with gender justice and overcoming oppressions. It recognizes the genderedness of all social relations and consequently of all societal institutions and structures. Thus, fundamental to a feminist perspective is a commitment to growth, to renewal, to life. The vision itself must continue to evolve. (p. 9)
She continues,

feminist pedagogy ultimately seeks a transformation of the academy and points toward steps, however small, that we can all take in each of our classrooms to facilitate that transformation. Three concepts, community, empowerment, and leadership, are central to these steps and provide a way of organizing our exploration into the meaning of feminist pedagogy. (p. 10)

Seeing empowerment, a term she links to Freire, as a key concern, Shrewsbury notes,

to accomplish empowerment of all, feminist pedagogy employs classroom strategies that: 1) enhance the students’ opportunities and abilities to develop their thinking about the goals and objectives they wish and need to accomplish individually and collectively, 2) develop the students’ independence (from formal instructors) as learners, 3) enhance the stake that everyone has in the success of a course and thereby make clear the responsibility of all members of the class for the learning of all, 4) develop skills of planning, negotiating, and evaluating and decision making, 5) reinforce or enhance the self-esteem of class members by the implicit recognition that they are sufficiently competent to play a role in course development and are able to be changed agents, 6) expand the students’ understanding of the subject matter of the course and of the joy and difficulty of intense intellectual activity as they actively consider learning goals and sequences. (pp. 10-11)

Shrewsbury believes that empowering students helps them to find their own voices and develop an authentic sense of self.

Jennifer Scanlon (1993) highlights the need for links between teaching and action for a pedagogy to be truly feminist. She indicates that feminist pedagogy is designed to help students get beyond mere awareness, and moves them toward action, “go beyond providing information to empower students so that they see themselves not only as victims of injustice but as people capable of creating change in society” (p. 8). Further, “if what students learn in our classes does not reach outside the classroom door or stretch beyond the end of the semester, our work bears the label ‘instruction’ far more than it does ‘feminist’” (p. 8). Scanlon would define pedagogy that addresses gendered issues,
but without an action component, as gender-sensitive, but not truly feminist. Drawing
upon the work of Giroux and Simon, Scanlon believes in pedagogy that “constructs a
political vision” such that both teachers and students are “actively challenging the
patriarchal social structure” (p. 9). Others do not argue for an activist focus, however
they do strive to expand the understandings students have of institutionalized sexism and
other forms of gendered social systems.

Taking a slightly different position, Elaine Hedges (1996) describes feminist
methods as “seeing students as active rather than passive learners, replacing the lecture
approach with more interactive pedagogies, and emphasizing the development of critical
thinking rather than retention of facts and ‘coverage’ of material are changes frequently
found in feminist teaching methods” (p. 19). Clearly these methods also closely mirror
those supported by critical theorists and liberatory pedagogues like Freire, McLaren, and
Giroux, and other learner-centered pedagogues. Hedges continues by noting feminists’
“increasing emphasis in their courses on social issues and problems. ...for course content
to allow students to discover themselves as unique individuals and to clarify their beliefs
and values; and increasingly encouraged students to examine diverse views about all
issues covered” (p. 19).

Describing teaching in a manner which links closely to critical pedagogies,
Shirley C. Parry (1996) suggests

feminist pedagogy promotes the awareness that knowledge is not a discrete body
of ‘truths’ that the instructor knows and imparts to students. It reframes the
relationship between students and the course material by suggesting that students
themselves are capable of active learning and that this, rather than passive
receiving, is what works best. Feminist teaching encourages classroom
interactions that emphasize students’ ability to question and to explore issues
deeply, and nurtures the development of motivation and skills that allow students to investigate ideas and evidence and arrive at meaning... helps students achieve mastery of material on their own or in groups. The goal is to give students the means to gain power and control over knowledge, and, as a consequence, to have authority in the classroom... its emphasis on the cooperative and the collective... makes explicit that how we experience and understand things is rooted in our social position, based on a variety of factors including gender, race, ethnicity, class, and sexual preference... feminist pedagogy affirms the value of personal experience as a central component to learning. (pp. 45-47)

Parry continues by clarifying the "feminist" portion of this pedagogy, noting, "many techniques used by feminist teachers were not originally developed as specifically feminist methods. However, when they are used in the context of feminist reconceptualizations of knowledge and in classrooms where power relationships are being examined and realigned in consciously feminist ways, they become important tools for feminist pedagogy" (p. 47, emphasis mine). The importance of context and the self-defined positioning of the teacher are therefore the key factors in identifying a feminist standpoint from other gender-sensitive styles.

In a well-reasoned, albeit tritely written, article entitled, Is there a feminist pedagogy?, Dennis Cato (1994) argues that "attempts to show that there is [a feminist pedagogy] have failed to establish either methodological or epistemological grounds on which such a pedagogy might be based" (p. 325). Cato asserts that "there is no single feminist background theory informing such pedagogy," (p. 326) and I quite agree with him because there are multiple feminist theories which inform the pedagogy. Cato does acknowledge "it is possible to discern a generalized spectrum of feminist thought and its application to feminist pedagogy by virtue of a range of positions in respect to the origins of the 'patriarchal paradigm' in educational thought and practice" (p. 327). Cato argues
that this range does not comprise a distinctive epistemology, and therefore cannot be the basis of a "feminist" pedagogy. Cato fails to see that part of feminism’s aim is to acknowledge a range of positions from which to experience the world. Luke (1996), Brown (1992) and others acknowledge this range of positions as vital to the grounding of feminist thinking and teaching, while Cato sees this as proof of incoherence. Perhaps the impasse here is Cato’s desire to analytically identify a specific epistemology and methodology which goes against the feminist project of inclusion and diversity.

Beyond his claim that a failure to have a coherent epistemology, Cato believes feminist pedagogy also fails in its methodology. Cato claims “a distinctive pedagogy means a distinctive methodology, a distinctive way of proceeding in the classroom” (p. 328). He then proceeds to show that under the label “feminist pedagogy” a variety of methodologies have been supported, and that this variety negates the existence of a named method. He further claims that visions and goals of feminist pedagogy are “indistinguishable from mainline liberal pedagogy” (p. 330) however he defines that.

Agreeing that there is no specific method, Shrewsbury contends,

feminist pedagogy does not assume that all classrooms are alike. Indeed, it suggests how classrooms might differ depending, for example, on the initial competence of students... It does not automatically preclude any technique or approach.... but it does include a reflexive element that increases the feminist scholarship component involved in the teaching/learning of any subject matter. It has close ties with other liberatory pedagogies, but it cannot be subsumed under other pedagogical approaches. It is transformative, helping us revision the educational enterprise. but it can also be phased into a traditional teaching approach or another alternative pedagogical approach. It is not all or nothing, although practitioners find that taking one step makes the next stop logically compelling. It is a crucial component of a feminist revolution.” (1993, pp. 13-4)
Shrewsbury’s and other researcher’s comfort with definitional openness is exactly what confounds Cato as he attempts to place categories on a field which is actively striving to avoid being essentialized.

I would agree with Cato that there is no one method or ideology that can be identified without qualification as feminist pedagogy. There are, however, feminist pedagogues, and I would argue that there are pedagogies based on feminist’s philosophies of education, which may indeed be worthy of the designation feminist pedagogies. The variety of philosophies and practices that are supported by self-identified feminists is widespread, yet continue to center around commitments to enhancing the gender-sensitivity within their classrooms, and to transforming students’ ways of seeing society and their roles within it.

Summary

The texts offered as recommended readings for AGS faculty present a story of struggle and opportunity for girls. Coeducational schools are described as often harmful to girls’ intellectual, occupational, social, and emotional development. Peers and teachers are blamed for creating environments that silence girls and limit their aspirations. Proportionally greater attention to male students, poor mentoring of girls toward academics and careers, male-centered curricula, lack of role models, peer culture of female submission, sexual harassment, and myriad other circumstances contribute to girls’ devaluation. Girls themselves are seen as partially aware of the harms they are facing, but choosing to collude in the process for the sake of relation and acceptance.
Single sex schools for girls are offered as a possible site to overcome or avoid such circumstances, however such schools on their face cannot promise positive outcomes. A central issue for schools to address is the balance between attempting to provide “safety” for students through a single-sex environment, and a desire to promote student empowerment. As Lee (1998) and Riordan (1998) stressed, the benefits of girls’ schools depends on such factors as campus culture, school size, student-teacher relationships, role modeling, teaching methods, and formal and informal curricular attention to issues of gender.

Another component of the readings addresses the issue of difference, and the gendered socialization and essential characteristics linked to sex. Behaviors, perspectives, and conversational patterns are described as having a relationship to sex and gender socialization, and as creating consequences for healthy development. Girls are shown to be socialized toward submission, leading toward low self-esteem and a variety of attendant self-destructive behaviors. Schools and families are offered as particularly valuable in countering harmful social norms if those involved are aware of the problems and properly prepared to respond. The difficulty of simultaneously acknowledging differences based on biology and socialization and promoting an agenda of equal treatment and sameness was presented, although no clear resolutions have been identified.

While the recommended readings provided an interesting discourse on schooling, voice, and self-esteem, these texts generally fail to specifically address feminism or draw connections between girls’ academic and/or social development and feminist aims.
Further, the link between feminist ideologies and teaching for empowerment was also absent. As presented within the review of literature, feminist aims of agency, empowerment, disrupting patriarchy, and critical reading of one’s surroundings were in many ways addressed within the recommended readings, but offered outside of the rubric of feminism. Indeed, while the “harms” which face girls and their recommended remedy within schooling seem to match closely with the aims of feminist pedagogy, this connection is not explicitly named within the texts.

Informed by the works included in this chapter, this dissertation project seeks to explore the discourses of gender and pedagogy as presented in institutional documents, interviews, conversations, and in-school observations. The next chapter will provide a brief introduction to A Girls School, highlighting recent developments related to institutional mission and single-sex education.
CHAPTER 4

SETTING THE CONTEXT: AN ANALYSIS OF INSTITUTIONAL DOCUMENTS

Beginning with a general introduction to the founding and development of the institution, this chapter will analyze archival resources from the past seventeen years as AGS addressed issues of growth and program development. As noted earlier, the transitions and commitments made in the 1984-1992 period were seen by the administration as significant to the development of the institution, and warrant exploration and exposition. The analysis is intended to provide insight into discourses of gender and girls' schooling prevalent in institutional documents, setting a context for the analysis of interviews and observations in the next two chapters. While by no means a comprehensive history, this chapter provides some sense of the school’s development and the possible implications for faculty discourses and activities.

The archival sources in this analysis include institutional publications and communications, and daily and weekly local newspapers. To support the confidentiality of the institution, the sources will not be specifically identified, but will instead be referenced as either institutional documents or newspaper articles (see Appendix A). Sources that would not reveal the identity of the institution are fully cited. In addition to
the archival sources, two studies conducted at AGS will be examined, helping to set the context for the project in which I engaged.

Founding Through 1984

As is widely promoted, AGS was founded in 1898 as a college-preparatory school for girls, however, as Haithe Anderson (1993) asserts, the founding of the school was hardly based on a desire to liberate women from the confining education provided in public and finishing schools. In her study of AGS’ archival papers, Anderson analyzed the founder’s own accounts of the motivations behind the school’s founding and early development. Referring to the founder as Kelley Smith (a pseudonym), Anderson states why did Kelley Smith, a European American woman (sic), start this school? What motivated her? She states simply that she was in need of a job. According to another historical story of the school she was a ‘well-brought-up girl’ and felt that teaching was the only avenue open to her. She had applied to Miss Sigourny’s school, her alma mater, but was turned down, ironically for lack of credentials. She couldn’t go into public school teaching because her finishing school training had not prepared her for the world of work. Interestingly, instead of applying to college, she decided to open a school. It is probable that her decision to open this school was not strictly tied to financial need. . . . That she viewed starting up a school as a viable solution to her ‘need’ to work suggests that she came from an upper class family and probably had alternatives to ‘outside work’ available to her. Her desire probably stemmed from the search for something meaningful to do before marriage. On a broader level this can read as one story about the positionings available to European American women situated in the upper/professional middle classes

In her search for meaningful work it is clear that Smith was not driven by some strong commitment to an educational philosophy or religious conviction - so common to many who started schools during the 19th century. . . . Even her commitment to starting a college preparatory school seems to have been based more on a need to differentiate her school from Miss Sigourney’s school rather than some strong philosophical commitment to higher education for women. Indeed, not only did she not go to college but she is reported to have been surprised when some of her friends chose the college route. . .

Finally, it is clear that she saw the school as a temporary place for herself before marriage. . . . she decided she could do the job without the full bag of educational credentials...
In the end it seems that AGS was more a product of serendipity than philosophical commitment. (p. 130-2)

Understanding that her background did not prepare her to teach college preparatory courses for secondary students, Smith sought the support of Jane Bole (pseudonym), a successful private school teacher who was recommended to Smith by a close friend. The two women sublet rooms in Smith's mother's house for classrooms, and began soliciting students from family friends. The school opened with 25 students, increasing to at least 100 students by 1900 (including several male students in the lower school). The students received a general education taught by full-time faculty, supplemented by foreign languages, arts, and physical education taught by contracted teachers. As enrollments increased, the school outgrew its space in the Smith home, and AGS relocated to a mansion in the community. Another local move in 1953 brought the school to its current site, which has accommodated numerous modifications and expansions on its own and adjacent properties.

Both Smith and Bole left the school in 1904, Smith to get married, Bole to travel. That Smith left the school after six years continues to suggest that her commitment to the education for girls was more a pre-marriage diversion than a passion for women's schooling. Even so, the school provided a valuable educational alternative for upper and middle-class [white] women who might not otherwise have had local access to a college-preparatory curriculum. Two women shared the "headmistress" position through 1926, and upon one's death, the other maintained sole responsibility for the role for many more years. Under this leadership the school grew in quality and scope, or as school histories
note, "the school became one of the most vigorous and progressive in the Midwest." The school was next headed by a renowned (male) novelist, and then a wife-husband team. When the husband left the school after a year, the wife remained as head of school for ten more years, and played a key role in the school's relocation in 1953. Following her sudden death, a succession of two male heads of school saw the school through several facility and programmatic expansions, including the development of athletic and arts complexes, and in 1980 the opening of the pre-school and kindergarten. The current head of school arrived in the summer of 1985, the first woman in this role since 1957.

In the first several years of AGS' existence, few graduates attended college, although over time the percentage of graduates seeking post-secondary education grew quickly. While the school espoused a college-preparatory curriculum, a non-collegiate "track" was clearly available through the mid-1960s, although the school did not promote this course of study in its formal publications. Even when non-collegiate courses were available, AGS remained committed to its college-preparatory designation, and emerged over time as a prominent private institution in the state. Providing one of the few private, independent schooling options for women in the region, AGS' enrollments grew, its faculty and administrators were hired with increasingly strong credentials, and the curriculum became more rigorous in order to prepare students for acceptance and success in a wide range of academic programs in the nation's colleges and universities.

Founded as a school for the elite, the students at AGS were primarily Caucasian, upper- or middle-class girls. Although marketed as a girls' school, to ensure financial stability boys were allowed to enroll as regular day students and summer students. Once
financially secure, regular enrollment of males was curtailed, although males are still welcomed to engage in summer coursework. As the local community diversified racially and culturally, the student body slowly diversified as well. Although the school continues to enroll primarily Caucasian students, attention is given to addressing issues of racial inclusion in both enrollments and school curriculum. As the school grew in quality and scope, so did its prestige and endowment, thus affording the school opportunities to provide scholarships and financial assistance to students who might otherwise not have been able to attend. Presently, over half a million dollars is offered annually in financial aid, primarily to upper school students.

While the institution began by preparing its students for the limited collegiate majors and careers hospitable to them at the turn of the century, it developed into an institution that attempts to prepare students for any career aspiration they desire. The school aims to provide students with the wherewithal to address the existing barriers to achieving their occupational goals, and the academic preparation to succeed in their chosen fields. Currently, only a college-preparatory course of study is available, with 100% of the school's graduates attending colleges and universities.

Recent Developments

1984 long-range plan.

As noted above, there have been some modifications in the mission and philosophy of AGS, although the commitment to a college-preparatory curriculum for girls has persisted as a central aim. The goals and sentiments expressed in the school's June, 1984 long-range plan provides a recent comprehensive document on the
institution’s mission and goals. Three major objectives were offered: the maintenance of a single-sex environment, the maintenance of the current size of the student body, and the expansion of the physical site to better meet the needs of the institution’s academic and co-curricular programs. Quoted at length from the long-range planning report, the institutional philosophy is offered:

[AGS], through eighty-five years of a rapidly changing world, still remains committed to two major ideas: the value of separate education for women, and the value of certain fundamental studies which constitute a liberal education. Using traditional and innovative approaches to instruction, the school is committed to academic excellence and to an overall program which will enable each student to achieve her highest potential; indeed, to establish in each student a love of learning and such strong skills that her intellectual capacity, aesthetic awareness, and sense of social responsibility will continue to develop throughout her lifetime.

These values are promoted through the total school environment. Foremost is the presence of a vital student body selected from diverse academic and economic backgrounds. Each student, whether intellectually gifted, creatively oriented, highly motivated and hard-working, or of untapped ability, finds encouragement for her style of learning in an environment in which her self-esteem and her mental and physical well-being are afforded high priority.

Equally important are faculty members, selected for their knowledge of and enthusiasm for their fields. Such a faculty presents a rigorous academic program designed to prepare students for the demands of college and the responsibilities of a lifetime. Extracurricular activities are offered which enhance the interests and talents of students and faculty as well as encourage service and leadership within the school community.

Taken as a whole, this statement of philosophy directs the school toward a position of educational leadership within its own community and beyond. Although the philosophy and mission will continue to be examined periodically, the major goal of the school is to educate young women and to educate them well.

This philosophy highlights a commitment to students’ full development, with a strong emphasis on academic and career preparation. Attention to issues of diversity, and appreciation of a broad range of talents and interests, suggests a recognition of multifaceted hopes and expectations for students’ full participation in school and society.
Mention of faculty preparation and skills highlights the key role the institution feels its teachers play in the enactment of the school’s philosophy.

The document continues by addressing “policy goals” in the areas of student body, faculty, curriculum/program, administration, governance, physical plant, and finance. The largest of these areas is curriculum, which supports the mission by affirming the continuation of a strong liberal arts core and enhanced development of programs that “address the needs of the future” including computer literacy and exposure to “issues and concerns of contemporary society.” The faculty goals involve attracting and retaining strong faculty through competitive benefits and salaries, and requiring “performance excellence” through participation in faculty development programs and ongoing performance evaluation.

The first policy goals listed after the mission statement relate to the student body. The lead goal was direct and concise, “to maintain [AGS’] single sex status.” Supporting this statement, the document continues,

- a single-sex school is a special institution uniquely suited to the development of young women. It offers girls numerous advantages including leadership opportunities, enduring friendships, increased self-esteem, and intellectual achievement in all subject areas. Furthermore, in its supportive and informal atmosphere, girls can concentrate on the essential daily business of education without the early sexual and social pressures of co-educational schools. Finally, it is a place where female accomplishment in every endeavor is unlimited. By continuing to provide a superior education to young women, [AGS] also contributes to the range of educational choices available [in the area]. (emphasis mine)

The language used in this statement reflects much of what is stated in the literature on single-sex schooling, and on the experiences of adolescent girls. How much of this
statement was based on research findings, and how much was simply of reflection on experience, is hard to tell. It appears likely that the works of Valerie Lee and Sadker and Sadker (see chapter 3) were available to the AGS faculty prior to writing this statement, however popular discussion of girls' development and school experiences was still several years away. That issues of self-esteem, social and psychological pressures, academic achievement, and leadership would permeate the literature on girls' schooling in the next 15 years perhaps reflects a congruence between the awareness of the institutional leadership and the lived experience of the students.

Another “student body” policy goal in the long-range plan that warrants attention states, “to encourage actively social, cultural, academic, and athletic interaction with other schools.” The implementation statement directly following states “to provide interaction with boys in realistic settings [through] community service, arts, athletics, academic endeavors, joint activities with [two local private schools].” The two schools include the independent boys’ school, CPS, and a near-by religiously-affiliated boys’ school, the two institutions with which AGS most regularly interacted. At this time, AGS was much more involved with CPS than the religiously-affiliated school, as the independent schools had more in common in terms of mission and philosophy.

The transition from “interaction with other schools” to “interaction with boys” is striking given that this policy goal directly follows the affirmation to maintain AGS as a single sex school. Certainly interaction with young men and young women at other schools would prove valuable as new perspectives, abilities, interests and environments are encountered. Further, it is unclear what is meant by interactions in “realistic settings.”
If this is intended to mean settings in which male and female students collaborate, cooperate, or complete on equal footing, this may not necessarily reflect "real life" and indeed may not happen when the students are interacting in these activities. If it is to give the young women an understanding of what it is like to interact with males in the activities listed, the choice to interact especially with the males in the local private schools is understandable given tradition, but also limits interactions to males in privileged school settings. The desire not only to have girls interact with boys, but the intentional inclusion of this desire in the long-range plan suggests several interpretations. First, it may be a way to allay concerns that girls attending a single-sex school would be unable to interact socially and intellectually with boys. Second, it may address concerns that girls in single-sex environments lack opportunities to meet boys to date. Third, it may be a way of affirming the school's commitment to positive relations with other schools in the community. Whatever the reason, the attention to interactions with boys, and solely with those in local private schools, expands the girls' social and academic opportunities within a controlled environment.

