Perceptions of Organizational Culture in the Prince Edward Island Public Sector: Through the Eyes of Women in Senior Management

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores perspectives on women's equality through an examination of organizational culture in a public sector organization in Prince Edward Island. From 1990 to the present, a pervasive assumption that women's equality has been achieved has diminished receptivity to program and policy initiatives, to workplace accommodations of women into senior roles, and to social discourse about continuing gender inequalities. Eleven female senior public administrators from among a population of 20 participated in either a focus group, or 1 of 6 semi-structured interviews of 1 hour or more. The study incorporates postmodern feminist and gender theory to substantiate the inequalities that have gone underground in a neo-conservative and individualist age. Joan Acker connects theory to organizational practices, processes, and performance to define gender as a relational entity which operates to subordinate women. The study also demonstrates the key role of language and discourse in fixing the identities and positions of women and men into binary relationships. The study describes the active role of the 10 participants in incrementally shaping their organizational culture. It concludes with an identification of perspectives and strategies that advocates might use in intransigent situations, to preserve a sense of self.

Acknowledgements

To my husband, Gerard, an advocate for girls and women in his teaching career, and in our lives together.

and

To my friend and colleague Becky Tramley, for countless hours of document preparation.

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Chapter One: Introduction

To live is to read texts, but to be alive is to write them – *Alan A Beck, 1988*

For most of history anonymous was a woman – *Virginia Woolf*

Gender is described by Harriet Bradley (1996, p. 19), as "a social category which refers to lived relationships between women and men." According to Bradley

> Gender relations are those by means of which sexual divisions of masculinity and femininity are constructed, organized, and maintained. . . . Every aspect of social life is gendered; sexual divisions are constructed, organized, and maintained not only within the family and private life, but also in work and employment, in education, in politics, in leisure activities, and cultural production. In every aspect of experience whether we are male or female has implications.

Working from this concept of gender as a living social construct, this inquiry explores how women in senior management in the Prince Edward Island Public Service perceive the lived relationships of men and women within their organizational culture. The study relates to my general professional and personal interests in the role and status of women in society, and to my specific role in the education of managerial women. At this time I work as the Coordinator of Management and Professional Continuing Education in the Centre for Life-Long Learning at the University of Prince Edward Island. I came to the campus in 1996 to establish a Management Development Program for Women. Since that time, approximately two hundred women have benefited from this program, which was designed to develop self-confidence, leadership, and managerial skills in women aspiring to careers in management. Since my interest is in the nuances of gendered organizational

dynamics, from among the possible questions I have generated, the one I have chosen to focus on for this research is: "How do women in senior management in the Prince Edward Island public sector, perceive the culture of their organization?" Relative to this question, I have titled this thesis, "Perceptions of Organizational Culture in the Prince Edward Island Public Sector: Through the Eyes of Women in Senior Management."

In the area of organizational behaviour and culture, equity and gender divides have been considered as women's issues, rather than as issues for women, men, and organizations (Townsley, 2003, p. 619). Joyce Fletcher and Robin Ely classify conventional strategies for addressing organizational gender inequities as (a) fixing the woman; (b) celebrating difference; (c) creating equal opportunity (2003, 4-5). The "equal opportunity" approach generally focuses on the structure of the organization as the primary source of inequality.

The modernist structural work of Rosabeth Moss Kanter continues to provide theoretical support to the equal opportunities approach. Kanter is often quoted and included in management anthologies, even though her early work dates back to the 1970s. Kanter traces the evolution of work during industrialization after about 1875, which saw family manufacturing businesses grow beyond the capacity of family members to manage them. At this time, the labour force was comprised of men in factory jobs, and women in occupations which mirrored their unpaid domestic roles: dressmaking, laundering, cooking, and providing domestic services to the upper class. Industrial expansion opened the door for the construction of a managerial identity by men in the new management role. This facilitated creating a socially desirable class identity as a new professional

group whose roots were in less-fashionable merchant and labouring classes. The new manager class virtually wrote their own job descriptions, articulating rational thinking as the key organizational principle, and hierarchy as the key structural principle. Managerialism was supported by the rise of business schools which professionalized management and admitted mainly white Protestant males. Kanter has noted that

> A 'masculine ethic' of rationality and reason can be identified. . . . This 'masculine ethic' elevates the traits assumed to belong to men with educational advantages to necessities for effective organizations: a tough-minded approach to problems; analytic abilities to abstract and plan; a capacity to set aside personal, emotional considerations in the interests of task accomplishment; and a cognitive superiority in problem-solving and decision-making (Kanter, 1975, p. 43).

As industrialization forced paying domestic roles of laundresses, seamstresses and such into decline, women filtered into organizations as secretaries to the new managers, and drew their identity and status from them. The primary route by which women entered the organizational landscape is significant, in that the stratification in practice at the time both prevented mobility beyond one's class, and precluded women's entry at the managerial level. Kanter's structural view (1975, 35-63), explains organizations as:

- complex social units with many interacting groups relating on the basis of power, tasks, and class, and governed by 'scientific' production routines;
- flawless machines in which the rational manager through his [sic] span of control could minimize the effects of having less qualified, perhaps less able, and overly

emotional workers in the organization. Women fell into the latter category, deemed unfit for the management role;

- separate worlds of managers and workers, with "separate hierarchies, rules and reward structures, and practically no mobility between them;"
- internal labour markets which place female clerical workers and labourers in certain opportunity structures, dependant on specific hiring, promotion, layoff rules, and judgements about the transferability of their skills.

Structural factors continue to play a role in the gendered workforce. For example, women today perform a significant amount of routine and mundane work in a segregated labour market. In 1999, women represented 75% of clerks and other administrators, and 59% of all sales and service personnel in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2000, p. 107). Narrow occupational parameters combine with other factors to produce lower average earnings for women in full-time, full-year employment. In 1997, women in this category earned $31,000, or 73% of men's full-time, full-year incomes (Statistics Canada, 2000, p. 141). There is also a familiar "pipeline" argument, which suggests that women have not spent long enough in the trenches, being groomed for the top positions. The problem is that there is no concrete measure of what is considered enough time, or of what women should be doing while in the pipeline, in order to exit into senior ranks. The pipeline is an imaginary structure, but nevertheless a powerful one (Maley, 1997, p. 61).

To remedy the effects of