Addressing growth needs, 1984-1987

AGS' physical plant was designed to accommodate 450 students, yet by the mid-1980s enrollments were exceeding 600. The 1984 long-range plan included both a call to maintain the current size of the student body and to develop a plan to best accommodate enrollments, small class size, and changing facility use. An outside consultant assessed the school and community, and produced a report in November, 1984, that explored options to decrease school size, move all or part of the school, or remain at the current
site. The report was clear in its recommendation to remain at the current site, expanding the buildings and fields where possible, and acquiring an off-campus site for additional sports and arts programs. While the report quickly rejected the idea of shrinking enrollments (it was not economically viable), several possible relocation scenarios were offered including moving the entire school to a larger site, relocating only the upper school, and moving all or some of the school closer to CPS. Moving the whole school was rejected quickly due to costs and the positive relationship between the school and the campus community. Moving the upper school was rejected for programmatic reasons, “separation of the divisions, even by a city block, would almost certainly erase many of the community aspects of [AGS]. A number of treasured traditions would cease to exist. Perhaps more important, maintaining existing inter-divisional collaboration and managing student transition from one division to the next would be more difficult.” Moving closer to CPS was discouraged as well as any discussion of relocation because it “inevitably is followed by consideration of ways to create greater coordination with [CPS] and, possibly, of coeducation... such a move almost certainly results in eventual coeducation.... I would not advise a move which would risk the adoption of coeducation” [emphasis mine]. The consultant noted that the evidence of the benefits of single-sex environments for girls, as well as the marketing advantage of being a girls school, made the risk of moving any part of the school closer to CPS a danger. The only recommended action, therefore, was to further develop the academic programs on the current site, and explore local off-site options for regulation-sized athletic facilities and expanded arts programs.
Action on the report was placed on hold, as the current AGS head of school left, and a new head was appointed and given time to review the situation. A new architectural firm was hired in Autumn, 1986 to conduct a space-use study and offered recommendations on locations for expanded space for classroom and sports facilities. In April, 1987, the AGS Board President wrote a letter to the school community announcing plans to develop AGS' expanded facilities on-site. The letter acknowledged that this decision was based on sound financial sense as well as a desire to maintain the school's single-sex tradition and to afford the best cohesiveness of the academic and social benefits of the school by keeping all forms on one physical site. The letter stated,

we have examined the option of building a separate high school in another location which would have facilitated coordinate activities between [AGS] and [CPS]. It was felt, however, that the creation of two academic campuses would destroy the essence of what makes [AGS] a unique entity. Nevertheless, we are committed to strengthening our ties with [CPS] and will continue to explore ways in which the educational opportunities for students in both schools would be enhanced through our joint efforts. [emphasis mine]

The dual commitment to maintaining relationships with CPS, but continuing the distinctive identity of AGS supported the 1984 consultant's recommendations, and remained true to the long-range plan. The use of the term "destroy" offered a clear statement that AGS was strongly commitment to remaining a single-sex institution. That this claim to individual identity was immediately followed by a statement affirming connection and relationship (indeed in enhancing, not simply maintaining this connection), appears to mirror women's individual experiences of attempts to claim a personal identity while assuring others that this will not hurt relationships to those one is supposed to care for and support.
The school administrators and trustees soon began to seek local sites for expanded athletic facilities, and began a comprehensive fundraising campaign to finance the on-site expansion. In May the Head of School presented a proposal to the city schools Board of Education requesting to share and upgrade a public recreation field close to AGS as a means to expand AGS students’ access to athletic fields. The Head also met with members of the City Council, and as one local news article reported “the decision City Council will eventually make... bears a great deal on whether [AGS] can afford to stay [in the city].” Within several weeks, public dissatisfaction with the proposal seemed to focus on two issues, the use of public facilities for a private school, and concerns that the proposal would require the removal of several old trees which added to the aesthetics and character of the park in which the field was located. As expressed in local papers and conversations with council members and school leaders, the immediate negative community reaction to sharing public sites with AGS led campus leaders to consider additional options for expanding its physical plant, and a last-minute postponement of the formal proposal to the City Council.

**Investigating coordinate education with CPS**

In addition to work to locate an athletic field, May, 1987 began the development of plans for a June meeting between AGS and CPS to discuss the continuing relationship between the two schools. Central to the meeting was a discussion of the “positions of [the two schools] on single-sex, co-ordinate, and co-education.” The meeting would include brainstorming on possibilities and opportunities, leading to the development of consensus and strategy development. This meeting was held on June 18th, four days
before AGS rescinded its proposal to City Council. At the meeting, groups met to discuss four options: maintaining the status quo, developing proximate programs, coeducation for both schools or a combined school, or to wait/delay action. Costs and benefits to each institution were discussed for each option, and led to a decision to develop proximate education. On June 19th, the President of the AGS Board of Trustees sent a letter to faculty, parents and alumnae which stated that AGS was actively pursuing moving the upper school to a site next to CPS. The letter acknowledges that this is a substantial change from the decision to build on-site, made only eight weeks earlier. She notes since the formulation of the [AGS] decision, several developments have caused the Board to reassess the situation. First, [CPS] is in the process of acquiring 120 acres adjacent to its property. Second, [CPS] has reaffirmed its earlier desire to have [AGS] in closer proximity to facilitate cooperation between the two schools, while at the same time maintaining single sex education at both institutions... Third, it has become clear that the securing of satisfactory athletic facilities in [the city], while not impossible, is at best a difficult objective to accomplish.... It is the consensus of the Board that such a move would strengthen the academic and social programs at [AGS] while assuring the continuation of single-sex education for our young women.... While this would mean separating the Upper School from the Lower and Middle Divisions, traditions would be maintained and, indeed strengthened, through diligent and creative efforts by the administration and faculty.

The letter attempted to address the concerns the 1984 consultant offered regarding moving the school to a site near CPS, putting a positive spin on the opportunities offered through such a move. However, the move from “destroying the essence” of the institution to “strengthening” social and academic programs as well as traditions, seems to be quite a leap in such a short period of time. Again the language involves relationship enhancement along with attempts to maintain identity, recognizing that this entails “diligent and creative” efforts to succeed.
Formalizing its commitment to the AGS move, CPS adopted a resolution on July 29th which resolved to make property available at no cost to AGS for the relocation of the Upper School (size and location to be jointly determined), and for CPS to “share its appropriate portion of the cost of construction of any facilities shared” between the two schools. The resolution also created a committee authorized to represent the Board in discussions and negotiations on the matter. As noted in a letter from the CPS Board President to the AGS Board President which announced the resolution, “there is a pervasive feeling that all this makes sense, that it presents both schools with tremendous opportunities and the flexibility to make the most of them, while at the same time ensuring the continuation of separate identities and traditions that are so important to both of us.” The continuing references to institutional “identity” appeared to respect the unique missions of each school, while expanding academic and social opportunities through shared resources and programs.

AGS held several parent and alumnae forums in September of 1987 to gain feedback on the possible move/split of the school. These forums especially addressed issues of cost, coeducation, and the costs and benefits of separating the upper school from the middle and lower levels. Although many community members expected a decision to be made in October, 1987, a letter to parents and alumni in early November indicated a need for more information before such an important decision could be made. Financial considerations were offered as a major concern, leading to the hiring of a feasibility expert to assess the financial implications of the option to move the upper school versus options to maintain the campus on one site. The letter also notes “the pros and cons of
splitting the school are too lengthy to be enumerated here, but in most discussions held, it seems that for every negative aspect, there is an equally strong positive one.” The letter concludes with a promise to continue updating the community on progress, and inviting feedback on the issues at hand. Between April 1987 and November, 1988, much media attention was given to the possible expansion of the AGS campus. Central to these articles was an affirmation of AGS’ commitment to remaining single-sex, and excitement about the new opportunities offered through the expansion of programs and facilities.

**Committing to cooperative education with CPS**

In March, 1988, a proposal was developed for a “cooperative educational program for AGS and CPS” which proposed shared programs in areas which met the following criteria “those which will enhance the quality of our current offerings, and those which cannot, because of financial constraints, be offered by one or another school [due to] too few students [or] prohibitive equipment costs.” Cooperative programs were proposed in academic courses, clubs and co-curricular programs, and athletics. Further discussion was needed in areas of student life, gender issues, faculty processes, administrative policies, and organization and use of facilities. This proposal was attached to a general document asserting cooperation between the two schools which (pending funding) included agreements to move the AGS upper school to the land beside CPS, share costs in constructing several common-use facilities, develop a joint advisory board, and to work cooperatively in AGS’ campaign to fund the move and expansion projects.

In a May 24, 1988 letter to faculty, staff, students, parents and alumni, the presidents of the AGS and CPS Trustees announced that the two Boards “have formally
approved an agreement that paves the way for the relocation of the AGS upper school... by the start of the 1991-1992 school year.” Affirming a coming-of-minds, the letter asserts,

the two schools discovered a great commonality of purpose and interests. Both schools recognized the need to maintain the traditions and strengths that have guided them since their establishment... both schools have agreed that a collaborative relationship promises far greater intellectual and social enrichment, as well as greater breadth and depth of programs, than would otherwise be possible.

The letter announces that there will be a “cooperative curriculum plan” that will afford cross-registration, but also that “the agreement between the schools does not set aside the distinctive educational legacies of either. Rather, the agreement acknowledges those legacies and preserves them, while at the same time uses them as the foundation of a new and innovative relationship.” The local weekly newspaper ran a cover story on the move of the upper school, noting that “with the exception of a few advanced classes, [AGS and CPS] will remain separate, independent and autonomous single-sex private schools.” In a related article in another local publication, the AGS Board president asserted “this is not a merger. We intend to keep our own identity... we don’t feel it’s a step to coeducation. They’ll do extracurricular activities together, but the girls can still be in their own classrooms.” She was quoted in another publication as asserting,

it’s not in my mind a first step toward co-education. Instead it gives everyone a chance to get the education they need, yet the girls will be free to shine in their own classrooms. It’s selfishly in our best interest to stay as separate from [CPS] as we can, while I suppose [CPS] would feel the other way. [emphasis mine]

The presidents’ statements would soon prove prophetic.
In a June letter to the AGS community, the out-going AGS Board president presented a summary statement on the progress of the past year, and the challenges which await. The letter reads, in part,

with the new cooperative education program... there will be new combined advanced course offerings, in which the students may participate and have the advantage of faculty expertise from both schools. As women increasingly compete with men in the work force, this interaction has become important. Yet educational studies continue to show that girls thrive best in a single-sex environment. Thus the board feels it is so important to maintain the single-sex status at the core curriculum level. Our commitment to educating young women and educating them well, will nevertheless be enhanced by this collaborative arrangement into which we have entered.

Such language seems to match the intent of the 1984 long-range plan as it asserts a desire for single-sex education with “realistic” interactions with male students in certain courses and co-curricular activities. The possibilities offered by the upper school relocation were becoming more clear, however little public commentary was being given to the impact of this relocation on the lower and middle schools programs and students. The continued use of the terms collaboration and cooperative suggests a meeting of minds and a sharing of purposes, aiming for the best outcomes for both institutions.

July of 1988 brought a new headmaster to CPS and a new president to the AGS Board of Trustees, both of whom were involved in the development of the cooperative program agreement. The new board president developed a September letter to the AGS community providing answers to many questions that were arising regarding the merger. To the questions “Won’t [AGS] inevitably go co-ed within just a few years?” the letter states, “No... the formal agreement between [AGS and CPS] provides for single-sex education at least until the year 2005. At that time the boards of the two schools can
determine if the cooperative program is still working well for the students.” This statement offered the first discussion of the possibility of coeducation, although placing it in the seemingly distant future. The letter affirms that shared classes between the schools have been held for years, while new classes will be developed that “strengthen their academic programs and offer more diverse curricula than their respective enrollments would otherwise justify.” This document, like many letters that preceded it, continued to address the concerns about eventual coeducation and destruction of school identity and tradition that were raised in the 1984 consultant’s report that advised against moving to land adjacent to CPS.

Things fall apart

The January, 1989 draft of the Agreement between the two schools proved telling of future conflicts between the two institutions. The draft included fifteen pages of information on financial and facility development, less than one on the cooperative educational program’s courses of study, and then several additional pages on cooperatively used facilities. That finances and buildings were significantly privileged over program needs suggests either a lack of awareness of problems/goals which could arise, or an intentional vagueness to prevent hard discussions on aims and goals. While changes/edits were suggested throughout the draft document, the language offered in the original draft, and those suggested by AGS show important differences in perspective on the cooperative programs. While the original draft states,

the goal of the program is to maximize the academic, social and extracurricular interaction between the students of [AGS and CPS]. It is the intention of [AGS and CPS] to expand this cooperative educational program beyond the initial scope of such program described in the exhibit attached, and therefore, in this regard the
Program may be modified from time to time by written agreement of the Boards of Trustees and the Heads of Schools of [AGS and CPS].

The edited version recommended by AGS representatives states,

the goal of the program is to enhance the academic, social and extracurricular interaction between the students of [AGS and CPS]. It is the intention of [AGS and CPS] to continually evaluate this cooperative educational program beyond the initial scope of such program described in the exhibit attached, and therefore, in this regard the Program may be expanded or modified from time to time by written agreement of the Boards of Trustees and the Heads of Schools of [AGS and CPS]. [emphasis mine]

While the AGS edits still support cooperation, the language is clearly cautious about movements toward increasing areas of coeducational interaction. The difference between "maximizing" and "enhancing" interactions was substantial, as was the distinction between intentionally "expanding" and "evaluating" the cooperative program. Such divergent intentions led to the eventual collapse of the program.

Dated February 14th, a mere five weeks after the production of the Agreement draft, a letter to the AGS Board president from the CPS Board president announced that the CPS Board of Trustees had met to discuss the agreements between AGS and CPS. The letter noted that representatives from the two schools had been working to develop a plan that would

place the highest priority in providing the best possible education for [AGS and CPS] students. Unfortunately, we have not been able to concur on the form which will be conducive to the development of a strong cooperative educational environment. Accordingly and regretfully, the following is the Resolution which was unanimously adopted by the [CPS] Board:

Whereas [CPS] desires to pursue a course which could in the future result in coeducation for the students at [CPS]; and whereas from discussions with [AGS] it appears that the two schools presently have different views on this issue; therefore, [CPS] determines to suspend the present discussions with [AGS].
The letter closes with a hope that the schools can continue their long-standing positive relationship. The letter to AGS was followed the next day by a letter from the CPS Board to the CPS family announcing the end of negotiations, stating that CPS embarked on a long-range plan in the fall of 1987, and concluded that some form of coeducation should be considered as a future option. It has always been our hope that the cooperative educational plan with [AGS] would have addressed the focus of our long-range plan. However, over the course of our discussions with [AGS] it became increasingly clear that the schools did not share the same vision for the future and [CPS’] hope for a ‘commonality of purpose’ would not be achieved.

The sharing of information regarding the CPS 1987 long-range plan provides some insight into the language used in the January Agreement regarding the cooperative educational program. Clearly CPS had hoped to open the door to coeducation although this was never publicly supported by statements from AGS representatives. One can only imagine the content of the private conversations that occurred in the five weeks between the Agreement draft and the decision to cease negotiations.

On February 15th a letter was sent from the AGS Board president to the AGS community sharing the news of CPS’ withdrawal from the Agreement. Using rather sharp language, the letter reads:

…it is now with a great sense of regret that I inform you that [CPS], for reasons of its own, has chosen to suspend discussions rather than to follow through in implementing the Cooperative Educational Program as outlined. They have chosen, instead, to pursue a course which, as their board resolution states, ‘could result in coeducation’. The Board and leadership of [AGS] have been consistent in their willingness to proceed under the agreed upon program [and have hired architects and consultants and raised funds in support of this project].

Such language lays the blame for the failed project squarely on CPS, assuring the community that any wasted money and/or funds raised for the project cannot be AGS’
responsibility. Further, it asserts that AGS at no time misled CPS into believing that
AGS would want to merge with the boys’ school. The letter continues by affirming the
strength of AGS as an institution, and the need to move forward capitalizing on present
“strengths and advantages” to meet the current space needs. While the past four years
strengthened AGS’ commitment to the single-sex education of girls, statements about the
value of intentional activities with boys would need to be re-evaluated if programs with
CPS were soon to be eliminated.

Local press coverage of the developments included statements from CPS stating
that “officials for a few years have been considering opening up the school to girls” and
quoting the CPS headmaster as stating “we intend to remain single sex for the next year
and for the foreseeable future... but we may want to consider some form of coeducation in
our long-range future.” That these statements contradict those made publicly in previous
years was rarely mentioned in the local media, but was clearly noted by members of the
AGS community. In March, 1989, CPS convened a committee to “study the long-range
plan of [CPS] and consider the options of single sex education, cooperative education
which could include the continuation of discussions with [AGS], and coeducation.” By
December, CPS has made its decision.

AGS recommits to single-sex education

In a letter to AGS parents, alumnae and friends jointly signed by the AGS Head of
School and Board President, the leadership shared news of developments at CPS and
AGS’ plans for the future. The letter states,

In its December 4th meeting, the board of [CPS] voted to pursue a coeducational
future, ideally in partnership with [AGS] but on its own should [AGS] decide to
remain a single-sex school.... The [AGS] board considered all the data available to it, including its own survey results and the decision of the [CPS] board. On December 16th, the board of [AGS] voted not to join [CPS] in a coeducational venture, because of its conviction that single-sex and/or coordinate education provide the best education for young women....

You may be interested in some initial reactions to this decision. First was that of our own board of trustees. A motion to support our decision was passed unanimously. The following day, [the AGS president] met with the entire faculty, who received the news with renewed vigor. Then she met with the Upper School students, who burst into an excited round of applause upon learning of the board’s decision.... With deliberations now behind us, [AGS] can now move forward and focus on its role as the only independent single-sex school, K-12, in [the central state].

Highlighting support for this decision from three levels of participants (trustees, faculty, and students) emphasizes the widespread support for the school’s single-sex status, somewhat contradicting several years of discussion of coordinate education and the value of periodic interactions with male students. The letter continues by reminding/educating the AGS constituents of the benefits of schooling at AGS, and the justification for choosing not to continue negotiations with CPS:

Our unique situation is particularly exciting in light of recent research [1989] which consistently points to the advantages, academically, socially, and personally, which a single-sex school provides for girls and young women. It has been demonstrated that students’ self-esteem is enhanced and educational aspirations are heightened in all-girls’ schools. In addition, this education environment diminishes gender role stereotyping, allowing females to participate in the social and professional arena with a stronger sense of self. Research indicates that these benefits extend far beyond colleges; indeed, that they positively affect attitudes and aspirations for a lifetime. There is no more powerful gift we can ensure for the young people in our charge. [emphasis mine]

The AGS commitment to single-sex education needed to be shared by parents and community members in order to ensure the continued enrollment and financial security of the institution. Given the likelihood that many current students and parents might begin
questioning whether or not to send their daughters to CPS when it became coeducational, such a statement sets a grounding for attempts to retain current students. By highlighting "recent" research, the school was able to show how the current decision is supported by cutting edge understandings of girls' education, its recency perhaps excusing the school for not pursuing this track all along. According to institutional documents, overwhelmingly AGS parents, alumni and faculty supported single-sex education at all grade levels, while CPS parents, faculty and alumni clearly preferred coeducation in grades 9-12, with large faculty and alumni support for K-12 coeducation. While the reasons for these preferences are diverse, the different responses at the boys' and girls' school are strikingly opposed.

March, 1990, brought CPS' announcement to enroll girls in kindergarten and first grade in the fall, beginning the school's four year transition to coeducation at all grade levels. CPS also announced its plans to increase enrollment from its current 610 to 825, potentially competing with AGS for students interested in college-preparatory, private education. Such a plan is a far cry from the CPS headmaster's February, 1989 statement that the school would not turn coeducational in the "foreseeable future." Clearly much had changed in just 15 months.

March, 1990 also brought AGS' announcement of plans to expand the school campus on its current site. The formal expansion plan was unveiled in July, 1990, with the project set for completion by the 1992-93 school year. The master site plan, as well as a statement on the institution's commitment to "academic excellence" was sent to the AGS community in July. This plan was introduced using language which provided much
stronger attention to women's education than was expressed in any previous documents, and reaffirmed the value of attending AGS at a time when CPS was beginning to admit female students.

Following the December 3, 1989 decision by the Board of Trustees to maintain our independence as a premiere girls' school with a national reputation for excellence, we have been able to fully focus our energies on developing strategies which will enhance our long tradition of providing girls with the educational opportunity to enter the finest colleges in the country. This commitment comes at a time of heightened national awareness of the enormous benefits provided to girls who have the good fortune to be educated in a single-sex environment. Research continues to demonstrate that in schools such as [AGS], girls are more academically oriented and have a higher level of self-esteem than do their coeducational counterparts. In addition, these girls fully expect to participate and take leadership positions in all classroom discussions and are unaffected by society's role modeling, which has been demonstrated to diminish their opportunities in areas such as mathematics, science, and politics.

While it is impossible to tell how much of this changed language is due to new data on the benefits of girls' schools, and how much was based on an increased need to sell the school to current and potential parents, it is clear that the tide had turned. Mention of cooperative education programs, and the benefits of shared programs with males generally, has been replaced by affirmations of AGS' ability to understand how "girls best learn" and how to teach them best separately. The new plan announced the development of programs to address excellence in math and science, and international programs, as well as goals for increasing the quality of faculty benefits and preparation. While these aims again match the goals stated in the 1984 long range plan, there appears to be a more deliberate link between these goals and the specific education of young women. The discourse of benefits, fortune, self-esteem, participation, and leadership as inherent to
girls' schooling clearly contrasts with the inferred liabilities of coeducation offered at CPS.

The $9 million expansion plan was preliminary approved by the local planning commission in October, 1990, with final approvals passed in April, 1991 (after a lengthy process to resolve concerns about parking). Funding for the project was tied into the 2nd Century Campaign, and proved highly successful as the school began renovations in November, 1991. Resolution to the expansion concerns was reached when in August the school received a donation of a 24-acre site near the campus which received approvals for conversion into an athletic and outdoor education center for AGS. The site now includes a running/walking track, regulation and practice fields for a variety of sports, tennis courts, locker and office facilities, and nature observation areas. The overall facility expansion was completed in 1993, and was accompanied by programmatic developments made possible by the upgraded physical plant.

As expected, as CPS became a coeducational institution, students attending AGS considered transferring to the coed independent school. Hired the year CPS went coed, Julie (pseudonym), an AGS lower school faculty member, notes,

it was a stressful time... it definitely impacted us and impacted our admissions and all of a sudden we had kids who never thought about leaving... before if you came for first grade you pretty much stayed unless you moved or something.... all of a sudden people were looking at other options or their brothers were at [CPS] so they left... the high school and middle school were a little harder hit... [in lower school] we had to pay attention to who was thinking of leaving and what are we going to do to hopefully help them stay... For a couple of years, admissions were down, but then the research came out at just about the right time [laughs] for us to say well we do offer something different. And even though I think we all knew that, but could point out to people that these are the reasons they should stay.
Clearly the works of Valerie Lee and her co-authors (1986, 1990, 1992) the AAUW (1992), Brown and Gilligan (1992) and later Sadker and Sadker (1994) and a wealth of other books were published at an opportune time for AGS, for their findings could be shared with faculty, parents, students, and community members (especially prospective students and parents) to support the value of single-sex schooling and validate the school’s decision to remain an all-girls institution. While enrollments did drop initially, within a few years the school was back to full enrollment, with a waiting list for acceptance.

Had the research not been published during this transition, it is hard to know if AGS would have had the data and language to affirm its value, or if the school leadership would have chosen to continue the school’s single-sex tradition. Not only do the studies help the institutional members understand why or how their work can be valuable to girls, they also provide justification for the school’s existence. The number of references to “research” and the manner in which they were included suggests the administration’s understanding of the power these studies have in the minds of parents, teachers, and students. Clearly the research findings strongly enhanced the school’s ability to focus its efforts, and also to market its purpose.

The Present

As CPS offered a local coeducational alternative in private, independent schooling, AGS was challenged to describe and promote itself differently than was necessary in the past. Such self-examination forced institutional members to articulate their understanding of the value and purposes of girls’ education, and provided incentive
for seeking out the most recent research and theory regarding the girls' development and educational needs. Revised in May, 1996, the current AGS statement of philosophy and mission maintains much of the intent of the earlier versions, but includes several direct references to gender-related issues. It reads:

The School: [AGS], founded in 1898, is a non-sectarian, college-preparatory day school serving [the local area's] students, infants through Form XII. By offering academic excellence in a single-sex environment, [AGS] makes a unique contribution to the range of educational choices available in the community.

Our Philosophy: Approaching our second century, we remain committed to two fundamental ideals: the value of a separate education for women and the value of a liberal arts education. We are committed to academic excellence and to a program which encourages each student to develop to her fullest capacity. Our goal is to foster in each student such strong skills and love of learning that her intellectual curiosity, aesthetic understanding, desire for health and fitness, and commitment to social responsibility will continue throughout her life.

At [AGS], we promote the following values: honesty, fair play, and justice; respect and honor for the opinions of others; enduring traditions and strong bonds of friendship; service to the school and to the community; a student body free from violence and substance abuse; the vitality of a diverse community and of a curriculum that reflects the multiple cultures of our nation and our world; close student-teacher relations; professional development and education for faculty, administration, and staff.

Our Mission: Offer a rigorous, developmentally appropriate academic program in a supportive environment; provide a variety of teaching techniques to reflect the multiple learning styles of our students; prepare each student for colleges most compatible with her abilities and interests; prepare all students to meet the demands of an increasingly technological world; help each student become a successful, confident person by promoting her social, emotional, physical, aesthetic, spiritual, and academic development; address the crucial issues of women's education, especially risk-taking and the development of leadership skills; involve our students in the larger urban community of which we are a part; engage the whole school community in the challenge and excitement of striving for excellence; seek a position of educational leadership within our community and beyond.
This revised philosophy and mission statement is still in use today, providing the rationale for AGS’ existence, and guiding curricular and co-curricular programs. These statements continue to support girls’ full development, and reference the students’ and schools’ roles within a larger social context. Asserting its continued positive, and now unique, role in the educational community, the statement declares that AGS provides an option that offers girls a valuable (and perhaps necessary) academic environment suited to their specific personal and academic needs. By emphasizing a history of success, alongside references to preparing students for an ever-evolving world, the document presents AGS as both traditional and cutting-edge, supportive yet challenging.

Research at AGS

Two studies conducted at AGS after the decision to remain single-sex and expand the facilities on-site present additional insight into recent schooling experiences at AGS. I have included these studies in this chapter because these documents have helped me to gain an understanding of AGS as an institution, rather than providing me with more generalized background data on single sex schooling. Interviewing and observing AGS students and/or faculty, Haithe Anderson’s study addressed “what it is like to be a girl in an all-girls school” (1993, p. 151), while Brenda Petruzzella was interested specifically in issues of girls’ self-esteem and its relationship to the literature the girls read. While neither study directly examined the 1987-1990 deliberations between AGS and CPA, both projects attended in part to outcomes of the negotiations and long-range planning. Anderson’s study addressed the physical transformation of the school site, as well as the school’s self-presentation in the early 1990s. Petruzzella’s study compared self-esteem of
girls at AGS and CPS only three years after CPS began admitting girls (the first year CPS was coed in all grade levels), a project which included several girls who had transferred from AGS to CPS to participate in a coeducational program.

A World Apart: Privileged Schooling for Teenage Girls

Anderson’s (1993) analysis of student experiences at AGS begins by addressing “myth-making,” utilizing the school mascot, the unicorn, with its one horn, as emblematic of the “myth of unity - a myth of school as one big happy family... Speaking through the myth of unity AGS undoes its class bound history simultaneously speaking itself into normalcy yet always as a world apart. Through the myth of unity AGS speaks its economic reality with a depoliticized tongue” (pp. 149-50). In support of this argument, Anderson critiques the manner in which alumnae are “connected” to current students via annual “network books” and provides evidence of school publications which not only depict the school as family-like, but in fact “mobilizes the romantic ideal bourgeoisie family form. Their self descriptions affirm the supreme value of love and intimacy, the need for nurturance and guidance” (p. 154). While Anderson finds such affirmations troublesome, I question whether such aims are truly hazardous to a young woman’s education. If Anderson’s concern is that the school is reproducing a harmful myth that “families” are prima facie happy, loving, and nurturing, then I can understand her concern with the language offered in the publications. If her concern is that schools should not attempt to create the feel of an “ideal” family-like environment as a means of supporting intellectual, social, and psychological growth, I’m not sure I see the harm. Taken metaphorically, the school environment as family-like, with both benefits and liabilities
associated with closeness, interdependence, support, jealousy, competition, and shared joys and hardships, is in many ways an apt description of the possibilities available within an intimate setting like AGS.

While Anderson is concerned about the romanticized family, she acknowledges that AGS supports a specific form of family, which sees girls/women as competent, active, and contributors both within and outside the home/family. The family also includes messages that one should be interested in and loyal to the school/family, one should live out one’s life in the name of AGS, and that service to others, culminating in the lesson that loyalty to family is “invoked and linked with economic benefit” (p. 159). I agree with Anderson that such messages can potentially be harmful, yet Anderson herself demonstrated that the girls attending AGS understood that these messages could not be trusted as true representations of reality. Anderson notes “[the girls] do not accept this constructed world uncritically,” (p. 162) and then describes understandings that all is not unified, that racism occurs, that some girls reject manufactured relationships with others, and that the school is truly an “ideal” space separate from the “real world.” The girls are also aware of the politics of wearing a uniform, valuing the opportunity to dispel outward appearance of class status even if betrayed in other forms. While school publications and ceremonies may construct a mythic ideal of unity, Anderson shows that the students recognize such representations as exaggerations or lies. While Anderson is concerned that the “controlling technologies” at AGS propel students to become “superwomen,” I would argue that since Anderson has shown the girls at AGS to be at least marginally aware of these controls and able to construct alternative realities within these controls,
that they may be well-positioned to resist technologies which harm or unnecessarily restrict them. Anderson's goal to expose the role of myth as a "normalizing" structure is a valuable one, however I feel she falls short in acknowledging resistance to this normalization and general skepticism of myths in general. Anderson did not provide any evidence that students believed or expected the school to be a unified family, even though the administration offered it as such. In some ways the myth provided an ideal or goal, which was resisted or supported by its members in appropriate ways.

I find Anderson's descriptions of the school's architecture enlightening, for my entree into the site began several years after the completion of the renovation project she witnessed during her research. While this construction created more classroom, recreation and social space, traditional patterns of interaction, participation, and retreat were disrupted. Anderson describes an uncomfortable sense of "surveillance" due to the openness of the new structure and the widespread use of glass on doors and walls. While she notes that the students in general were "very relaxed and carefree" within the single-sex environment (running, laughing, wrestling, lounging, holding hands, etc.), the new structure allowed for greater visibility of all action, indeed putting girls "on display" much of the time. The senior commons, off limits to other students and administrators, was seen as the last haven of privacy in the upper school. Anderson was concerned that the school had created a structure within which the girls were under constant watch, where they are performing publicly at all times, and have lost the freedom to just be.

My perception of the structure was quite different, due in no small part to the manner in which individuals modify their environments over time to suit their needs.
While Anderson describes an inability to enter or leave the upper school without passing by several offices with interior windows and being seen by “authorities,” I have often entered the building unable to find someone to help direct me to a desired location. Over the years blinds have been installed over many glassed spaces, allowing for needed privacy for both students and staff. Portions of the interior glass are covered with posters and flyers that advertise social, academic and vocational opportunities while simultaneously obscuring opportunities for surveillance. Students are commonly seen in all public areas, and seem to pay little attention to others around them, including paying very little attention to me whether in classrooms or the public areas. While my “visitor” pin clearly identified me as a “welcomed outsider,” even when clearly engaged in a researcher activity (taking notes, observing intently), I failed to notice students “performing” for or in spite of me. It would seem that through physical means (blinds, posters) and actions (lack of eye contact) the students and staff have developed forms of resistance to possible surveillance. At the same time, student and staff expectations of privacy may have changed, as students have forgotten the privacy offered by the old structure and have conformed their behaviors to the new setting.

Anderson suggests that the freedom and control that is simultaneously offered by the openness of the new structure mirrors the freedom and control the students feel at the school. While they are free to show affection, demonstrate competence, and be physical, they are also aware that they represent AGS whenever they are uniformed, and that some degree of self-monitoring is necessary when “the public gaze” is upon them. Though the girls appear to resent being reminded to look and act unified and conformative when
valued guests are scheduled to visit the school or they are out in public, they also are willing to conform out of a sense of duty which is both enviable and potentially self-limiting. Anderson describes the girls as lacking awareness that they were at times “upholding an image of AGS that wasn’t always in line with their own self-identities” (p.194). While the girls were able to understand some ironies and limitations inherent in the mix of freedom and control, it was unclear whether this was seen as a distinct problem at AGS. It may well be that teenage girls are well aware of the complexities of freedom and control in all aspects of their lives, and see little difference in their experience at school. Being both willfully under surveillance and expected to act responsibly and autonomously are likely common experiences for teenage girls, and perhaps especially for academically successful girls who may be seen as both mature and in need of constant challenge.

Entering the environment several years after her project was completed, I learned a great deal from this work. Her history, noted earlier in this chapter, provided a strong background of the institution. Her descriptions of institutional myths, architecture, and meaning students made of institutional actions provided a lens into aspects of the institution that are absent in my own study. Anderson’s use of Marxist and post-structural/post-modern positioning placed her outside the traditional discourse of the institution, providing a reading of the environment unavailable in Petruzzella’s work or my own. Further, my knowledge of the AGS administration’s reaction to the final document alerted me to the tensions involved in the use of critical theory to research an institution in ways that often alienate the participants.
Self-Esteem for Adolescent Girls

Petruzzella's project, completed in 1995, addressed issues of self-esteem, single-sex schooling, and the literature girls read by comparing girls at AGS with those at CPS (which had been all-male until 1990). The two-year study included 26 students (three did not complete the study) and 8 faculty and staff members between the two schools. According to the results of the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory administered to the girls in the study, girls at AGS received higher self-esteem ratings than those at CPS, with more than twice as many AGS girls scoring "high" on self-esteem than girls from CPS. Petruzzella concludes that many girls benefit from single-sex settings because the girls feel more free to be themselves and can avoid negative attention/distraction from boys. While single-sex schooling was valued, students and teachers felt that some contact with males was necessary for healthy development, whether in out-of-classroom experiences or within the classroom. While most felt that single-sex schooling was valuable, for others, the coed/single-sex split was less important than the fact that both schools were academically-focused and intentionally attended to girls' needs and achievement.

Because this study was conducted soon after CPS' decision to include girls, and AGS' affirmation of their single-sex status, both schools were functioning with high attention to girls' academic and personal achievement, and girls in both schools were likely feeling valued and attended-to. The study did not indicate how long the girls at CPS had been enrolled in coeducational schooling, or how long those at AGS had been in a single-sex environment. Further, the students attending CPS had entered the institution at a time of transition, several of the female students "were tormented in fairly serious
ways by the middle school boys” (p. 90) or due to the high academic expectations at CPS were experiencing lowered grades than they had earned in their former public school.

Given these conditions, the total self-esteem scores may not prove as interesting as the percentage change over time while at the school. Given the limited scope of a dissertation study, this data is not available, but would be a valuable follow-up to her initial work.

Petruzella notes, “many of the girls at both schools suffer in one way or another from the academic pressure and often describe themselves as overworked and stressed out” (p.102). Students who had transferred to AGS or CPS from public schools had the greatest difficulty managing the workload and expectations, although all girls generally felt like schooling was taking over their free time. Interviews with teachers and students also found that girls were perceived as less willing to reject “unreasonable” demands; boys were more likely to stop working when they felt they had done enough, while girls would work until the assignment was completed. AGS in particular was seen as requiring large amounts of homework and having extraordinary academic expectations (although it was also suggested that parents of these girls also have high expectations and may be at least equally responsible for the stress their children feel). Several girls at CPS noted that the boys created more pressure than the academic program. This pressure was especially felt as the girls were sexually harassed by the male students, and often this harassment was not challenged or addressed by the school faculty. The “safety” felt at AGS from the lack of harassment by males was noted by several students and adults in the study. The harassment of girls by girls was noted in one interview, however it was unclear from the
interview excerpt how pervasive this is. Although not directly stated in the study, it seems that whatever level of harassment girls receive from girls, that which comes from boys is perceived as more hurtful or problematic, perhaps largely due to heterosexual desires for male approval during puberty and adolescence.

One teacher noted that for some shy girls, a coeducational setting like CPS may be more beneficial than attending AGS, “I have one who is very shy, very soft-spoken, but I think if you put her at AGS, she’d never say a word. I think she’d be much more intimidated. She finds, I think, some comfort among the boys. There’s a sort of acceptance of her, because boys like girls” (p. 99). In contrast, several of the students in Petruzzella’s study felt that shy girls did better in the supportive environment at AGS. She states, “perhaps the discrepancy between the feelings of these girls and those of [the teacher cited above] is due to the fact that the CPS girls [the teacher] teaches are older. It may be that ‘boys like girls’ by the time they are ninth graders, but most girls in the study did not seem to find any ‘comfort’ among boys in the middle school years” (p.100). The study noted that teachers’ perceptions of students are very important, and thus the lack of fit between student and teacher perception may be an important issue to address. As Petruzzella states,

it is important to the self-esteem of girls in any school setting that the female faculty are aware of the need to encourage girls to maintain strong voices, and to serve as role models in that regard... Several girls in my study indicated that the degree to which they feel they can speak their minds in the classroom depends largely on the attitude of the teacher. (p. 166)

As noted earlier, that the teachers may not feel empowered to speak their own voices may affect their ability to support students’ use of their own. I am very interested in the
manner in which the teachers describe student “voice” and “self-esteem” since these terms and concepts appear so frequently in the literature on girls’ schooling and development.

Petruzzella’s study of literature concluded that girls at both schools valued stories with female protagonists and books written by women, but only wanted texts included which were of high quality. “The girls resist an overtly feminist approach to reading curriculum. They feel that they should read a book because it has something worthwhile to say, not just because it has a female author or protagonist” (168). Self-esteem is not enhanced by mere inclusion of female experiences into the curriculum, but by inclusion which clearly demonstrates women’s competency, creativity, value, and uniqueness. Petruzzella reminds her readers that inclusion in literature classes is not enough, that inclusion must occur across the curriculum, with gender-sensitivity a central focus of all educational endeavors.

Taken together, these two studies suggest that there is much to be learned at AGS, and that what one finds is inextricably linked to the positioning of the researcher and the questions which she/he hopes to answer. Conducting studies within a few years of one another, Anderson and Petruzzella had very different perceptions of students and the institution. As a point of consensus, however, both indicated that the transitions that occurred in the late 1980s and early 1990s effected students and the AGS campus environment (and according to Petruzzella, the environment of CPS as well). That this time of transition was important corroborates the statements of the administrator with
whom I first met, and lends credence to the attention this time period receives in the next chapter.

Summary

As AGS arrives at its centennial, it has grown from a small school of contested purposes, to a 650-student school with a strong commitment to the education and development of empowered, intelligent, motivated, compassionate women. The events of the past fifteen years required the institution to evaluate its purposes, assess its assets, and develop a vision for the future that would ensure strong educational offerings and its financial survival. That this evaluation and development coincided with widespread national attention to the gendered nature of schooling was a fortunate coincidence, serving to enhance the school’s ability to name and further enhance its influences and impacts. The school’s efforts to provide academic excellence were rewarded by the upper school’s naming as a Blue Ribbon High School by the U.S. Department of Education. Strong enrollments and donations to the school’s capital campaign suggest that the school has successfully convinced members of the local community that AGS continues to be a valuable academic force as it begins its second century.

The next two chapters will draw upon interviews and observations to explore issues related to the gendered nature of schooling and teaching philosophy and methods. These chapters will draw upon the information presented in this and the previous chapter, placing interviews, observations, institutional documents, and published texts in conversation with one another as discourses of gender and feminism are explored.
CHAPTER 5
SETTING THE CONTEXT: THE FEMALE EXPERIENCE AND THE NEED FOR SINGLE-SEX EDUCATION

In order to understand the purpose of AGS and the manner in which the teachers teach, I begin by introducing the faculty participants in the study. As will be shown, the perceptions and representations of girls’ experiences in the previous two chapters directly relate to the participants’ beliefs in the value of single sex education for girls. Indeed, this chapter will specifically explore the use of single sex schooling as an intervention strategy to overcome many of the educational and societal impediments to girls’ full development. Once these broad discourses of educating girls are analyzed, the next chapter will specifically address the pedagogical practices espoused and enacted by faculty to achieve institutional and personal aims related to female development.

The Participants

The twelve faculty participants in this study are somewhat hard to categorize based upon the diversity of their characteristics. The eight women and four men were all Caucasian, and full-time employees. Most began their teaching careers at other institutions, including K-12 public schools, coeducational private schools, single-sex private schools, and coeducational universities. The most recent hire had been working at AGS for less than a year, with the longest employed at the school over 20 years. The
faculty represent the lower school, middle school and upper school, and a variety of disciplines. Given the small size of the school, the ability to describe the faculty without betraying anonymity is a difficult task. I will therefore offer some brief descriptions which should provide sufficient information to gain a sense of their work at the school, even if not as complete as one might wish.

- **Alexandra** — lower school teacher with less than ten years teaching experience
- **Diane** — lower school teacher, with over 20 years teaching experience
- **Harvey** — upper school social studies teacher with over 20 years teaching experience in single sex and coeducational settings
- **Joe** — upper school social science teacher with over 20 years teaching experience in single sex and coeducational settings
- **Joyce** — physical education teacher with over 10 years teaching experience
- **Karen** — physical education teacher with coaching experience
- **Ken** — foreign language teacher with over 10 years teaching experience
- **Lois** — music teacher with over 10 years teaching experience in coeducational and single sex settings.
- **Megan** — upper school science teacher, with experience teaching in coeducational settings
- **Michelle** — physical education and health education teacher with experience teaching in coeducational environments
- **Sally** — middle school science teacher with less than 5 years teaching experience
- **Tom** — upper school teacher with over 20 years teaching experience
In addition to these twelve faculty participants, conversations were held with several administrators either individually or during a meeting with the entire administrative team. None of these administrators is identified by name, however comments offered by administrators are identified as such. As mentioned previously, the participants do not comprise a representative sample of faculty based on sex, race/ethnicity, grade levels taught or subject matters taught. I make no claims that their perspectives and methods are representative of the AGS faculty generally, but instead offer this project as a case study of the participating faculty.

The Purpose of AGS

We’re here to educate young women. And to do it in a way that they’re culturally, academically, and socially stimulated. Megan

After reading the institutional documents, I turned next to the faculty participants to learn more about the school and their role within it. The interviews generally began with a brief discussion of the purpose or mission of AGS, setting a context for later discussions of teaching and activities at the institution. I intended this question to provide insight into the fit between individual interpretations of the school’s role and the published institutional documents mentioned in the previous chapter. As is demonstrated below, these faculty members had a very clear sense of the mission of the school, using language that reflected their understanding of girls’ needs and experiences.

I think the mission of AGS is to allow opportunities for strong women to develop from... early childhood education all the way up through high school, and for girls to feel free and comfortable away from pressures that might be experienced in a coed school. Diane

I see it as a liberal arts education... our emphasis is on the whole girl, developing the whole child here, physically, emotionally, as well as academically, and there’s
a huge partnership involved in what that involves, it's really fourfold. It involves the administration, the teachers, the students, and the parents, and I think that blend is reflected in our curriculum. Sally

It's to train young women and educate them and educate them well. The mission of a college prep school is to prepare people for college and university. I think it's to understand their needs... and then too challenge them to allow them to truly learn self esteem, that is by doing things that maybe they didn't think they could do before. Tom

I guess the mission is pretty much the same as that of other single sex schools, and especially girls schools, and that is that we try to provide a formation which is meaningful for the girls, to give, let them for a change have a chance to lead in the classroom, to lead on the athletic field, to lead in social services organizations, that sort of thing. Places where they might otherwise shrink a little. Ken.

This is a school which focuses on the education of young women, and helps them, I think, to learn about the world around them, and about their interactions in the world, in an environment which is secure intellectually, but also challenging, and to a certain extent, insecure, in that risks are taken, that people are, I think, set out to try to challenge them, many different ways, and I think that probably is a school which takes risks in learning how to educate women. Joe

First and foremost what is offered is a discourse of opportunity, providing girls with a broad, liberal education that engages them intellectually and extends their social and cultural awareness and prepares them to engage in collegiate study. Also evident is a recognition that school is a developmental site that effects many aspects of a girl's life and works alongside socialization found elsewhere. Further, the faculty express a sense of responsibility, one of partnering, of challenging and supporting students and themselves. Finally, there is a sense of security and safety, with an understanding that this is not necessarily available in all educational settings. While the specific language used varies from teacher to teacher, one finds no contradictions among their statements, and the ideas expressed almost appear to be in conversation with one another, building
upon the other’s thoughts. No discernable differences are evident based on grade level(s) taught or the faculty member’s sex.

These statements closely match the aims presented in the AGS mission (see Chapter 4), showing that there is a common institutional language related to purpose. The mission statement speaks of providing a liberal education, academic excellence, attending to the full development of students, supporting intellectual curiosity and aesthetic understanding, and social responsibility. While not cited verbatim, the participants all embraced the essence of this mission statement in their explanation of the institution and maintained the integrity of the institutional dialogue. While the campus is centered on educating female students, the college-preparatory and liberal arts emphases focus the educational climate in a manner that enhances female development and preparation. It is important to remember that these discourses do not necessarily imply successful enactment of the mission. As members of the faculty suggest, the role of physical education is often contested, and can at times be subordinated to address more "intellectual" aims. Michelle notes, “in physical education and health within the mission, that’s not always followed up as being, it’s in there and they know it’s very important, but I don’t think it’s always given the credit that it’s due to make the holistic school and for our philosophy to go along that way with athletics. I think depending on who’s involved and what the situation is there can be different outcomes at different times.”
Benefits of a Single Sex Education at AGS

I think it does give them more opportunities. It lets them grow in ways that they probably won’t in a coed school... there’s just more opportunity for you to be able to shine in an all-girls setting... when you look at the upper school, the middle school, they don’t have to worry about boys, they don’t have to worry about what they look like when they come. I mean that’s just a whole other tension that’s out of the picture... They can just be so much more relaxed about everything and sillier, and again their teachers know they’re good students and they’re going to expect a lot from them. Alexandra

The participants see their institution as providing a valuable educational option for girls in the local community. Whether as students, teachers, or parents, all have had experience with coeducational schools, and are able to draw upon these experiences, as well as their understanding of research, to identify ways in which a single-sex environment is preferable for girls. None of the teachers studied would claim girls’ schools are necessary, but certainly valuable in promoting girls’ full development. So why is AGS useful? Upper School teacher Harvey provides a wonderful entrée into the discussion of schooling at AGS. He asserts that at its core, the curricular preparation is the primary benefit offered by this institution. He further acknowledges that the clientele bring much to the environment, but that nonetheless, AGS can make a difference.

Oh it’s mainly the academics... when they get out of here they can write essays, they can do the math, they can do it all. They can, you know, whatever school they get in they are prepared to be there. And part of it’s attitude.... They understand what homework is, they understand what getting to work means, they understand what taking notes is across the line, you name it, they understand that they're prepared for it.... The biggest factor in them being prepared, as much as I'd like to say it was me, it was all me, the biggest factor is the socio-economic group. Their parents have mandated that they can handle college. And, my gosh, if we didn't exist if they sent them to the [CPS] the girls would still have it. If they went to a coed public school or a coed Catholic school they, these same girls would still have it, because at a public or a Catholic school they would've gotten
into the college preparatory track, they would have got into the AP classes. Oh no, these girls were gonna cut the mustard wherever they went, that, I'm not pretending that this isn't a daggone fine school, and that the kids are getting a lot here because of the way this school is, but these kids would've made it. And for me or any other teacher to, I think I earn my money and I think I get the job done, but these kids were programmed for success and their lot in life and their parents get the credit more than we do. Not that I don't believe that we're not doing our jobs, but...

Betsy: So then is there one major selling point that says given all of that, that your kids are going to succeed anyway, they should come to AGS, you should spend that extra money to come here, because what?

Harvey: Well, one thing I think the selling point is this is an all-girls school, and especially at the age of the high school age with as many distractions as there are, this is a nice, safe, environment where academics are first, and the girls are expected and demanded that they show up to work. And I'm not absolutely certain that they can get that everywhere.

Indeed, the majority of students attending AGS come from middle- to upper-class families even if financial aid is available to those with who qualify for admission but lack the resources to cover tuition and fees. Regardless of financial status, however, parents of AGS students are described as highly involved in their daughter's education and invested in academic success. Even if these girls could succeed anyway, Harvey's final statement seems to be echoed throughout the faculty interviews – the female-only environment provides opportunities for girls to be challenged within a safe, supportive environment.

But what exactly is safety and how does a single sex environment appear more safe?

Avoiding Harassment

I don't need to be mauled in the class, in the hallway, I don't need to be called a second class citizen, I don't need to be put up on a pedestal, I don't need to be made different, I want to be just me. Megan.
Throughout the interviews, freedom from harassment by males is mentioned by most faculty as a benefit to girls' schools. Sexual harassment, as well as the sexualized nature of coeducational schooling, is seen as diminishing girls' comfort in schools, and therefore limits their ability to succeed academically. These observations have been supported through research (AAUW, 1993; Orenstein, 1994; Sadker & Sadker, 1994) as well as through the teachers' personal experience. Physical harms perpetrated by males are seen as frequent enough in coeducational environments to support separate education for girls. As the AAUW (1993) found, girls in junior and senior high schools report a remarkably high rate of unwanted touching by males, yet rarely felt the ability to confront or stop such behaviors. As a rule, in the absence of males, the AGS faculty participants infer that girls need not fear being groped, grabbed sexually, sexually assaulted or raped. On their own, girls can feel less concerned about the manner in which they carry themselves, avoiding being "on guard" against male aggression, and therefore have more mental and emotional energy to commit to their academics. One faculty member offers,

My daughter, that's in college, when she went to pick up [her younger sister] at her middle school, there were two fellows that followed the girls out of band. She was walking with another friend, and she said as they were coming down the hall this kid kept saying, "hey bitch, where're you going now? Hey are you leaving the building?" because they were going to lunch and she said they said, "hey bitch, aren't you going to talk to me? Hey you!"... And they kind of giggled about it and they got in the car. And [the older sister] said to... the eighth grader, she said, "Why are you guys laughing about this?" And [the younger] said, "Because we don't want him to know it bothers us" and [the older] said, "Mother, I can tell you an AGS girl would never put up with that." Lois

The older daughter's response to this situation reflects a sense of empowerment on behalf of AGS students, for she believes they would stand up in such situations when faced with
them. At the same time, there is a sense that during school hours the AGS student is shielded from such behavior so that the academic enterprise can take center stage. Most interestingly, Lois offered this story as an example of the “courage” that girls develop by virtue of being around “their kind” in a single-sex school. She stresses that this “gives you the confidence to stand up... for your own dignity and your own kind” by virtue of being in an environment where you draw strength from one another as you address the challenges in the world. There is safety in being with other girls, and this safety creates the opportunities for positive character development.

**Intellectual opportunity**

Beyond physical safety, the faculty express concern for ensuring intellectual opportunity for their students. The sexualized nature of coeducation within patriarchal systems leads to a dumbing down of females to maintain male dominance. This is both an internal and external process as teachers limit their expectations of girls/women and as girls/women hide or inhibit their own intellect and behavior. As an example of the former, Megan frequently shares with her students the story of a former graduate,

> I had one of my better students that I’ve ever had come back to me, she's at [a major university], and she said, um, there were three girls in this class, it was a seminar, and the instructor, although she was prepared and ready to speak, never called on her. And would in lieu take any of the males who had nothing to contribute, and force them to talk, and you know, and give them an opportunity. And when she talked to him later, you know she went to his office hours, and said I need, we need to discuss this... and he said, you're a women, you're not going to last, you're going to get your MRS degree, and you'll be out of here. Well, there are a, it's kinda like a few bad apples have spoiled it for the rest, and so, we, there's a reputation out there that's not true.
Such stories highlight the negative stereotypes of female desire and ability some faculty members continue to perpetuate, and the consequences to female students. Other AGS faculty share similar stories occurring at all levels of education. The tracking of boys into higher levels of mathematics and science, assumptions that boys will be better leaders or athletes, and other such male privileging can create an academically hostile or uncomfortable environment for girls. Explaining the external expectation that girls don’t enjoy science, Megan states,

> When we were evaluated by the person for the Blue Ribbon Award, he was a lower school principal, retired, you know, out doing this kind of consulting and stuff, and he came in and, and he kept asking the students over and over again, "why are you taking so much science, why are you doing this" and finally one girl stood up and she just said, "why are you asking this?... I’m taking this because I like it." And that's what's here. When 94% of your students take four years of science, hello. You know, that's a pretty strong statement. That's what we're doing. We're allowing them, we're allowing our young women to take these courses that are challenging to them, to learn how to work together, and you know, to do some good things. Without the fear of being put down, or socially you know, this isn't going to limit them.

That evaluators continue to question female interest and competence in sciences shows the pervasiveness of traditional gender-linked expectations in schooling. Again a participant provides a counter discourse of opportunity, of competence, assuming that girls should not be limited in their academic pursuits. Girls attending AGS are seen as academically oriented, and these faculty members have high expectations for their curricular and vocational success. Especially noteworthy is the fact that the students felt capable of questioning the evaluator and challenging his misunderstanding. The girls are being socialized and educated in a manner in which competence and interest in the sciences are commonplace, and indeed expected, and therefore require no explanation.
Absent messages that girls shouldn’t like or excel in science (or any field), the girls have opportunities to develop competencies and interests that AGS faculty feel are more limited in coeducational environments.

Because many of the stereotypes regarding female ability and interest are absent within AGS, faculty at times must remind students of the discrimination that exists outside of their schooling experience. Sally stresses with her middle school students that they may face discrimination, but once aware of this, they can work to get past it:

They’re invisible barriers, that have blocked progress and the future for women, but they’re not, there’s no reason for them, I cannot justify a reason for them being there any more. And so these are the girls we’re educating to push through those invisible barriers, regardless of how strong they are on their development or their future successes, and they’re prepared to push through them. And, for them we portray them as invisible barriers. You may not have seen this, you may not have seen this, but it's just 'cause you haven't seen it, but it's there. So, yes, we feel very strongly that women have, society has missed out, society has been deprived of a lot of female capability and so we just want to enrich society.

Such messages of empowerment and opportunity combat patriarchy and challenge the status quo in ways that provide opportunities for girls and prepare them for discriminating situations they may face. Similarly, by providing alternate realities for girls these statements confront many developmental challenges presented in the recommended readings. The ability of AGS to confront sex-role stereotypes and prepare students for challenges they face is completely dependent upon the messages conveyed by the faculty.

Echoing messages offered by Lee (1998), Tom stresses that although seemingly more prevalent in coed schools, single-sex campuses can also be involved in perpetuating male dominance, but he believes that AGS has become much stronger at recognizing the
implicit and explicit ways in which males were privileged and has worked to eliminate these as much as possible.

**Promoting academic excellence and risk**

Even if harassment or outright discrimination are not occurring, academic success is also seen to be hindered by the interactions among boys and girls during puberty as their interest in (heterosexual) dating blossoms. Girls are described as self-regulating their behavior in coed classrooms, attempting not to appear too smart in front of boys who may be potential “romantic” partners. As hinted to in Megan’s statement above, at AGS students need not being “socially limited” by their interest in science. Sadker and Sadker (1994) tell of the difficulties faced by smart girls “For a gifted girl, being asked a question was a no-win proposition: if she got it wrong, she looked dumb. But if she got it right, then people would dislike her for being too smart” (p. 91). The faculty participants share this understanding of the self-regulation of smartness. Megan offers a recollection from her coeducational classroom:

I had some very bright women... who would sit in the class and go like this (shy, low raising of hand). They would raise their hand, but no one except me would be able to see it. And at one point, I said to this student, I said, “Why? Please speak out,” and I said, “I know you’ve got something to contribute,” and she said, “I can’t.” And I said “why not?” and she said “I won’t have a social life if I am the star of the classroom.” Most of the time my AP classes were mostly female anyway, but there’s always a smattering of males in there, and even those were inhibitory. I mean the fact the she was taking the upper level courses, taking physics and AP bio was really crunching her social life. Here, one of the first things I noticed is they don’t wear makeup, the don’t care what their hair looks like, they’re here for class, and let’s just get busy and do it. And you can tell when there’s going to be boys on campus. They look different, and they act a little different. But most of the time they’re business-like.
Within AGS, intelligence is described as a virtue to be celebrated without concern about its effect on one’s dating prospects. To refer to school-aged girls as acting “business-like” suggests a sense of adult behavior and attitude not commonly associated with grade-school students, and turns the academy into a more serious work-site than is typically expected.

Drawing upon the seriousness of academics at AGS, Lois tells of a former AGS student who prized AGS over coeducational schools because “the attitude about learning is so different... [at AGS] it was cool to be smart, it’s good to get your homework done... it’s cool to do extra work.” While much of this focus can be directly linked to the college-preparatory nature of AGS, Lois suggests that the single-sex environment was seen by the student as the contributing factor to making it “cool” to be smart. This concern about the external gaze is also reflected in discourse regarding student appearance. Most of the faculty in the study perceive girls attending less to their physical appearance when in a single-sex environment, remarking on the limited make-up and casual hairstyles. The school uniform helps to regulate physical appearance as well, but for the most part the faculty perceived girls as coming to school comfortable and ready to learn rather than costumed for display. This concern about physicality extends to the physical education curriculum as well. Gail describes the difference between a coed and single-sex physical education program, “[in a coed school] all of the girls didn’t want to excel because they didn’t want to beat the boys because that wasn’t how you got dates and they were worried about sweating and their hair and everything. Here, they just do it and they don’t care about how they look as far as that goes and they don’t mind if they
sweat because they’re not coming back to boys. They just seem much more free about their being physical.” The faculty participants provide a sense that girls at coeducational schools are, to steal Holland and Eisenhart’s (1990) term, “educated in romance,” while those in single-sex environments have the opportunity to focus on more curricular pursuits.

Romance aside, the academic environment in coeducational classrooms is seen by the faculty as privileging male styles of learning and behavior. Described as linked to gender socialization, several faculty members discuss the attention-getting behaviors of boys that prevent girls from being full participants in class. In contrast, girls are seen as socialized to avoid embarrassment and withhold participation until they’re certain of their answers. Alexandra offers, “Girls worry more about answers ‘being right.’ They are less likely to take risks because of this worry.” Sadker and Sadker (1994) agree with this perception, as boys are seen to have not worries about failure, jumping in to participate whether or not they have anything substantive to contribute. With boys quickly offering responses and girls initially holding back, the boys dominate the conversation and garner the greatest amount of teacher interaction.

Within the single-sex environment, the faculty participants believe they have awareness and ability to respond to the socialization toward classroom risk-avoidance. Although there are many stereotypes regarding male competitive behavior and female’s cooperative behavior, the faculty do see that female students are very patient and supportive of one another’s learning processes. Ken talks of several of his “silent” students who seem to lack both confidence and preparation. Believing that his classroom
is a safe site for students to take risks, after meeting with them individually, he then pushes the silent students during class discussion.

I never hesitate, even in a big group, to put one of those quiet girls on the spot. To show her, in front of her colleagues, and that’s one, one big difference I think maybe in a girls school. A very quiet girl sits right in the seat here, and she hardly says a peep unless she’s been asked to, unless I point at her and solicit an answer. And finally there came a point where I really wanted to get something out of this student, so we worked on it for a couple of minutes, maybe at the loss of a few seconds of class time where other students, more aggressive ones, could have been doing their things, but no, we waited, she finally came up with the answer, and her classmates practically cheered. You know, and these girls are much more supportive of each other in that way, I think. I don’t think, I can’t see a bunch of guys doing that. Ever. And that’s a nice thing. It makes me feel a little bit fuzzy, warm, about a girls’ school in that way, in the support that the students give to each other, by and large.

Joe echoes this sense that the girls rally around one another if there is a sense that all are trying their hardest. There is a respect for hard work even if abilities are not all equal. On the other hand, Joe notes that his students lose patience with those who fail to try, or don’t follow-through on their commitments. He notes there is safety for trying even if success is slow-coming, but the students themselves impose high expectations upon one another to assure a good effort goes into all that is before them. Therefore, support and cooperativeness are recognized as prevalent within the school, although not engaged in randomly.

Sally notes that breaking girls of risk-avoidance behavior demands a lot of teacher time and attention. Within the single-sex environment the faculty are challenged to find a balance between providing the students with detailed information and support that decrease risk, and the need to challenge them to “figure it out” and take a chance. While cooperative classroom settings and activities help to make the classrooms more
comfortable for girls, Alexandra states, “research says that girls learn best cooperatively. This may be true – but it’s not automatic – it takes time to work on cooperative skills.” The ability to attend to the issues of such behaviors is seen as a luxury not necessarily available in other school environments. With small classes, no boys, apparently supportive classmates, teachers trained to be aware of gender socialization, and a focus on academic development for all, teachers are in a better position to recognize self-silencing and low-risk behaviors and to address them directly. Further, they can take the time to enhance cooperative skills through group and team activities.

A Sense of Centrality

Every leader… every position in this school is taken by a girl. Every confrontation in every classroom intellectually is girl to girl, or teacher to girl. Tom

Once students have the safety or opportunity to focus on their education – both curricular and co-curricular – the content and style of their schooling experience plays a role in socializing toward empowerment and/or submission. Yet another concern about traditional school experiences is the peripheral space women and girls occupy in the content of materials studied and in the acclaimed roles students inhabit on campus. Sadker and Sadker (1994) assert, “when girls do not see themselves in the pages of textbooks, when teachers do not point out or confront the omissions, our daughters learn that to be female is to be an absent partner in the development of our nation” (p. 8).

Within AGS the discourses of female centrality are prevalent, and indeed, the centrality of the female experience is demonstrated as one of the selling points of girls’ schooling. For many faculty in the study, there continues to be a sense that coeducational
schooling privileges male experiences and suppresses or neglects the female. While this is particularly true in terms of the content of the curriculum, it also is experienced in the manner in which students are taught and mentored. Within the single-sex setting, all institutional activities can take into consideration mental, emotional and physical issues that respond to female socialization and girls' development.

Throughout the school, in myriad ways, the experiences of women permeate the institutional environment. Pictures and stories by and about women (and some men) adorn bulletin boards in hallways and classroom; all conversations about successful graduates are tales of women; all alumni who have powerful stories to share are women; all information related to college and career success after graduation is about women. Further, all campus sports stars, star pupils, leads in the plays, student artists and musicians, student government leaders, merit scholars, etc., are girls. In contrast to perceived experiences at many coeducational schools, the students at AGS do not lack peer role models of their own sex, and have access to adult role models via AGS alumnae.

While the next chapter will provide more exploration of pedagogical issues, it is important to note that a major component of the centering of females is the intentional inclusion of women's experiences within the content of the formal curriculum. When discussing her classroom, Diane talks of how she doesn't think about the role of males anymore. "I'm not aware of doing a lot of education or talking about the male world, but it's not a conscious effort. I think it's just you deal with the audience that you have when you're a teacher." In essence, she is saying that when teaching girls you are challenged
to connect the learning to their experiences and interests. In the absence of boys, the male roles are less central to the conversation. Instead, to respond to their students, faculty make choices to find materials and create assignments that address women, and quite often minority women:

We’ve gone out of our way to show minorities and women. I hate to say it because I don’t think it’s true in AGS, but in society women are still considered minorities in so many ways, so we do try to lean over and find women’s roles... In February we will do for black history month, historically first grade has done famous black women in history... there are two minorities that have never really been addressed that often, and each child takes, finds research on a famous black woman in history, and we have a selection of them, and we do it in the lunch room for everyone who’s there. And, I think that’s the kind of thing that wouldn’t be done in a coed school because it would be even, an even distribution male/female... and here we do go over the other side, but I think that’s because we still feel society... is still so male oriented, so we need to do that to counterbalance it. Diane

And I know in fifth grade they do women in science they all pick somebody. I think we are made more aware of it and try to when we’re pulling books from the library... you try to be conscious of having something that represents girls and women. And I think there’s more stuff out there now than there was twenty years ago so it's easier to do that, but you still have to make the conscious effort and I don't know, wouldn't say that any of us do it all the time or always remember to, but we try. Alexandra

Both these teachers talk about the lack of women within texts that are readily available to students, and the need to create opportunities to include women. Implicit in their comments is the belief that inclusion of these types of texts and assignments draws students into the academic enterprise differently than items that exclude women and girls, providing role models and enhancing the awareness of women’s opportunities. When texts used in class fail to address women’s experiences, or are intended to highlight men, faculty are said to take the time to discuss these exclusions with their students. For
example, in a class on presidents that occurred on Election Day, Alexandra extended the content of the readings and assignment to include specific references to women. She noted, “John Quincy Adams had a famous mother Abigail Adams” and asked her students why all the presidents were referred to as “he.” By the end of the exercise several of the girls were talking about becoming president one day, perhaps due in part to Alexandra’s selection of a book on becoming President that included both boys and girls as potential heads of state. Similar stories happen throughout the school as songs are revised to include lines about women, history projects are assigned that require uncovering the history of local women, and students are taken on field trips that include visiting women performing non-traditional roles. While the faculty would likely all tell you that good teaching requires the study of both men and women regardless of the clientele, they also laud AGS for ensuring that women’s and girls’ experiences take center stage.

A Girls School is shown to be beneficial to girls in a variety of ways. First and foremost, the campus provides a rigorous college-preparatory academic program that stresses intellectual curiosity, critical thinking, and engagement with course content. The faculty in the study do not place limitations on girls’ intellectual opportunities based upon their sex, and strive to provide their students with the knowledge and skills to succeed in their endeavors. Acknowledging the influence of sex role socialization on student behavior, these faculty see separation from males as helping to decrease female risk-avoidance and increase girls’ willingness to shine academically. Girls’ schools are also offered as academically, socially, emotionally and physically “safer” than coeducational settings through separation from many negative male influences and behaviors. Without
males, the school setting is also seen as de-sexualized, allowing girls to focus less on appearance and attractiveness, and more on academics and personal development.

Finally, the centrality of female experiences throughout the academy is viewed as important to girls’ sense of self and the possibilities they see for their futures. Moving beyond the possibilities offered by AGS, I turn now to the perceived outcomes of the educational opportunities provided.

Outcomes of an AGS Education

I hope by the time she leaves that she can say “I have a disciplined approach to how I do things when I need to.” I hope there’s a balance in life between the physical and the mental. I don’t think she’s any different than any other adolescent in terms of testing things out... I would think we want kids that are still curious... I hope they’re bloody bold and resolute, like the poet said, they’re not afraid to stand up in class and speak their mind... Our girls aren’t shy, I like that. But I think that just comes from doing things you didn’t think you could do, you get a certain self-esteem from doing it, not from being told you’re good, but from actually proving it to yourself. Tom

In addition to asking the faculty participants about the purpose of the institution, I also asked them to describe the impact of an AGS education, generally something along the lines of, “what is an AGS student like upon graduation?” The language used by these faculty members hinted toward the values they hoped to instill in the students, the hopes for their academic and personal development, and the opportunities they hoped were before them. These discourses again brought forward concepts that were presented in the institutional mission and addressed in the recommended readings — intellectual strength, confidence, empowerment, competence, voice, and desire. The descriptions celebrated young women’s abilities and character, and highlighted a sense of agency,
I would say well-rounded education, first of all. You know, humanities and the sciences and a little bit of everything... a lifelong learner, somebody who can be given something and figure out how to go find out about it... [AGS] girls doesn't (sic) have to know everything but know how to find out. And I would hope opinionated no matter what the opinions are. I think people who will make a mark. I mean they will fight for things that they believe in and that they will, you know, stand up and participate and when they get a coed environment it won't make any difference. But they will stick up for themselves and their ideas.

Alexandra

The hope is that each graduate will have a sense of that empowerment thing, the confidence thing, the well-rounded formation, both academic and athletic and extracurricular, and in, with the social, community sense both in this community right here inside this building and without, out there through tutoring programs and so on, just a whole bunch of experience, including a moral formation that comes from who knows where? Theoretically it should come from family, perhaps church, but obviously that, a lot of that has to come from school. They spend, they spend eight hours a day here. So, why shouldn't some of it come from somewhere within the school? So that the idea is that when graduates commence, indeed they're ready to commence.

Ken

I think this may be general, but to me she should be a fine young woman who is ready to conquer any college that she chooses 'cause our title is college preparatory. And, is ready to hopefully find her place in the world, in whatever direction she wants to go. Whatever she chooses, if she chose to stay home and raise a family she's ready to do that, and be a good citizen, if she chose to be president of the United States, she's ready... I'd expect her to be a fine young lady who has respect for the various parts of society.

Harvey

I think upon graduation firom here girls should be strong intellectual figure[s], meaning that she has had strong academic preparation in a number of disciplines, she's, she's widely based, she has perspective on the world around her, she understands political problems, and the difficulties with black and white type of perspectives, the ability to see grays and to work within grays. And that she's able to not simply be trained in an area, but to be able to appreciate a wide variety of other perspectives, but there is no right answer necessarily, that there is a sophisticated understanding of the world which they are hopefully going to gain as they move through life. Increasingly sophisticated in that learning is a lifetime adventure. I think that, and as well to be, you're really in control of your own education, and I think the most important thing that a girl can learn here is that she is not here to please her parents, she's not here to please her teachers, she's here to learn how to learn, how to grow, and to take control of her own education means that when she doesn't understand something, she goes in and asks questions about it, she's strong enough, she understands to do that. In a position of weakness, I
don't understand, she automatically understands the strength move is to say I don't understand and let's talk about this... So, there's a certain strength of personality, strength of character, handling your own education, and I think doing so with a sense of grace, not outlandish anger, emotion, etc., but being in control of oneself. Joe

Throughout these descriptions are discourses of agency and choice. Girls can choose their career and life path, hold and defend their own opinions, stand up for their rights and beliefs, and participate actively in the world. Keeping with the college-preparatory mission, the girls are expected to be academically strong, and able to critically evaluate the world around them. Through a broad education, the students are expected to be prepared to take on the challenges the world has to offer, regardless of paths they chose to take.

Tom’s call to be “bloody bold and resolute” is a far cry from descriptions of poor self-esteem and self-subordination offered in many of the texts describing adolescent girls (for example, Orenstein, 1994; Piper, 1994) The graduates are seen as having a world of possibilities before them and the intellectual and social skills to “make their mark.” Describing the graduates as strong, opinionated, able to “stand up and participate,” confident, moral, and in control, the faculty present their students as ready to take on the world. In a word, these girls are expected to leave the school empowered.

Support of Women’s Opportunities and the Role of Feminism

I love to persuade them that they can do this. And it doesn’t take too many small successes, they get to do a few things right, and all of a sudden they say, “Oh boy, I really can do this... Empowerment, I guess is the word. Ken

The discourses of female empowerment permeate the faculty participants’ descriptions of the influence of an AGS education. These faculty do not speak of seeking
female “equality with males,” but instead focus on providing women with the tools they need to advance on their own in potentially difficult environments. Sally, a middle school teacher asserts that the faculty see women’s opportunities as broad and far reaching, and serve as living examples of their belief systems:

We truly believe in women and women’s capabilities, and that the future will ultimately be in our hands. History has proven that, and I think we all believe that women sustain societies, with wars and whatnot, that traditionally that the men and boys went and many didn’t return and it’s the women that sustained the values of societies and sustained the culture and passed things to future generations, and I just, I believe we’re followers of that history, that it’s our responsibility to carry it on into the future. But feminist, no, I don’t think any of us stand on a pulpit saying that women are better, or women are stronger, or more mentally capable, but we'll never deny the capabilities of women or the successes of women. We celebrate the successes of women, we show these girls role models, predominantly female, so they have someone to aspire to that the pioneers have been there, you can follow and be pioneers yourselves. That there’s nothing you can’t do. And if that’s feminist, then, yes, we are feminists. How you define feminist, I don’t know. I wouldn’t say, I would doubt any of us are members of NOW, or any feminist organizations, but we truly believe in women and women’s capabilities, and our roles and responsibilities in a society, and that we push with these girls.... And we're strong women in our own rights, and so we stand up for our beliefs and that's what we share with the girls.

Espousing women’s value, capabilities, strength, intelligence and responsibilities, Sally celebrates women’s contributions and stresses the importance of women’s participation in the world at large. As will be explored in greater detail in the next chapter, the fact that Sally fails to see this perspective as feminist was initially surprising to me. Indeed all of the participating faculty were hesitant to name the institution as promoting or reflecting either a feminist or pro-women political agenda. Many see no feminist influence on the curriculum or institutional goals, and felt that while individuals may be involved in feminist organizations, these affiliations did not serve to politicize the institutional
environment. Others mentioned that the school leadership in particular supported feminism, and unsuccessfully tried to encourage faculty to embrace this perspective as well. Diane notes, “I think the feminist viewpoint is certainly given voice, but I don’t think it’s totally representative of the school.” Among the most accepting of feminism, Joe provides a broader description of its role at AGS,

I think that you're a girls school, you're here to educate females, not simply in all the disciplines here, but you're also hopefully able to give them some perspective about their particular position in society historically and where they are now and, their particular roles, their variety of roles. I think that the problem that I sense, I think that this should be not a place for militant feminism, I think that that has much more of a place in other quarters than here, I don't think it's ready for it here, I don't think it's wise for their particular understanding of the world around them to shape them in that direction... But feminist, I don't know if I would say that yes I think that that, I have a very liberal definition of feminism, I think it has to deal with understanding women in their position in society and their interrelationships with society, I don't think it's some self-defined women's movement type of thing.

Joe has a more inclusive understanding of feminism than Sally, but still initially rejects the feminism of the institution due to concerns about militant forms. Given the breadth of feminisms, and the intensity of campus discourse related to women’s experiences, it is surprising that feminism receives such short shrift. However, without using the specific discourses of feminism, these faculty members do indeed concern themselves with broadening women’s opportunities, identifying and removing barriers, supporting women’s development, preparing girls for choice-making, addressing issues of subordination and self-destructive behavior, and celebrating women’s successes and contributions.

Although the predominant discourses are those of female opportunity and strength, several members of the faculty were able to recount times in which they
perceived some degree of “male-bashing” as the AGS experience was celebrated as beneficial to girls. The period when CPS turned coed was noted as a time in which some institutional discourses were inappropriately denigrating toward males, but the faculty also noted that this denigration was quickly identified and for the most part abandoned. Throughout the study the faculty described sex-based imbalances in opportunities or experiences, but did not speak of these using systems-language of oppression or patriarchy. This does not suggest that they do not see harms faced by women, for they clearly address these when encouraging students to critically evaluate received knowledge, however the discourses of oppression and patriarchy are noticeably absent. As Marilyn Frye (1983) suggests, one can see individual barriers to women’s advancement from a microscopic position, yet when one views the barriers macroscopically such that the interconnections are evident, systematic oppression is evident, as is the case of women’s oppression within patriarchy. Even if these faculty members are aware of the macroscopic view, they do not describe it utilizing systems language, again positioning themselves outside of traditional feminist discourse.

As an independent school, AGS needs to be very cognizant of its role in the community and the need to create a learning environment that doesn’t counter the sensibilities of alumnae, parents and students. Were individual faculty or the institution as a whole to espouse a feminist standpoint, it might hinder their success and support. Given the perceptions of feminism presented by those faculty integrally involved in girls’ lives, it’s safe to imagine a lack of understanding of the diversity and scope of feminism among the general public. With “fear of feminism” widespread in America, it seem that
even if AGS had intended to enact a feminist agenda, it might be better off addressing feminist aims without adopting the label. As Mary notes, “a number of people, I think, send their children here so that they’re protected... and then they find their daughters are getting a voice instead of being submissive... but they like that, we're not a conservative Christian school. We're not so liberal that, you know, that nobody knows what we're doing, and we're fragmented all over, I just think it's a nice balance.”

Developing Voice

I think [an AGS girl has] had plenty, more opportunities to speak her mind without socially having any social comments being put on by a male, or worrying about what someone might say. Diane

When Gilligan (1982) initially spoke of a “different voice” used (primarily) by women, she claimed this as one that is grounded in responsibility, relation, and a desire or drive to be caring. This concept of voice is an internalized perspective on morality and life that is linked to sex-role socialization and gendered behavioral expectations.

Although some of the AGS faculty mentioned girls’ learning styles as cooperative, this is about as close as they got to mentioning “relational” drives or ethics of care. Ken and Joe noted the support the students offered one another, but didn’t link this to voice or specific discourses of care. While the concept of voice was mentioned by nearly all participants in the study, the exact meaning was somewhat muddied. As if engaged in what Fairclough deems “taken for granteds,” there was almost an assumption that all understood that developing voice was important, and that’s all that needed to be said.

What is clear is that these faculty members are not using “voice” as it was originally presented by Gilligan, but are using the concept more broadly based on their
understandings of the meaning of validating this “different voice.” I was reminded of Judy Mann’s (1994) description of her first meeting Carol Gilligan in the early 1980s. As a reporter interviewing Gilligan about her upcoming publication of *In A Different Voice*, Mann reflects, “She was uncovering secrets about the condition of women in Western cultures. She was also talking political heresy: She was saying women were different and it was just fine to think like a woman… Looking back, I now realize that Carol Gilligan was the first person who had really told me about the value of thinking like a woman, who made me feel that it was terrific” (p. 278). As “voice” has been used in future works including Brown and Gilligan (1992), Mann (1994), and Debold et al. (1993) it has come to focus less on the unique perspective offered by females as females, and more on the value of having experiences spoken aloud, on feeling empowered to share one’s thoughts and feelings without fear. As faculty participants discussed voice, they were really speaking of these two issues, actually feeling supported when choosing to talk, and feeling able to share their ideas with others.

At a somewhat literal level, the students use their voice when given opportunities to speak publicly and have their thoughts heard. The content of the speaking is less important than the actual act of talking aloud and feeling comfortable doing so. Ken talks of a “ghetto of silence” that girls often face in schools and throughout adolescence, and his use of class discussion and intentional calling on students (as described earlier) as important to girls’ claiming their education. Public speaking is an important component of an AGS education, involving students from all grade levels. Students perform reports based on class projects in front of other students and/or parents, tell jokes in the
lunchroom, lead class discussions, and sing in choir. When discussing the difference she imagines between teaching boys and girls, Sally states,

I wouldn't develop [the boys’] voices as well because I think I would assume they have a voice already, by virtue of their sex. With the girls, we bring them out. A lot of work is done in their oral presentation capabilities, how well they explain and can speak of their knowledge and talk and communicate and I don’t know that we’d spend that kind of time with the boys.

In this manner she somewhat crosses between giving opportunities to speak, and beginning to value the meaning of their speech. As used by Megan as she describes students “getting a voice instead of being submissive,” the phrase “getting a voice” is likened to becoming strong, powerful, assertive, or confident. Voice is gained, rather than owned, and is developed through intervention or activity. Addressing this issue in another manner, she talks about the manner in which students are taught at AGS,

We tell them that there are no limits, you know, and we don't say, well this is going to be too hard for you, you won't be able to do this. We don't tell them anything. We just go out and do it. And if they struggle, fine, but they're going to grow in that, and that's what gives them their voice. It's very obvious for our alumna when they're in a group setting, and they look at other girls, other girls will do anything besides talk, and our girls will talk. You know, they'll be the ones who will ask the questions and be persistent about it, so we've given them a voice.

Seemingly in support of Megan's perspectives, Shrewsbury (1993) believes that empowering students helps them to find their own voices and develop an authentic sense of self. Many of the participants in the project would agree with this evaluation – voice and self-awareness come from confidence; therefore educational settings that aim to empower students will necessarily lead to beneficial outcomes.
Developing and Supporting Self-Esteem and Confidence

I think we sometimes have a real snobby, snotty um, perception, people have that perception on us, and if they came and walked the halls, I think they would realize that it's confidence that these girls exude, not that they feel good about themselves, that, it's not that they're better, they don't feel better, but they feel good about who they are and they're willing to tell ya, what they can offer. And that's something that we think is a positive trait. And so we instill that. Sally

Throughout the interviews, the teachers in the study described the role that the school plays in developing confidence, helping the girls to enhance their sense of self as well as their skills and abilities. These faculty rarely use the term “self-esteem” when discussing their students although this is a discourse that permeates the school’s recommended readings. As Orenstein notes, “girls with healthy self-esteem have an appropriate sense of their potential, their competence, their innate value as individuals. They feel a sense of entitlement: license to take up space in the world, a right to be heard and to express the full spectrum of human emotions.” (1994, p. xix) Much as with voice, there is almost a sense that self-esteem will necessarily follow from the opportunities afforded girls at AGS. Although not mentioned as “self esteem” much of the analysis above addresses these issues of value, competence, potential, and entitlement, but places them in a context of educational, occupational, and social opportunity rather than the link to psychological well-being. An exception to this is the health class. Debbie notes that in health “basically everything we do is on the basis of self-esteem, responsible decision-making, all the things that we do cover go back to that. Mental and emotional health,
family and social health, we touch on alcohol and tobacco and other drugs, body systems, nutrition, and then we end with disease if we have time."

Adolescence is seen as difficult, but it is not pathologized. Perhaps this is particularly due to the clientele; on average, the students comes from families that strongly support their development, and may in fact be guilty of expecting too much rather than too little from their children. As noted in the literature review, competent girls do face difficulties, but these are primarily represented as ones caused by the male gaze, which is generally absent at AGS, or by educational settings that devalue girls, an issue for which AGS cannot be faulted. Even so, not all students are exceptional at all things, and academic and social struggles do occur. Lois talks of the difficulties students often face transferring from other schools to AGS. She begins by suggesting that at the former school the girls were the cream of the crop, and were treated as such,

While of course you're their favorite class, you're their favorite student, you're gonna get extra attention. Well then you come to AGS and all of a sudden everybody's that quality. You know, everybody in your class. So for somebody like [a transfer student], it was a little tough at first because all of a sudden she's not standing out as oh, yeah, wooh, we've got a, you know, a great one here. And yet, I can see how for other kids who are somewhat struggling, wooh, that's got to be really tough on their self esteem, or on their just, just to exist every day, how hard they must have to work. If I hear [a student] complaining about homework sometimes, you know, I think, how do some of these kids make it?

Indeed, there is a lot of pressure to do well in classes, to be intelligent, to have a talent (athletic, artistic, literary), and an expectation that the students are driven to succeed. While the faculty participants may speak of preparing students for choices, all students are expected to attend college and to have aspirations toward public (paid or volunteer) contributions. Suggesting that students have enormous pressures placed on them as
preparation for these adult roles, members of the administration discuss students’ overwhelming workloads, and their inability to set limits. Such perceptions are echoed throughout the faculty, including by the athletic coaches who marvel at the students’ ability to complete their schoolwork, participate in practices and team travel, and be involved in other co-curricular activities as well. A sense of competence can certainly emerge from successful balancing of myriad responsibilities, but attention must also be given to the possible stress involved in this pursuit of widespread excellence.

Returning to Orenstein’s definition of self-esteem, the following selection highlights one faculty members’ description of developing confidence, and the factors that go into supporting and challenging students.

Harvey: Oh, I think this school gives those kids confidence. I think the girls come out of here with, I'm not telling you that they come out of here perfect, and I'm not saying they're coming out of here with enough confidence that they'll ever need, but I think this school in the big picture is very, very good for the kids' confidence overall. I'm not one of those guys who believes that you coddle somebody to build their self-esteem, I think that if you create barriers that they can get over, that builds their self-esteem because they have mastered things.

Betsy: So give them enough challenge, within a somewhat supportive environment?

Harvey: Yeah, well said, well said, challenges within a somewhat supportive environment, and I like the word somewhat before supportive because, I don't want the mushy supportive, we're supporting you, I want the people in charge making decisions when support is needed, but not throwing the support there if the young lady may find a way to get over that hurdle. You know, if she starts falling, then we put the support there, but if she's struggling, she's struggling, you know, like if you're with a little child and they're in the playground and they're going up the monkey bars well you kinda stand away and just you know, watching them, you're watching them, and whatever they can cut the mustard on without your help, you let them conquer... but then when they get to the scary part then they're there, and if they would fall, they would catch them. That's yes, but challenges, challenges, challenges within a somewhat supporting and somewhat to
me means uh, that we're there to catch them if they fall, but any time they can conquer something without knowing we were there, more power to 'em.

Betsy: And my guess is here even sometimes you let them fall, and then (oh, oh) help them a little bit (oh yes) after the fall.

Harvey: If it's not one of those humongous falls, absolutely, and if they're in my class, we're not going to cry about it. 'Cause, I'm not saying crying doesn't belong, but not in [my] class. ... No, we don't cry in [subject] class, like Tom Hanks says, there's no crying in baseball. No, I tell the girls if ten years from now some young man wines and dines ya' and you make promises and commitments and you marry the guy and he turns out to be a jerk, give me a call, I'll cry with you. But, if the grade is less than you thought, you don't cry, we make a meeting with [Harvey], we have a one-on-one meeting, one-on-one you tell him his judgment of your paper was wrong, and you tell him why, you know, that's how I see it.

Harvey continues by noting that this manner of working with students is not dependent on sex, he would have the same expectations of male students as well. His description assumes that adolescent girls should have the agency and ability to stand up for themselves, feel confident in their activities, be able to handle challenges and learn from failures, and gain self-esteem by proving to themselves that they can indeed do all of these things. He refuses to believe that teenage girls need to be “coddled,” but instead treated as empowered individuals, and through this treatment they gain build their confidence and take risks. Harvey was not the only participant to reject “coddling” students, suggesting this as a negative term faculty have associated with girls’ education, and perhaps one that is avoided in institution discourse and action.

Future Choice-Making

As noted above, the AGS faculty participating in this study believe that AGS students develop the skills and desire to make their own choices regarding their lives.
Drawing upon the concept of women’s opportunities, Tom, an upper school teacher, talks about conversations with his students regarding life after AGS:

Every class I have I go around the room and I say okay what do you want to be when you grow up? And I don't really care what the answer is... I'm looking more at type and I, I think if you would do that, that 95 out of every hundred would tell you, would give you a job title. Whether it be a doctor, or a lawyer, or an engineer, or a writer, or you name it, that they are in charge of themselves. Now, you think about that. That the horizon they see is one that they control. And that says something about their view, and their view of themselves and their position in society. It's rare that I have a girl respond that she's looking for a job where somebody can tell her what to do. They're all thinking in those terms... that says something about their self-image and the possibilities they see for themselves.... We get fewer moms, than I think you would expect. Because, and I will tell you that I think that there will be more moms out there than what they will say now. Which is okay. It's choices. I think they would all see it as their choice of what they want to do. Very few, very few would say that that's my role, but that's not to say there wouldn't be some. And that's okay.

Tom highlights the difference between fulfilling a role, and freely choosing one’s destiny. He sees AGS students as having choice, being in charge of themselves regardless of the broader societal views on their place in the world. More importantly, he sees the students as knowing and believing that they have choices. Faculty like Tom have taken to heart many of the messages shared in the institutional documents and reading list, failing to accept the second-class citizenship women and girls have often encountered. However, in encouraging the girls (and themselves) to take on new roles, there isn’t yet a good dialogue regarding the balancing of these with former roles. Several faculty members expressed concern that in sharing messages of opportunity with the girls, they have failed to prepare them to make tough choices regarding where to expend their energy and focus their desires. When Megan tells her students that there are “no limits” she only tells half the story; one’s sex should not hinder one’s opportunities, but there are limits to what one
can reasonably (or healthfully) do to any degree of competency. Stressing this point, Joe asserts,

I will say that this school I think is particularly bad, as I, I just call it like I see it, the school is particularly bad in the message that it does give women. It gives them two messages. Both of which are true, and on the other hands are in a sense almost impossible to attain. That they can do anything, set their mind to it, which is a good, strong, articulate, I think, image to give. And secondly, they can do everything. Which is the exact wrong thing. The problem is that we spend a great amount of time telling them that they can do everything they want, what we don't tell them is, no, that's not right, you can maybe do what you want, but you're going to have to make some clear choices and hard decisions. If you want to be a professional woman, you can do that. You have the ability, you have the training, you can do it. If you want to be a mother, you can do that too. Can you do both at the same time? Credibly well? No, you can't. You may have to make some trade-offs as you go in life. That I'm in a position here, that I choose to leave the position to raise a family for a time, and when I go back maybe it's a time when I think I can manage both, etc., etc. One way or the other you can't have everything that goes on. And I'm afraid that when you're told you can have everything, and I think that's a fallacious, I don't think it does people any good.

As presented by Joe, the idea of "doing anything and everything" relates to activities in which one is engaged. Sally uses these terms somewhat differently, noting that although she initially stated in the interview that she tells her students "there's nothing you can't do," the more realistic message she sends is "there's nothing you can't try." Rather than an expression of activity, she is focused more on ability. She recognizes that there are indeed limitations on what her students have the intelligence and skills to do, but that the AGS faculty should be helpful in getting the girls to aim for the "next rung on the ladder" and to keep them from being discouraged if their attempts don't always succeed. While Joe's statement also addresses competency, it presents success more as a matter of balance and time rather than basic skills or talents.
Others echo Joe’s concerns about teaching balance, noting that the faculty often fail to model healthy lifestyles for their students. The faculty are often overly-accessible to students, taking on too many projects and activities at the expense of their privacy, health and leisure. Many of the study participants describe themselves as “type A” personalities that strive for perfection in themselves and their students. The head of school is lauded for her intelligence, vision, leadership, and drive, and therefore is offered as a role model for the girls to follow. Unfortunately, the students often link some of her physical attributes with her other successes, turning the head of school into a difficult woman after which to model oneself. Diane notes,

[the head] exemplifies how driven a lot of these girls are here… she’s a very driven person and she’s thin and she’s tall and so when you have that role model at the top saying if you want to be everything you can be, this is what you should look like and be and that kind of stuff. That’s not the end all and we’re always trying to put things in perspective that it’s just not the tall and beautiful woman that strives and gets everything… but you have to be comfortable with yourself and that kind of stuff… [the head] has good eating habits, she works out daily, she has a very healthful lifestyle. You’ve got to put all of that into it, it’s not like she’s starving herself.

In her dissertation study of AGS, Haithe Anderson (1993) also showed concern about the role models offered to students, suggesting that the alumnae that speak to student are those who are seemingly balancing work and families in ways that appear “too mythical” for replication. While I suppose it is best to err on the side of having set aspirations too high than too low as a means of counteracting discourses of subordination, the potential harms of encouraging students to be “superwomen” cannot be disregarded. Further, students need realistic understanding of their abilities to avoid self-depreciation if one does not excel at everything.
Summary

Throughout their conversations on schooling at AGS, the faculty participants offer a discourse of opportunity, providing girls with a broad, liberal education that engages them intellectually, extends their social and cultural awareness and prepares them for collegiate study. The language used to describe the institution closely matches the discourses offered in the institutional documents presented in Chapter 4. This degree of congruence suggests that AGS has a strong institutional culture that maintains and reinforces perspectives and understanding on the purpose of schooling girls.

These faculty members often echoed the concerns about coeducational schools that were offered in the recommended readings: girls face harassment, boys garner teacher attention, students aren’t properly mentored, leadership opportunities for girls are few, girls fear appearing smart, women’s experiences are only minimally included in the curriculum, large class size hinders academic success, etc. AGS is offered as a site where much of this is responded to. The participants do acknowledge that the absence of boys doesn’t eliminate aggressive behavior and monopolization of teacher time, but they also believe these circumstances are less pronounced at AGS. The single-sex environment alone doesn’t make the difference, but it’s a strong starting point. Add to this the college-preparatory mission, centrality of women in the curriculum, opportunities for leadership, availability of role models, faculty and parental expectations, and a host of other supports, and faculty believe the girls are being prepared for success.

The discourse of “voice” permeated the interviews and classroom observations. Voice was used as a sign of empowerment, developed through opportunities to practice
public speaking and through activities that promote competence and confidence.

Interestingly, although prevalent in the readings, the term “self-esteem” was rarely used by faculty, choosing instead the concept of “confidence” to suggest comfort with oneself and one’s competencies. Throughout the study, the faculty participants offered a counter-discourse to the pathologizing of adolescence offered in many of the school’s recommended readings, instead seeing students as competent and capable. As described by the faculty, strong academic preparation and institutional support of girls’ total development lead to confidence and voice, thus empowering girls to take on whatever challenges they may face. The faculty tell their students that they have the opportunity to do anything, yet may falter by failing to prepare them for making choices regarding how many things they can credibly do.

Perhaps the greatest asset AGS offers is the centrality of women in the environment, with all energies going toward girls’ development. As all student positions and roles are taken by girls, women’s experiences are infused into the content of classes, and girls’ perceived needs are attended to, girls receive constant messages that serve as a counter-discourse to many negative socializing systems. The faculty in the study present themselves not simply as teachers within academic disciplines or grade levels, but as being in a position to shape the quality of a girls’ life and contribute to her ability to reach her potential. Perhaps this reflects a sampling bias, but the faculty appeared to see themselves as having a responsibility to help foster empowerment, confidence and voice, almost as if a mission undertaken. While the faculty spoke with different degrees of passion about their work, all showed a commitment to the institutional aims and felt that
they served an important role in the girls’ lives and the institution. Regardless of the teacher’s sex or grade levels taught, all espoused the value of single-sex schooling and importance of directly including in the curriculum girls’ and women’s experiences.

Building upon the explorations from this chapter, Chapter 6 will focus specifically on the manner in which gender informs teaching philosophy, methods, and curriculum. Of particular emphasis will be the manner in which discourses and enactments reflect gender-sensitive or feminist pedagogies.
CHAPTER 6
THE GENDERED NATURE OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY AND PEDAGOGY

I selected AGS for my dissertation work because the administration spoke to me at length about the quality of the education provided at the school, and the role the school played in empowering girls. I was told that central to the success of the school was the adoption of “feminist pedagogy” in the late 1980s. I was toured through the campus, and shown examples of feminist pedagogy in action — rooms configured with chairs in circles, rejection of lecturing in favor of discussion-based teaching, pictures of celebrated women on the walls, students working cooperatively rather than in isolation, etc. I was excited about this opportunity to experience feminist teaching outside of a college setting, and to see the impact of this pedagogy upon the schools’ girls and young women.

Once engaged in my study, it became clear to me that the language of feminist pedagogy was foreign to most of the faculty involved, or if familiar, not seen as operating at the school. These faculty members spoke at length about empowering girls, developing their voices, raising their self-confidence, showing them opportunities, celebrating their successes, and exposing them to women’s experiences and contributions. Even so, the majority did not see themselves as feminists, and did not intend to conduct their classrooms from a feminist agenda. In fact, they weren’t even sure if the school had
or should have a feminist aim. Rather than looking for feminist pedagogy, I changed my focus to understand the manner in which these faculty described and enacted their teaching philosophies, looking to uncover the ways in which these relate to the institutional mission, their discourses of gendered experiences at AGS, and the administration’s sense that feminist pedagogy was occurring.

Building upon the previous chapters, this chapter will explore the manner in which classroom activities address issues of gender and the relationship of such attributes with the institutional mission. By describing faculty discourses and classroom activities, I will show that while the faculty are engaged in teaching that supports girls’ development, their work cannot be identified as “feminist pedagogy,” but instead is both gender-sensitive and women-centered. The chapter closes with a discussion of the implications of these pedagogical styles and ideals for the attainment of institutional aims. Given the focus of the dissertation, this chapter is not intended to explore teaching in general, but instead to begin to look at the relationship between teaching girls and discourses of gender.

**From Feminist Pedagogy to Teaching Girls**

As was noted in Chapter 3, feminist pedagogy cannot be identified by a particular teaching method, but instead allows for multiple enactments while based in a common philosophical grounding. Although such pedagogy lacks a methodological base, it flourishes in its ideological grounding in feminism, with attention given to issues of power, entitlement, opportunity, and critical evaluation. When such ideology is translated into pedagogical philosophy it,
promotes the awareness that knowledge is not a discrete body of "truths" that the instructor knows and imparts to students. It reframes the relationship between students and the course material by suggesting that students themselves are capable of active learning and that this, rather than passive receiving, is what works best. Feminist teaching encourages classroom interactions that emphasize students' ability to question and to explore issues deeply, and nurtures the development of motivation and skills that allow students to investigate ideas and evidence and arrive at meaning... [that] helps students achieve mastery of material on their own or in groups. The goal is to give students the means to gain power and control over knowledge, and, as a consequence, to have authority in the classroom... its emphasis on the cooperative and the collective... makes explicit that how we experience and understand things is rooted in our social position, based on a variety of factors including gender, race, ethnicity, class, and sexual preference... feminist pedagogy affirms the value of personal experience as a central component to learning. (Parry, 1996, pp. 45-47)

Jennifer Scanlon (1993) suggests that to be truly feminist, the pedagogy must lead to action on the part of the students. She asserts that while it is necessary to enlighten and empower students through feminist perspectives on teaching, the true virtue of feminist pedagogy is the practical link, the ability to create change based on the knowledge and skills one has developed. If one looks at the desired outcomes of an AGS education presented in the previous chapter, it is apparent that many if not all of the aims Parry discusses are in evidence at AGS. Indeed, some faculty participants even espouse the practical applications that Scanlon offers, but this is not enough to affirm that feminist pedagogy is occurring. As reported in Maher and Tetrault, (1994) feminist teachers claim this designation by entering the classroom utilizing a feminist "mode of analysis" (p. 13) as a guide to teaching strategy and style. The AGS faculty participating in this project do not enter into teaching from an intentionally feminist mode, and do not name themselves as feminist teachers, and therefore no matter how empowering or liberating their pedagogical styles may be in terms of impact on the students, I will argue that the intent
or purpose of their teaching places them outside the feminist realm. Because they do not see their work as feminist, their actions alone do not warrant the imposition of the term "feminist" on their methods or philosophies.

Perhaps more in line with faculty intent at AGS, Barbara Houston (1985) identifies "gender sensitive" teaching as recognizing the influence of gender in society, and intentionally addressing these influences within the curriculum. Rather than being "gender free" and ignoring or disregarding gender differentiation, the gender sensitive curriculum and classroom acknowledges inequalities based on sex and sex role socialization, and helps students to explore the impact of such differentiation. While this standpoint is political in its intent to expose biases in systems, it is also somewhat neutral in its aim not to privilege a particular ideological (i.e. feminist, Marxist, post-modern) perspective. Based on the exploration of sex-based power differentials, a classroom conducted utilizing feminist pedagogy would necessarily be gender-sensitive, but gender-sensitivity is not sufficient to identify a classroom as feminist because it fails to require support of a feminist agenda.

Looking for ways in which schools addressed gender, The American Association of University Women (AAUW, 1992) identified three forms of curricula that individually and together influence student learning and by extension understanding about gender roles and expectations. The formal curriculum looks specifically at the content of the course, the "classroom as curriculum" looks at the manner in which the information is taught, and the "evaded curriculum" addresses the core information this is ignored or suppressed. The AAUW report suggested the schools that best support girls'
development monitor the level of positive representations and messages offered regarding girls’ and women’s experiences. This chapter will look at the manner in which faculty include issues related to gender in each of these curricula, and describe the reasoning behind such inclusion.

Returning to the previous examination of Riordan (1998), I assess the degree to which the AGS faculty appear to assist in addressing the “rationales” offered for claiming that single-sex schooling provides girls with benefits not found in most coeducational settings. His attention to curriculum, relationship, role modeling, biases and stereotypes attempts to ensure widespread support for girls’ development rather than isolated positive messages easily counteracted by pervasive negative forces. While naming “activist and constructivist teaching and learning” (p. 56) as important to the environment, none of his rationales speak directly to girls’ learning styles. Several works (AAUW, 1992; Belenky et al., 1986; Mann, 1994; Sadker & Sadker, 1994) suggest that girls work well in groups, benefit from discussion-based learning if not overwhelmed by aggressive/assertive students (usually meaning boys), and need more time to have confidence to answer questions than typically afforded, however the benefits of gender-inclusive curricula and pro-academic mentoring seem to play a much stronger role in supporting girls’ education. The method is again offered as less important than the content and intent.

As shown in the previous chapter, the faculty participants described themselves as engaging in pro-academic activities, and stressing the benefits to girls’ full development. In this chapter I will pay particular attention to teaching philosophy and curricular activities and their relationship to gender. Prior to this exposition, I will review some
in institutional characteristics that these faculty members see as necessary preconditions to much of the work they are able to do.

**Preconditions to Successful Teaching at AGS**

As was noted by Harvey in the previous chapter, most students come into AGS with a great deal of parental support for their education. The parents are very invested in their children's education, and demand the best of the student and the school. For many faculty, certain conditions such as family background, admissions standards, small classes, great resources and the institutional mission have as much or more to do with their teaching style and curriculum than does the single-sex environment.

Because of her belief that good education requires one-on-one connections between teachers and students, Lois asserts, "I have always believed that the biggest strength, the greatest strength of AGS is the size of the classes.... This is the biggest issue to me, even bigger than a girls' school.” Others echo the praise of small classes. Given his support of student-centered classes, Jack offers, “if I get to 16 and 18 kids in a class, I can’t do it.” Alexandra notes “I can’t imagine... if you have 25 or 30... how could you do writing workshop the same way? You couldn’t meet with that many kids... All kids deserve individual attention.” While appreciating small classes, Dana suggests that “sometimes you get a class that’s too small... that everybody sticks out terribly, and they feel terribly exposed, and so that can be more difficult than a huge class. But in any case, as I promised parents on their open house evening... nobody would be able to fall through the cracks in classrooms of 10 or 12.” With class sizes that generally don’t pass 20 students, and often cap at 12 to 15, it is indeed much more difficult for students to fall
through the cracks, and choices of pedagogical styles are much broader than when faculty teach thirty students in a class and hundreds of different students each day. Megan says "the beauty of [leaving the public school] is that I left 168 students for 41 students. That makes a big difference... there's more of me to go around." The small class size and number of total students taught increases faculty connection with students and enhances their awareness of student skills, needs and experiences.

With a focus on educational opportunity, the campus leadership and faculty do whatever it takes to ensure that the school has widespread and varied campus resources. Through grants, alumnae and parental support, and a variety of other sources, AGS is extraordinarily rich in resources. Sally notes,

I have never been denied a resource, an educational teaching aid of any nature. To include human resources. Parents are very willing, we have a huge clientele of professional parents, very willing to come in and talk to the girls, work with the girls, participate in activities. I'm doing an inventor/invention discovery unit with my sixes and we have a father who runs an invention/patent business. He will come in and talk to the girls and tell them what, how he got into it and what he does and we have a lot of medical professionals um, that are always willing to send in um, plastic gloves for dissection, things like that. ...as well as the technological resources that have been made available by grants and other things by donating alumnus. So, we've been, I feel very fortunate in that regard. There is not a resource that I am ever short of. All I have to do is ask.

Unlike at many public schools in the area, students at AGS can expect ready access to computers, high-tech scientific equipment, and a large campus library. Although she appreciates access to these items, the faculty are also seen as a noteworthy campus resource. Sally suggests, "it's not the money that's pumped into this institution that is the most valuable asset, it's the faculty that cares, is dedicated to these girls and their development, and takes every second of time necessary."

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Beyond such rich resources, by nature of this being a private institution the faculty also have greater freedom in curricular development than they would at a public school. The classes are taught with up-to-date textbooks, or with selections of readings that provide a different range of information than found in a traditional textbook. The faculty have great flexibility in choosing books, and value the support they get institutionally for trying out new curricular content. The institutional mission helps to support this focus on curricular content and engagement with technology, and links these to the desire to adequately prepare students for college. Further, the institutional focus on college preparation creates an expectation that students come to school to learn and that teachers attend to student development. With this in mind, teachers feel the responsibility to have high expectations for students and feel supported in their desire to have all students succeed.

Taken together, these preconditions create a pro-learning environment regardless of clientele or faculty activity. Parental attention to academic excellence, low student-to-teacher ratios, varied and prevalent human and physical resources, site-based curricular control, enhanced by selective admissions policies and a college-preparatory curriculum, create a strong foundation for educational excellence. The remainder of this chapter will explore the means by which the faculty engaged in this project build upon these positive preconditions as they enact their teaching methods and philosophies.
Teaching Philosophy

I do see myself as a facilitator more than as, I don’t get up and lecture all day, that the kids are very active in their learning. That they’re creating, constantly questioning... I’m sure they feel very safe to ask anything or to say anything... we’re fostering them to be lifelong learners. Alexandra

An early interview question for faculty participants was a call to describe their teaching philosophy or their style of conducting their classrooms. While I had somewhat naively hoped that they would begin a long description of their use of feminist pedagogy, I instead found explanations that varied widely in the manner in which teaching occurred, and the use of formal pedagogical discourses.

I'm not of the teacher-school type. My Master's is in my field, in fact the only education course I took is one I failed. In college, I dropped it too late (laughs). My philosophy, it comes, if I have one, it comes from all of the best teachers that I remember in my life, and I had I think some very good ones. And so I tend, I guess I'm a sort of a combination of all of them. And what that amounts to is really, I think, a person who loves his subject, who loves his job, and his charge. Uh, and I tend, like them, to be sort of traditional in a lot of ways. Fairly teacher-centered teaching. I guess that's the word for it. I'm not as experienced or as comfortable with, because of the lack of the teacher school things, with student centered conduct of class, with multi-media conduct of class. Dana

I think my job is as a facilitator here where I, especially in, my experience is primarily in kindergarten, first and second grade. But my job in an all girls school, single-sex education, has been first and second, and I think my job is as a facilitator, to make sure that at this point that they have the strongest skills they can have, that they can feel good about themselves. Lucy

I'm a visual learner, so I make sure there are class notes on the board. There are auditory learners out there, so I make sure that where I'm discussing it, there are those that are kinesthetic, who have to have something, so we have the toys out. You know, there's Playdough for one thing. I mean, there are just things that can help them, and every day there's a visual, there's a model, or something for them, and although I'm talking to them, I'm interacting with them, they're giving me comments back and how to pull that together. It's kind of like a, it's not a teacher-centered conversation, but I have 60% of the conversation. But they also pull it in, and ask questions, and there's a very, in my opinion, there's a very relaxed
feeling that they can ask whatever, and sometimes you get these off the wall "this has nothing to do with," you know, and okay, fine, you know, and we'll check it out. So that's the type of class it is. Megan

I think I've probably subjected kids to some pretty boring classes over the years and learned a lot about engaging kids to do the teaching, meaning I think the student-centered classroom is the only way to go. I think there are times for lecture, but to be honest with you, in my AP US History class is probably the toughest class I teach, they do most of the teaching. Jack

Although diffuse in content and style, these faculty members share a discourse related to the “centeredness” of the classroom. Regardless of the style chosen, all seemed aware of the difference between teacher and student-centered methods and their enactment thereof. The language of engagement, facilitation, and discussion highlights teachers and students collaborating to construct meaning and understanding rather than students receiving knowledge. As exemplified by several of these passages, the explanation of classroom practices is not initially well-organized, even when theoretical or pedagogical discourse is utilized. Such statements suggest a lack of experience talking about one’s teaching even if a particular methodology or philosophy is intentionally utilized.

Several mention that their background in educational theory is limited, and their teaching is more based on personal experience and collegial norms. For some faculty, their theoretical background is weak because teachers at AGS are not required to have teaching degrees prior to employment. For others, the education courses taken were seen as of poor quality, and had little to no lasting impact. While it pained me as an instructor of education courses, these types of courses were described by Joe as “perhaps the greatest bane to society” and as “utterly laughable” by Jack. Given this, that there is a
shared discourse on centeredness suggests that it has some relationship to conversations and interventions within the institutional environment.

More prevalent than general educational theory are pedagogical theories linked to specific academic disciplines. Within several of the disciplines, such descriptions include the names of theorists, as well as the intention and impact of prescribed methods. For example, the music teacher in the study talks of the benefits of music education, strongly linked to her use of the philosophy of Zoltan Kodi who uses folk music from different cultures to help develop understanding of music and foster academic development. Based on the use of this theory, she describes how the study of music has an impact on the rest of one’s development noting “I can enhance everything else that’s taught in the rest of the school.” Music is described as developing motor skills, awareness of patterns, reading, and vocal skills. Further, the musical score “is a graph that charts frequencies, intensities, balance, volume, changes in harmony. It’s a science. Rhythmically it’s math, if you look at the fractions and the divisions” of notes and measures. She espouses a theory and methodology that is based on studying she has done and success in its application at AGS, but that has no direct link to the gender of the students.

As another example, the physical education faculty as a group had recently embraced an educational method based on Daryl Siedentop’s model of sports education that focuses around sports organized by “season” and played in a league fashion. According to Gail, this model tries to “give the students that aren’t in athletics a feel for the whole team concept and everything involved in it. So, they each have a job as well as playing [the sport].” The model works by the girls taking on the roles necessary to
support a sports team, as well as demanding that each girl participate in the sport selected for each of the 5-6 seasons engaged in during the academic year. Teams earn points not only by winning their games, but also by members of the team successfully completing their support tasks. As described by Gail, the roles include,

The coach who has to get their team organized, ready, out on the field, put in positions, and coordinate all that. The captain has to organize the enthusiasm and the cheer at the end of the games and the shaking hands and that type of sportsmanship activity. The trainers have to research what a trainer’s job is and then take supplies out to the field with them and if anything were to happen, I would go out with that trainer and try to assess what type of injury and all that kind of stuff with them... but their main job in the practices and everything has been to get the kids warmed up and stretched out properly... The managers have to get all the equipment and do all that kind of stuff and help with awards at the end of the season and they delegate... they bring balls, cones, pennies, and then they make sure people on the team bring that stuff out for them. We have a scorekeeper who has to make up a score sheet or at least know how to use it and be able to keep time, and a statistician that needs to know how to keep track of all of the different things that go on in a game, and a publicist who keeps track of putting things up on a bulletin board... so each has that kind of a role that has nothing at all to do with physical ability, so the kids that really don’t excel in that sport feel like they’re really contributing to the team... So what we’re trying to get through to them is that sports involves more than just playing.

This model allows students of all abilities to participate nearly equally, incorporating athletic skills with leadership, math, artistic, health, and social skills. Gail notes that the less athletic (which may change depending upon the sport being played) are said to be more involved than before this model was embraced as “they have an actual role that they’re kind of excited about fulfilling, and they’re not complaining at all about playing because they know that if they don’t, their team loses and they lose a point.” Further, the traditional “star athletes” have shown that the model is making them “help the weaker kids with their skills a little bit more, and it’s bringing out a more leadership
role instead of an ‘I’m going to do it all’ role.” By design, the model does not allow a student to serve in the same “role” more than once, so all are called upon to utilize a range of skills throughout the academic year. Most interestingly, a team that lost every game could still statistically win the “season” because of the points earned through successful role completion and full participation by team members.

Designed for any student population, the physical education faculty members in the study find this model especially valuable for girls because it offers them insight into job possibilities in sports beyond the limited number of positions available for women as professional athletes. This model also brings the concept of teamwork and sportsmanship to play in every class, allowing all students to develop these skills that have often been available only to those with the highest skill levels who can earn a spot on an athletic team. Because the understanding of sports and sports analogies are often stereotypes as part of the male experience, intensive participation in team sports may also help prepare the AGS students to participate as equals to men in workplace and social situations in which sports-based knowledge or skills are called into play.

Absent from the teaching philosophies espoused above is a specific gendered discourse, although the sports model is described as beneficial to girls from a career standpoint. The initial comments on teaching and the selection of educational models is most specifically designed to support student learning regardless of clientele. As will be shown below, what makes these styles and models beneficial for use at AGS goes beyond the basic methods or espoused philosophy. One thing was certain, however, the faculty
in the study did not immediately describe feminist pedagogy as central to their teaching, and even with prodding had little to offer on the subject.

**Teaching Girls**

Most of our faculty is female, and I don't think that's an accident. I think that's who gravitates, we kind of gravitate to our own. We have a very diverse population at AGS, but I think the bottom line is females educating and relating to females. Sally

As shown in the previous chapter, the faculty participants strongly believe that the work they do supports girls' development and creates a special academic environment not found in most coeducational environments. Certainly the college-preparatory curriculum plays a role in this, but these faculty seem to believe that more is involved. Sally had noted that the faculty at AGS “know how to teach girls best.” Elaborating on what that means to her she states,

The teachers have had experience in coed environments and all boy institutions and religious institutions, parochial schools, at all levels from preschool through college, and they have settled here deciding that this is their niche, and that this is where they want to teach because they feel a connection with these girls and they obviously are very comfortable in what they're doing and that comfort zone is extended to the girls. The girls feel comfortable learning here. They feel comfortable growing up and maturing among us. So their problems become our problems, their concerns become our concerns, and I go through adolescence every day with these middle school girls. And it's, sometimes it's not pretty (laughs) but we empathize and we have a wealth of experience not just in teaching but in many other endeavors... You get to move within this environment [changing grade levels taught], too, to see where you're most comfortable, and then you can settle in in the sense that you find the girls that you can work with best, and provide the most to enrich their lives the most... this is such a dedicated faculty, you can come here 24 hours a day seven days a week, you'll find faculty members in and among students. Or you can go to students' homes or to their athletic events or to their social activities and you'll find faculty there, supporting them, and I think that's the best way to develop an entire, the whole girl, in every instance. We take the time with those that aren't mainstream or that have particular concerns, things that need attention, and that's why I think we are the
best educators of girls. Because of all of those considerations that we make every
day.

This is indeed a discourse of relationship and connection, faculty being drawn to a
particular population of girls and becoming involved in all aspects of their lives. This is
also a story about an institution's willingness to allow faculty to test out their skills and
interests to find their niche. Sally's description has nothing to do with methods, or indeed
curricular content, but with attitude and fit. Although she later has much to say about the
benefits of the curriculum, her initial focus on environmental matters is noteworthy.

When Joe speaks of teaching girls, he provides a discourse of method based on his
understanding of girls' learning styles. Although many of the methods used are ones he
enacted while in a coeducational environment, the style takes on a different meaning or
purpose given the student population.

My style was always very inclusive, I wanted to include people in the discussion,
it wasn't ever a straight lecture type of thing . . . But what I've learned to do here,
and my philosophy, in teaching if its evolved at all is that I've learned to become
much more creative in working with how girls like to work in groups. How they
actually need a lot of that interaction... I think I learned a lot more about
education, about how, about how females learn and interacting with one another
and interacting in small group situations, and also having to, I think, you know, try
to do a variety of different ways of teaching from visual to kinesthetic, to abstract
things as well... So, my philosophy of education has grown and developed here
to become more interactive and more interdisciplinary, for females.

Joe draws upon research on learning styles to create classroom environments that will
support involvement with the subject matter. When visiting his classroom, it was evident
that he had taken this information to heart. His classes often include group work, and
involve a great deal of interaction between the student and teacher. He has developed
small projects for students that require utilizing information from many sources and fields
to develop a broad understanding of subject matter and develop strong research skills. Seeing themselves as part of a team, the students draw upon one another's strengths to complete the projects. Alexandra, like Joe, has read about girls’ learning styles, but fails to see the direct gendered connection. She asserts, “when I read some of the stuff about girls I'll read it saying, but that's how you should be teaching anyway. I don't know if it's simply because its girls you would be teaching that way. I mean, all kids deserve that. All kids deserve individual attention All kids should be doing some group work and not just, you know, doing worksheets.” For Alexandra, these methods are beneficial, but what strengthens girls’ education is the focus on women’s opportunities and experiences. Indeed, when most faculty in the study speak of their teaching methods, their discourse does not appear to be particularly gender-linked. They talk of facilitation, interaction, discussion, lecture, etc. in manners that reflect their best understanding of teaching their subject matter coupled with their personal skills as faculty. When talking directly about influence of gender in the formal and informal curriculum, however, these faculty tell a very different story.

Attempting to discern the relationship between teaching style and perceptions of sex and gender, I asked how their teaching would be different if teaching males only, or teaching in a coed school. Harvey asserts that his teaching style has remained much the same as he has moved from school to school, however his interactions change somewhat. He offers, “there's some differences. I might horse around differently with the guys, a little different than I would horse around with the girls, but I would still horse around with the girls, it's just that there ought to be some differences because I'm a different
gender... there are some things you can say amongst guys that you would not, you know, because I think that should always be.” While on the face this may appear to be somewhat of a double-standard, in reality this seems very honest and reasonable. As cited later, Megan has a freedom in her all-girls class to speak about “boobs and eggs” in a way that she could not as comfortably joke with boys about “prostates and sperm.” Sally’s comments on the connection between (female) teachers and their students could be readily matched by a connection between Harvey and his male pupils, whom he could interact with a little differently because of their same sex.

Sally also sees a change in her behavior if boys were present based on her assumptions of their interests and behaviors. Providing an extended version of a citation offered in the next chapter, Sally describes the differences in male and female treatment,

My examples in class would be different, probably more, I'm very athletic so I use a lot of sports activity examples in physics and biology in terms of human anatomy mechanisms, but I think I would emphasize that more. I think I'd be more gruff, if you will, to boys, not more abrasive or more harsh, but I wouldn't develop their voices as well because I think I would assume they have a voice already, um, by virtue of their sex. With the girls, we bring them out. A lot of work is done in their oral presentation capabilities, how well they explain and can speak of their knowledge and talk and communicate and I don't know that we'd spend that kind of time with boys. We also instill that they are valuable members of society, that there's an intrinsic value to them just as females and how they develop that is up to them, and that they can be anything and do anything that they want to do, and I think that is reflective of how society, women's place in society today. That I don't think that the boys would get that kind of attention or that kind of influence or that of push, so in that regard, my whole demeanor would be different. My, the examples, the things I would relate to in the class, their academic studies too, in the classroom would be different. My outlook would be different, and so would my expectations. Not more or less, but just different based on gender, and I, my reading, I've read a lot on how to educate girls because that's an interest of mine, I have not read about how boys learn best, just comparative studies, so I would have to reeducate myself to teach boys, and I, so I think I would continue to want to teach girls. I know my experiences, too, I can relate to girls.
Again, Sally stresses connection with her students, and the importance of having experiences that she can share with them. While she doesn’t see teaching boys as something she is unable to do, her belief that her outlook and expectations would change clearly indicates a different sense of male and female learning styles, needs, and relationships to female teachers. Her desire to be more “gruff” with boys and stress athletic examples appears to adhere to traditional gender socialization, yet she is outspoken about girls’ needs to not be constrained by gendered assumptions. At the same time, hers is a discourse of female deficit; her classroom gives to girls what she assumes males already possess. She has language to explain female need, but does not immediately identify male needs that could be addressed pedagogically. Recognizing that Sally hasn’t intentionally learned about male needs, it is still somewhat surprising that she does not describe any special support boys may need to assist in their socialization or education.

Dana has had a very different experience teaching boys. Based on work in coeducational settings, he has generally found that the females in his classes were stronger students than the males, therefore he has not needed to make substantive changes in style to support female success in his subject matter. He does believe he makes some informal changes to his teaching based on the student population, but these tend not to be directly related to the formal content of course. He states, “maybe I’m a little more, just because of the population, a little more sensitive to questions which pertain to girls. Larger questions like um, do you think it’s right that women have the same combat roles
in the army, or not? You know, something just off-handedly I'll ask, so I might tend to ask that more often, a, a girl-centered sort-of question, or an awareness sort-of question more frequently than I would in a coed setting." Such questions create an informality in the class that allows students to interact with Dana outside of the course subject matter, giving him a window into their thoughts and understanding, and through the informal curriculum shows his interest in girls' lives.

While the differences offered here regarding informal interaction and classroom examples provide some sense of the ways in which these faculty respond to the gendered nature of the classrooms, the primary difference appears to be the intentional inclusion of women in the curriculum to overcome perceived neglect and absence. Men and boys are seen to be centrally included in the traditional curriculum, and therefore their experiences don't need to be added. In contrast, women's absence or misrepresentation is seen as limiting to girls' academic development and requiring remedy for female populations.

Curricular Interventions to Focus on Women

Faculty participant discussions of curricular interventions to support girls' education provide a wealth of information that is not contained in their descriptions of pedagogical philosophy. While discussing philosophy they mention teacher and student centeredness, but as noted in the discussions of feminist pedagogy, the methodology used is not as important as the ideology behind the work that is done. Although not immediately articulated as ideology, each of the faculty members believes that girls need to see themselves in the curriculum as a means of supporting their full development. As shown in the previous chapter, sometimes the insertion of women's issues is a seemingly
off-hand comment like “his mother was famous, too” but other times class discussions center on the inclusion of exclusion of women as when Alexandra asks about calling all U.S. Presidents “he.” There is also variation in intensity, whether an isolated comment, or an intentional inclusion of experiences that highlight women’s lives. Examples of curricular interventions will be offered at length to show the range of inclusions students experience as they move from course to course and grade level to grade level within AGS. Individually these experiences help students to feel connected to the subject matter, collectively they create a sense of the range of women’s experiences, and the means by which women can be included in arenas in which they were previously absent. These are discourses of gender inclusivity in the formal curriculum – the content – and of the informal curriculum in terms of how the class is taught.

**History**

When asked about the way in which his teaching is influenced by the female environment, Joe initially talks about the books that are included in the courses, focusing on the novels that supplement the more traditional textbook study of history. He notes, if I look at my department in particular, History, [the] literature that we use, especially in middle school from about oh, fourth grade on, literature is very much centered into,... linked with strong women figures. Um, from Women Hollering Creek, you can do it to, there's so many that we actually use in English, too. Caged Bird, all of this, that I don't think you'll find in some of the literature in other schools, especially in non-female schools. But I also think, we'll do something like Scarlet Letter here, and you'll say to yourself, well that's a pretty standard arrangement, and yet it's got a strong female problem going on here. By the same token, we don't read Hemingway. I think that's ridiculous... Now they also read All Quiet on the Western Front, a boy's book, but I don't regard them as such, I regard them as great literature, I regard that, I look for an opportunity to use something like this.
Joe wants the girls to have an awareness of the "canonical books" of history, but wants to ensure that they also get strong messages about women and view the content of all of the books through a gendered lens as well as an historical or literary perspective. In this way he is teaching his students to be critical consumers of the works they read, seeing the relationships between the historical times and the treatment of issues and individuals. He is also showing his students that one source doesn't tell the full story, one needs to seek out information when a "gap" is identified. Responding to his clientele, Joe creates many other opportunities for women's issues and experiences to be addressed in his classes that draw upon his desire to be creative and to provide opportunities for group interaction.

I make up assignments that generate with strong female subjects in it. . . . Here it's just so natural. They, they're right with it, feel quite good about it. And we also don't teach in the curriculum, we don't teach, "great men theory" history. The Columbus this and that. I mean, we deal with all the figures, but we're also dealing with a wider range, a wider perspective. . . . In modern European Advanced Placement History... we do a salon. We have an 18th century salon, just how women used to learn in France at that time, they were cut out of a lot of the schools, and they learned at home and they learned in the salons that they ran, so they'd invite the male luminaries in there, and then they'd run it. And it's, actually they direct the males. So I just said, well why not take that model and we have, we run a salon, in modern European, where we have them invite their friends, their parents, their teachers, and the girls run it. And they direct the conversation. That most girls don't do at that stage... I think that's a good example of how the curriculum changes.

Although I was unable to observe a salon in action, it is relatively easy to visualize, and to infer the type of impact such an activity would have on students. Not only are they learning about the manner in which women in Europe created educational opportunities for themselves, they are taking leadership in an activity that involves parents and teachers as participants, and engaging in self-directed discussions of history. Again the education
is student-centered, drawing on women’s experiences, and developing competencies in areas believed to support self-esteem and self-confidence. The teaching has no particular political aim, but clearly centers on his female students and his understanding of the best means to engage them in the study of history.

Jack, another teacher of history, suggests that by the “nature of the school” it is only natural to be attuned to gender issues and find ways to translate these to the curriculum. While he believes that all history classes, whatever the clientele, should in some ways address equity, it is particularly easy to address gender within a girls’ school. Designed for students in his AP U.S. History class Jack describes a project entitled, “‘Where Are the Missing Women?’ and girls do research, and it’s generally a late 19th, early 20th century assignment, and they go find the women that aren’t in the history books. They spend a lot of time doing primary source stuff. Lots of kids end up at the Ohio Historical Society, back in the boxes and letters and things, and get some good stuff, some very, very real people.” Students are not only learning strong research skills that many don’t learn even in college, they are also made aware of the bias in traditional histories and discovering that there is indeed information available on women that others have not chosen to represent in most history books. They are learning that women have been leading interesting lives and making social contributions even if these stories haven’t always been considered important to know. While this and the example of the “salon” are assignments designed for students in advanced placement classes, Jack and Joe include less sophisticated but nonetheless enlightening assignments in their general classes as well.
Science

On a November morning I sat in on Megan’s biology class as they discussed genetics. During the class she related genetics to a “recipe” for chocolate chip cookies as she helped students understand some diagrams in the book. She passed out corncobs, asking students to look at the patterns and variations, and admonished those who pass too quickly and failed to learn from handling and viewing the object. She then showed a video on Barbara McClintock, the story of a scientist who faced numerous discriminations as a female in a male profession. The video explored the great scientific work she produced, and the manner in which she was treated as a second-class citizen. This was also a movie about responding to oppression and adversity, as McClintock states, “when you feel that strongly about something you can’t be turned off, you can’t stop.” After the video, Megan asked her students to comment on the film, asking about McClintock’s character and achievements. A student offered that she is mad because women were ignored, and that men won the Nobel Prize instead of McClintock. Megan asked if McClintock offered as much or more to the work that earned the Nobel, and after being told more, engaged in a discussion as to why the men won the award instead. She then talked to her students about perseverance, and told a story about discriminations that continue to happen, attempts to limit women’s voices, and what a former student did to address them. She stated, “I’m empowering you to make those challenges. Barbara McClintock wasn’t empowered, but she was determined. See the difference?” She closed the discussion by noting that the textbook has a paragraph on McClintock, but lots of information on other male scientists.
Through this one class discussion, Megan offered information on genetics as well as a lesson on bias in her discipline, academic bias (through her stories), textbook bias, and the value of perseverance and empowerment. Further, while engaged in a form of Socratic discussion that allowed them to be active creators of knowledge, she also guided students toward responses that would elicit the understanding she hoped would emerge. True to her pedagogical aims, she combined visual learning, kinesthetic learning, discussion, and reading, responding to students with various learning styles and helping the girls develop interest in manipulating objects.

Megan’s combining of science and women’s issues was commonplace throughout her classes. In a later discussion of genetics, she addressed cancer, talking about family experiences with the disease and the ways in which girls can limit their chances of getting cancer through behavioral choices. With an all-female audience, she is able to be direct, talking about the link between breast cancer and smoking, and how “cool” it is to smoke and be thin. She then spoke of the “potential harm to eggs and boobs” noting that “you’ll be a flat-chested woman from smoking,” and with 13 students in the room, statistically 1.3 will get breast cancer. Throughout her teaching, the course content was directly linked to the girls’ experiences, suggesting women’s need to understand science to live life to its fullest. As presented in class, science is shown as important in girls’ lives, yet also at times biased against women. In this way Megan strives to draw girls into scientific understanding while preparing them to see and overcome exclusions and barriers.
Music

Lois says that she was always committed to supporting her students' development, and prior to coming to AGS had paid little attention to gender as an important component of education. She didn't expect gender to play much of a role in her curricular activities at AGS either, and initially when discussing her teaching she didn't see much that she had done to respond to gender issues. "I didn't begin to start a real program right here to make girls aware that, of single-sex education at the elementary level, you know, a little women's studies course or something. I haven't really done anything like that, and I'm trying to think of how, what I really have changed." However, she quickly came up with several examples of changes to her work that were a direct result of an institutional commitment to centering women in the formal curriculum. She now pays much more attention to the songs she chooses, attending to their gendered content. Describing a unit the first graders do about farms, she states,

There's a very old, old folk song, When I First Came To This Land... [singing]
"When I first came to this land, I was not a wealthy man, so I got myself a farm, I did what I could. Then I called my farm, muscle in my arm, and the land was sweet and good, I did what I could." And the song progressively builds, he gets the farm, he builds a shack, he brings on a cow, a horse, he gets a wife, and then the song, in most folks song books, says [singing] "then I got myself a son, I did what I could. And I called my son, my work's done, and I called my wife, love of my life..." So where I might have just taught that as an early folk song, now I'm very careful to point out why does it just say "man"... Why did the man come and get the farm... What were the women doing... and in one of my classes, some years back, the girls made another verse [singing] "so I got myself a daughter, I did what I could. And I called my daughter, do what you oughtter [sic]."

She describes discussing with the students the roles the male and female children played when this song was written, and how the boys could help "get the work done" while the
roles women played weren’t seen as productive to the family. While trying not to overanalyze things, she tries to draw some attention to gendered assumptions in songs, and the uses of the terms “man” and “he” in songs that don’t necessarily relate to males. Indeed, she even has talked to them about referring to God as “he.” Reflecting on what she had shared, she notes “if I’m doing a song about men, it says ‘man’ like the other one, then I try at least to say, ‘why does this say man?’ and let’s face it, the old folks songs and the old classics, where were the women? They just weren’t allowed to participate in the things that were sung about, or they weren’t educated in the same way.” Addressing both the gendered nature of language and the means by which popular culture represents and interprets experience, Lois is teaching her elementary school students to be critical consumers of music.

Beyond the curriculum of music classes, school programs often include a musical component. When students are doing class reports on projects, Lois will work with students to include appropriate music for the occasion. She notes that the fifth form students wrote reports on women and the revolutionary war, and to present these during a program Lois worked with them to revise the words to Yankee Doodle to tell the stories of these women. She sings, “Women too made history while they raised their families… and don’t forget the ladies.” Each student wrote a four-line summary about what each woman did and added it to the song. Lois says that this was not something she had ever done when teaching at a coeducational school, but it seems right to be doing it at AGS. While she initially didn’t describe gender as a key component in her teaching, in fact she does much to challenge the gender bias in songs and to explore the manner in which her
students respond to language that fails to directly include women. While not creating a "women's studies program" she still has the opportunity to teach her students to be critical consumers of music and is developing in them skills that can be translated to critical reading of information in any discipline. Further, when these "revised" songs she helps to prepare are performed for an audience of students, teachers, and parents, the scope of her influence goes far beyond the individual classroom.

First Grade

Lucy strongly believes in choosing materials for her classes that relate to the types of students she has. With an all-female class, she most certainly includes books that reflect women's and girl's experiences. Further, with four African American students and another from India, she intentionally selects books that address multicultural issues and the experiences of girls from these cultural backgrounds. She notes that strong women are reflected through both in-class activities and more informal co-curricular settings. She speaks of women-related activities by describing a forum used to promote public speaking and to bring some entertainment to the lunch period, joke-telling. Each grade level is allowed to tell two jokes in the lunchroom on an assigned day of the week, "and it doesn't usually happen, but usually by third form or fourth form you might get a joke that’s a female-bent to it, about how strong women are... and the girls will cheer about that it’s a real AGS joke, because it reflects women, strong women." More important to her, however, are the activities she does related to course content. Reflecting on the same farming unit that Lois mentioned above, Lucy notes the special efforts taken to ensure that women's roles on farms were studied
We went out of our way to make sure that we had books that showed females as farmers... We went to see [a local historical farm] and the docents there really said that if a farmer didn’t have sons, they worried about who was going to inherit the farm, and my girls were just astounded. Well, what about the daughters? Well it just wasn’t done. And they had a hard time believing that. So we’re going to see an ostrich farm, and the woman is the owner and the manager. Many of the farms we have seen, yes, men are running it, but the women are also working it.

Such activities provide lessons about past (and current) sex-role differentiation, opportunities to see progress in overcoming some of the inequalities, and sets the tone for exploring possible bias in other areas. That the students are intentionally being taught these lessons in the first grade places these girls way ahead of the general public in understanding gender bias and socialization, and lays the groundwork for understanding the gendered lessons taught in middle and upper school as well.

The centrality of women in the curriculum is evidenced throughout these stories. Women’s experiences are highlighted, women’s exclusion is noted and challenged, and the girls’ lives are drawn into course content. Assignments that require students to research and/or perform women’s lives appear especially powerful as students discover the sources of women’s stories and have a chance to walk in the women’s shoes. While in isolation such gender-related activities occur in all schools to some degree, the intensity, frequency and breadth of such experiences make AGS exceptional in this regard. For these AGS faculty, these curricular activities are not merely educational, they’re interventions against negative sex-role socialization.
Is it feminist?

Well, I don’t know what feminist pedagogy is... I don’t think I’ve seen that term written anywhere. Julia

When I began my interviews, the first several included direct questions related to feminist pedagogy. After talking about the school generally, and following discussion of the commitment in the late 1980s to remain single-sex, I would ask something along the lines of “the administration talks of that as the time when AGS discovered feminist pedagogy. Does that seem right to you?” I would then get questioned regarding the meaning of the term, or informed that indeed that has not happened. I later changed the question to ask if the school had a political or social agenda that might be feminist, feminine or something altogether different. In all cases, the feminist agenda was not seen by the faculty participants as prevalent, and did not seem to suddenly change education in the late 1980s.

Jack, for example, saw the late 1980s as a time when educational philosophy changed somewhat at AGS, but attributed this not to feminism, but to “when [the new head] came, she and I got very interested in ... the student-centeredness issue.” This focus on students as central to the educational enterprise is indeed a component of feminist pedagogy, but Jack attributed the student-centered philosophy to sources that had no specific interest in women’s education or feminism.

Lois noted that even before the situation with CPS the lower school faculty included some special units on women scientists and women heroes. However, she does think that over time there has been a “subtle awareness” that is continuing to develop in
each of the faculty that can impact their teaching. Recently she has become especially aware of the impact of language, and found that “words that we used to think of as gender-inclusive in my generation are no longer gender-inclusive.” She asked her students and found that many (not all) do not feel included in when the term “mankind” is used, so to change the language to be non-sexist is important “for those girls to feel like they’re included.” While not a presented as a feminist act, Lois sees this as something that occurs as a result of the on-going institutional attention to supporting female development. Lois suggests here that subtle changes have occurred that better respond to girls’ education and empowerment, but that the faculty include these changes on an individual basis with no specific guidance or mandate to do so from the institutional leadership. Responding to questions related to the political aim of the institution and its possible feminist leanings, Megan suggests,

If you did it on a scale of one to ten, where one is feminine and ten is feminist, I'd like to think that we're a five, that we're right there in the middle, because we don't want to forget, I mean our girls are so beautiful at holiday dinner, and we praise them for how they, their achievements that they've had both on the athletic courts and the academic courts and the theatrical stages, and all of those things, so I don't think we lean one way or the other, but we tend to be a six in that we want them to have their voice, okay, so it's the five-six, don't lose track of who you are, but remember that you have a voice. So I'd say we're leaning toward the feminist, but we're not right out there.

Megan offers a link between feminism and development of voice, but also sees the school as wanting to encourage aspects of femininity. Clarifying what she meant by “losing track of who you are,” she notes, “you are a caring, intellectual being. You have a social history; an ethnic history; an education history. Take the good of all and use it when you voice your opinions and contribute to the changes in the world.” Megan thus sees
feminism as helping to support empowerment, but not placing one’s female identity as the only important influence on one’s essence.

Perhaps the most direct statement on the role of feminism at AGS comes from Sally. Recalling Sally’s comments from the previous chapter, she stated that the teachers at AGS were not feminists, “but we’ll never deny the capabilities of women or the successes of women. We celebrate the successes of women, we show these girls role models, predominantly female, so they have someone to aspire to that the pioneers have been there, you can follow and be pioneers yourselves. That there’s nothing you can’t do.” Based on her rejection of these ideas as feminist, I questioned her regarding her definition of feminism or feminists. In a follow-up note she wrote,

I was called a feminist in [my job before becoming a teacher] because I always pointed out the capabilities of the females... and how they/we enhanced the unit with the “female qualities” they/we brought... I was only vocal when challenged, but always measured up in all the “guy stuff”... In teaching, especially here at AGS, I’m never challenged this way. I don’t have to prove what women are capable of anymore - that women are capable is a given here. I can be me and spend all my energy on enhancing the girls’ capabilities... To me, feminists are in the daily struggle of proving what women can do. They fight the political and social battles that will enable my girls to have the opportunities to fulfill their potential without gender barriers. I am not directly involved in the fight so I am not a feminist... but I sure admire those who are! A feminist is a woman struggling daily to prove that we can. [emphasis hers]

Regardless of the numerous activities engaged in that draw attention to women’s contributions and encourage girls to develop their capabilities and live full lives, Sally does not see herself or her colleagues as “directly involved” in social battles. While I would argue that her work includes daily efforts to “prove that we can,” Sally doesn’t conceptualize this as activist or feminist work. As Delmar (1994) asserts, to the degree
that feminism is an identity one imposes upon oneself, if Sally doesn’t consider herself feminist, she in fact is not.

Summary

Even prior to inserting the influences of individual faculty, AGS begins with many characteristics that Riordan (1998) believes help create supportive environments for students. The small school size, adult and student role models, pro-academic parent/student choice, student leadership opportunities, and solid core curriculum all serve to improve learning for girls, and strengthen the likelihood that a girls’ school provides positive outcomes for the students. Once the faculty influence is added, nearly all of Riordan’s criteria are met.

As evidenced in the discussion of philosophy and methods, the faculty members involved in this study engage in some forms of “active and constructivist teaching” even if they don’t use these terms to describe their classrooms. The focus on discussion, interaction, student-centeredness, facilitation, and student research creates conditions that support critical thinking and student agency. These faculty members also describe strong relationships with students, and their sense that students, parents and teachers work together to support the girls’ development. Riordan and Lee (1998) would both value this condition, as Lee highlights the importance of collaboration in “good schools.”

The primary way in which faculty participants support Riordan’s criteria is through their efforts to reduce gender bias through student/teacher interactions, reduce gender differences through curriculum and opportunities, and reduce gender stereotypes in peer interaction. Throughout this and the previous chapter the faculty have shared
stories of the myriad ways in which the inclusion of women’s experiences helps to support students’ sense of their opportunities and possibilities.

Returning to the AAUW’s (1992) descriptions of curriculum, the intentional inclusion of works by and about women, and the creation of assignments that highlight women’s lives, serve to ensure that gender is a component of the “formal curriculum.” Turning to the manner in which classrooms are taught, namely the “classroom as curriculum,” the faculty participants also demonstrate attempts to utilize methods that respond to female learning styles, engage in informal conversation on women-related topics, post pictures and stories on bulletin boards celebrating women’s contributions, and provide encouragement to their students toward goal achievement. Finally, the issue of the “evaded curriculum” must be addressed. As demonstrated by several faculty members in this study, attempts are made to supplement the traditional curriculum with information of importance to women. Lois and Joe have suggested that some “central matters” may go untouched if one attempts to include too many women’s texts at the exclusion of important works by men. They warn of the need to balance a rounded education with the desire to be gender-inclusive. All told, however, if the experiences and philosophies described herein were, by chance, representative of the entire school, I believe Riordan, Lee, and the AAUW would evaluate AGS as providing an educational environment conducive to girls’ full development.

As Houston suggests, “gender sensitive” teaching acknowledges the influence of gender in society, and includes in the curriculum opportunities to identify and to evaluate the impact of sex role socialization. I do believe that this and the previous chapter clearly
demonstrate that these faculty members are sensitive to issues of sex and gender, even if they don’t see every activity in which they are engaged as having a link to the students’ sex. I would further argue that these faculty have engaged in women-centered pedagogy, emphasizing throughout the curriculum women’s experiences and contributions, and ensuring that girls’ developmental needs are attended to.

Although these faculty engage in many activities that are components of feminism, it appears that feminist pedagogy is not commonplace at AGS. There may indeed be feminist pedagogues at the institution, but none chose to participate in this project. Even if feminist pedagogy is not practiced, I suggest that many of the aims of such an ideology are prevalent at AGS and help to influence the quality of the educational environment. Students are exposed to active learning techniques, are taught to be critical thinkers, watch for representations of women and girls within the curriculum, obtain the skills and information to have authority in the classroom, are encouraged to relate their experiences to classroom activities, and come to understand their social positioning as women (and members of other classes and groups). The students are mentored and supported in their developmental processes, and given strong messages of competence, opportunity, and self-confidence.

Certainly it is easy to understand how classroom observations and conversations with faculty could lead one to believe that feminist pedagogy was embraced at AGS. Such is not the case, however, because such a positioning must be self-identified, not imposed, and be based on ideological as well as pedagogical aims. If the administration believes that feminist pedagogy is embraced, yet the faculty do not claim to enact it, this
may be an area for concern. The fact that many faculty did not claim to be familiar with the term "feminist pedagogy" suggests that additional exposure to readings or training might be of value. However, before this occurs, it is important for the institution to determine how or if it is appropriate for feminist aims to be a component of teaching. The faculty participants in this study appeared at best suspicious of the institution taking on a feminist agenda, and suggested that parents and students may not embrace such a move. Perhaps the administrative desire for claiming a feminist pedagogy is alleviated by embracing the language of gender-sensitive or women-centered pedagogy. This clearly seems an area in which institutional members disagree, and may warrant some directed discussion.
CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This project concerned faculty performances and discourses of gender and pedagogy at A Girls School (AGS), an independent, single-sex, college-preparatory school. Over the course of the 1997-1998 school year I conducted interviews and observations with 12 faculty members, and analyzed this information alongside institutional documents and texts of relevance to the school environment. The data collected addressed teaching philosophy and methods, perspectives on schooling girls, perceptions of gender and sex role socialization, the AGS mission, and perceived outcomes of an AGS education.

The exposition and analysis I have offered in this dissertation tells one story of AGS regarding the intersections of gender and schooling as presented and represented by faculty members and institutional documents. Conducted following standards of ethical qualitative research, this document should be regarded as providing a gaze into AGS, but should not be construed as generalizable to other single-sex settings or even fully representative of AGS. The interpretations of discourses and practices reflect my positionality as a feminist researcher, as well as the positionality of the faculty
participants who reviewed my representations and analyses. What follows is a summary of my interpretations, and implications and recommendations for future research.

General Findings

Throughout this study I have attempted to uncover the gendered discourses that permeate the institution, whether expressed in documents, conversations, or activities. I began this examination with an accounting of the documents included in the faculty list of recommended readings (see Table 3.1). As noted in Chapter 3, the texts addressed the difficulties faced by girls in American society, and the need to create conditions that prepare girls to face and overcome these challenges. The socialization of girls toward submission, silence, and second-class citizenship garnered extraordinary attention in these works, coupled with concern about the impact of such socialization on self-esteem, opportunity, and “voice.” Discourses describing the psychological harms of gender socialization were especially evident in these readings.

Colluding in this harmful socialization process, coeducational schools are described as often detrimental to girls’ intellectual, occupational, social, and emotional development. These books suggest girls in coeducational schools experienced harassment, few leadership opportunities, poor career and academic advising, social conditioning toward passivity, and limited attention from teachers. Single sex schools for girls are offered as possible sites to overcome or avoid such circumstances, however girls’ schools on their face cannot promise positive outcomes. A central issue to address is the balance between attempting to provide “safety” for students through a single-sex environment, and a desire to promote student empowerment. As Lee (1998) and Riordan
(1998) stressed, the benefits of girls’ schools depends on such factors as campus culture, school size, student-teacher relationships, role modeling, teaching methods, and formal and informal curricular attention to issues of gender.

The discourse of “difference” was also prominent in the readings, as authors attempted to respond to sex-based differences grounded in socialization and/or biology. The texts at times tried to stress sex-linked behaviors as different, yet equal in value. The difficulty of simultaneously acknowledging differences based on biology and socialization, and also promoting an agenda of equal treatment and sameness, was presented, although no clear resolutions have been identified. While issues of difference, equality, and opportunity were addressed, these texts rarely drew upon feminist theory to explore or explain women’s positionality. The connection between feminist theory and pedagogy for empowerment was absent from the school’s recommended readings, but appears to be a rich area for future exploration by institutional members.

Chapter Four offered brief background information about AGS, followed by a discourse analysis of institutional and local documents to (re)present school aims and activities. The analysis highlighted the school’s creation and reconstruction of institutional mission and identity drawing upon research on girls’ experiences and responding to local needs. Throughout the recent documents, the commitment to single-sex schooling for girls remained a priority, as did the college-preparatory focus. The best manner in which to enact this mission at times varied due to physical and fiscal concerns, but in the end, commitment to a separate, college-preparatory education for girls has guided institutional decisions. The discourses of gender as offered in the documents
directly reflected those presented in the research on girls’ developmental and schooling experiences.

Building upon ideas presented in the literature review and document analysis, Chapters Five and Six explored the perspectives and activities of faculty at AGS. As demonstrated, the faculty involved in the study echoed many of the perspectives offered in the recommended readings and institutional documents. Drawing upon their own experiences with coeducation (either as students, teachers, or parents), the faculty participants saw single-sex schooling for girls as highly desirable. While acknowledging that all is not perfect at AGS, they saw coeducational schools as providing female students with limited opportunities to participate actively in class discussions and leadership roles, failing to provide attention to girls’ learning styles, offering career and academic mentoring based on sex role stereotypes instead of abilities and interests, failing to include girls’ and women’s experiences in the curriculum, and allowing class sizes to be too large to engage all students in active learning. Further, coeducational schools were often described as physically, intellectually, and/or emotionally unsafe for female students. As a single-sex and college preparatory school, AGS is offered as a site where much of the deficits of coeducational schooling are avoided or redressed.

Although these faculty members appeared to have an awareness of the information included in the recommended readings, they rarely utilized the specific discourses presented in the texts. Two notable exceptions were discourses of voice and silence. As mentioned in Chapter 5, the discourse of “voice” was present in nearly every interview and at times directly mentioned in the classroom as well. Voice was used as a
sign of empowerment, developed through opportunities to practice public speaking and through activities that promote competence and confidence. The faculty spoke of the “silence” female students exhibit in coeducational schools and public arenas, and the carry-over to AGS. As Sally notes, she creates opportunities to develop student voice, assuming that they haven’t had these elsewhere. Again, voice is not seen as a particular sex- or gender-linked perspective as originally defined in Gilligan (1982), but instead the wherewithal to know one’s mind and speak it aloud.

Interestingly, although prevalent in the readings, the term “self-esteem” was rarely used by faculty in the study, choosing instead the concept of “confidence” to suggest comfort with oneself and one’s competencies. The discourse of self-esteem as used by these faculty members seems to refer to self-regard or self-reverence, whereas confidence is more directly linked to a sense of agency, competence, or ability. While both are self-reflective, confidence is used as a more powerful or empowered term, while self-esteem is somewhat softer in meaning. Although not directly stated in the interviews, it appears that the faculty have avoided discourses that would pathologize their students, but instead chosen terms that either claim their students’ strengths or show high expectations for future successes. Further examination of the meaning of these terms would likely prove as fruitful as additional examinations of voice. All three have become part of the common discourse of female adolescence, and have meanings that are somewhat “taken-for-granted” and thus no longer clearly defined.

The obvious, intentional, diverse manner in which the female experience is centered at AGS is its most remarkable quality. While the faculty participants did not
have specific language to name these experiences as "centering," they described women's inclusion at all levels of the educational enterprise. These faculty members presented myriad examples of assigning readings and activities that intentionally explored women's experiences or positioning. Further, the faculty demonstrated casual and intentional insertions of sex and gender into classroom discussions, enhancing the formal curriculum. The faculty participants intended these activities to expand their students' understanding of women's contributions, barriers to progress, and opportunities for advancement. Through these experiences, these faculty members demonstrated the relationship between curricular and co-curricular activities, and girls' development. Beyond simple exposure to works on and by women, students are taught to examine received information for gender inclusiveness and bias, and to seek out information on women's experiences when unavailable in the traditional curriculum. In this manner students develop critical thinking and reasoning skills, directing them toward analysis of gender bias, but applicable in a variety of situations. These faculty assert that this centering of female experiences is what sets AGS apart from most educational options in the region, as girls see their experiences addressed in the curriculum, and are surrounded by peer role models of female ability and accomplishment.

While this centrality is espoused, the methodology for its enactment is individualized. As evidenced in Chapter Six's discussion of teaching philosophy and methods, the faculty in the study engage in some forms of "active and constructivist teaching" even if they don't use these terms to describe their classrooms. The focus on discussion, interaction, student-centeredness, facilitation, and student research creates
conditions that support critical thinking and student agency. With this aim in mind, these faculty members present themselves not simply as teachers within academic disciplines or grade levels, but as being in positions to shape the quality of a girl’s life and contribute to her ability to reach her potential. While these faculty members see much of their pedagogy as good teaching for all clientele, they believe girls are especially served by cooperative environments and active engagement in their learning. Well-aware of preconditions that support their methodologies, the faculty participants acknowledge that their methods are facilitated by the vast institutional resources available to faculty and students, the college-preparatory mission, and family support of education.

Although I had entered the institution expecting to observe feminist pedagogy, none of the faculty participating in the project utilized this philosophy. They admitted to having little knowledge of educational theories that weren’t specific to their disciplines, and few had even heard of “feminist pedagogy” prior to my mentioning it as part of my project. While having strong backgrounds in their disciplines, their pedagogical practices were more experiential-based than theoretical. Instead of theory, their own educational experiences, prior successes and failures as classroom teachers, and understanding of girls’ development informed their teaching methods. Their all-female clientele motivated them to be women-centered and gender sensitive in their classrooms, providing their students with a much more varied view of the female experience than they believed was generally available in coeducational schools.

The participating faculty included women’s experiences throughout the curriculum, promoted critical thinking even in the lower grades, encouraged students to
draw upon their own experiences during classroom discussions, and promoted women’s accomplishments and value. Throughout these teachers’ classrooms, and indeed throughout the campus, were posted examples of women’s accomplishments and opportunities for student involvement in a wide array of activities. Students continually encountered messages that showed women and girls as intelligent, strong, involved, giving, nurturing, and capable. Girls and women were shown to be competent academically, occupationally, socially, and artistically, and told that they could do and be anything even if some barriers still temporarily impeded ease of progress. From a cursory viewing, these classroom methods and institutional messages do indeed appear to support feminist aims. Even so, none of the participating faculty saw their work as part of a political project or linked with feminist activity. As noted in Chapter Three, feminist scholars often see teaching as a component of their activism, yet even when prompted none of these faculty members claimed their work as activist in nature. While I would argue that much of their work indeed had activist impacts, and drew upon feminist ideologies, the faculty did not describe their work in this manner. This is especially interesting given the administration’s perception that feminist pedagogy was being enacted, and indeed embraced, institutionally.

Although outreach efforts and access to financial aid have expanded the clientele, as a private school AGS remains an institution whose students come from primarily upper- and upper-middle-class families. For many students, the aims of feminism would attack the patriarchal and class-based systems that offer them the privilege of attending a private school. Were their education to be feminist rather than gender-sensitive or
women-centered, they would be learning at a young age to critique the very systems that provide them social and financial status, and that indeed allow AGS to exist. I would be surprised if the parents would support this type of education, and if the faculty would all be comfortable challenging the status quo as well. Gender-sensitive and women-centered curricula can be empowering simply because students feel a connection to what they are learning and are inspired to succeed to their potential. The more politicized, activist approach of feminist pedagogy may well be empowering from a female standpoint, but may also feel disempowering given the students’ class (and perhaps racial) backgrounds.

As noted earlier, the lack of a political identity may well serve the institution as it negotiates its role within the local community, however I would expect that the impacts of the education received provide students with more than a cursory grounding in feminist ideology even if it goes unnamed. Students are being taught to identify and question women’s exclusions from curricula and professions, to be aware of bias in texts, to see women as strong and capable, and to feel empowered to challenge unnecessary barriers to women’s full participation in society. Although not named as feminist by the faculty participants, their students are indeed learning many of the liberal feminist messages that help to enhance women’s opportunities. The lack of a feminist label may in fact make the information more accessible and acceptable simply because it is not seen as part of a politicized project.

Although it is unlikely that the local community would embrace AGS taking an active feminist stance, the faculty may benefit from learning more about feminist pedagogy to help clarify teaching aims and methods and examine these against current
pedagogical practices. I understand that the AGS faculty as a whole is generally resistant to being assigned or recommended readings that are too “academic” or theoretical in nature. Even so, I believe that an institutional conversation related to feminist pedagogy may prove valuable in helping the faculty and administration to evaluate the opportunities and liabilities associated with an individual or institutional enactment of these pedagogical methods. Because it includes many examples of pedagogy in practice, and draws upon some of the research with which the faculty members are already familiar (i.e. AAUW, 1992), I would encourage adding Maher and Tetreault’s (1994) *The Feminist Classroom* to the list of recommended readings. As described in Chapter Three, this text provides an introduction to the concept of feminist pedagogy, and indicates why and how this can be a useful method for increasing the quality of women’s academic experiences. Rich with descriptions of classroom activities, the theory is well balanced with practical applications.

*The Feminist Classroom* might provide insight into practices that promote a curriculum for empowerment rather than simply providing single-sex schooling to support separatism or student safety. The text may also help the faculty to articulate the areas of connection and incongruence between feminist pedagogies and their current practices that were named by the participating faculty as non-feminist in nature. I would also recommend adding to the list of readings the AAUW’s (1998) *Separated by Sex: A Critical Look at Single-Sex Education for Girls*, as it would place focus on the need to have intentional curricular interventions to promote girls’ development and educational success. While much more theoretical and academic than the other readings on the list,
the report reminds faculty that single sex schooling alone does not lead to positive outcomes, but instead involves an interplay among curriculum, classroom methods, and a variety of background conditions.

Recommendations for Additional Research

The lack of research on teaching in girls' schools in the United States continues to confound me given the breadth of data on single sex education and on girls' development. As reported by the AAUW (1998), much of the information on girls' schools fails to distinguish between school type (independent or religiously-affiliated) and primarily reflects student academic performance and/or psychological health as garnered through testing, observation and interviews. Data on institutional mission, teaching methods or philosophy, and curricular content is limited at best. When teaching is studied, it is primarily limited to examinations of the relationship to girls' psychological development. At the same time, texts exploring female childhood and adolescence continue to highlight the role schools play in gender socialization, and studies in coeducational settings highlight teachers as especially responsible for addressing socialization. (AAUW, 1992, 1993; Mann, 1994; Orenstein, 1994; Pipher, 1994; Sadker & Sadker, 1994) Given the passion with which the AGS faculty in the study describe their role as teachers, and the efforts they put into developing gender-sensitive curricula, this appears to be an area worthy of study. Similarly, the connections these faculty draw between institutional conditions (mission, size, resources, clientele) and student outcomes highlights the need to look beyond issues of sex when assessing desired educational conditions.
Related to teacher passion at AGS, I was surprised to discover that the single-sex environment was not initially what drew these faculty to the institution. For some, the college preparatory curriculum was desirable, others valued the small class sizes, the learner-centered mission was also valued, and others took the position simply because it was available when a job was needed. The transition from neutrality to advocacy, and its relationship to institutional enculturation is an area of inquiry I would like to explore. I also wonder if this transition to advocacy would eventually lead to feminist positioning, or if the faculty in the study are simply not the type to see themselves as politically active.

As noted earlier, the centrality of women in the formal and informal curriculum was evident throughout my engagement at AGS. While the intentions and activities have been described and evaluated, there is no clear information on the impact on students. Petruzzulla’s (1995) study explored the impacts of female-centering, but did not attempt to evaluate the entire curriculum or to look at impacts beyond areas of self-esteem. Future research looking at broader outcomes might prove fruitful given the extensive nature of the curricular intervention at AGS. The importance of addressing self-esteem and empowerment among students with generally high socio-economic status (who may thereby be seen as already somewhat privileged and empowered) would prove especially interesting.

Although not included in this document, rich data was collected regarding the purposes for including males on the faculty, and the desirability of student interactions with male peers and family members. Based on this, the role of males in girls’ schooling is as an area in which additional research is recommended. The exploration in which I
engaged suggests that sex-role socialization permeates the faculty discourses even in an environment in which such socialization is intentionally challenged. The literal and figurative inclusion of males as necessary or valuable components in a female setting challenges the harms associated with male influence and the necessity for separate schooling for girls. The impact of the role of "other" on male faculty is also an interesting area for examination, determining to what extent this may influence their experiences as "the one" in other settings. Finally, I believe that such research on males at girls’ schools examined alongside research on women in boys’ schools would prove interesting in terms of one’s sense of role and experience with othering.

An assumption within the campus environment is that sexual harassment and the influence of a "culture of romance" are generally avoided by the exclusion of males. When directly asked if the girls talked much about dating and sexuality, I was told by faculty that girls may share their stories, but that there isn’t any "cattiness" or problems like would be found in a coed school. I am interested to know if this indeed is the case, and if so, what about the environment causes girls to refrain from the same-sex razzing and harassment that occurs elsewhere. Petruzzulla’s (1995) research indicated that some of this indeed occurred at AGS, yet as a peripheral aspect of her study, it did not demand further exploration at the time. Along the same line, I am interested in the degree to which lesbian and bisexual students feel engaged in the female culture, and how they are received by peers and faculty.

As noted earlier, while engaged in research at AGS I had an opportunity to observe many classes, and am left with a wealth of data that was not directly linked to
issues of gender. I was especially impressed with the degree to which faculty stressed critical thinking in their classrooms, and created assignments that required analysis and interpretation that many of my college undergraduates cannot master and to which they have not been exposed. I was also impressed by the degree of “performance” engaged in by students in all grade levels. I am curious to know the impact of this experience on girls’ comfort being in the public gaze.

Final Thoughts

I began this project having little experience with single-sex education, but a passion for exploring the intersections of gender and education. I am greatly indebted to the faculty participants who share with me their time, insights, experiences, and passions. I have come to understand that AGS provides an educational experience that has everything to do with female empowerment, but can provide lessons for teaching in any environment with any student population. The faculty are deeply invested in student development, and work cooperatively and creatively to create opportunities for student engagement and learning. Further, the faculty refuse to allow traditional textbooks to create their curriculum, choosing to insert information, challenge assumptions, and at times avoid the textbook completely if the messages failed to meet the teacher’s aims. Everything focused on the students, teaching them of their importance and respecting their abilities.

The faculty and students at AGS affected me, and I feel an obligation to share my experiences with others. I have continually reworked chapters in an attempt to convey the passion with which the faculty spoke, or the impact of a classroom activity on the
students. I will never be done with this project, for I have completed this writing with more questions than answers, and look forward to continued explorations of this data.
REFERENCES


Tavris, C. (1992). The mismeasure of woman: Why women are not the better sex, the inferior sex, or the opposite sex. New York: Simon and Schuster.


APPENDIX A

ARCHIVAL SOURCES

In order to maintain the anonymity of A Girls School, the exact names and dates of institutional communications and newspaper sources have not been directly cited in this document. Below is an inventory of the types of sources utilized, and the range of dates they represent.

AGS Annual Reports 1987-1997

AGS campus newsletter, 1987-1994


AGS Trustee and subcommittee meeting agendas, 1987-1991

Communications to AGS trustees and head of school by CPS trustees and administration, 1987-1991

Communications to parents and community members by the AGS Board of Trustees, 1987-1997

Communications to parents, trustees, CPS, and community members by the AGS Head of School, 1987-1998

Consultant’s Report on Campus development, 1984 and 1987

Daily County Newspaper 1988-1997

Weekly City newspaper 1987-1995

Weekly regional newspaper for AGS neighborhood, 1987-1995

Weekly regional newspaper for CPS neighborhood, 1987-1993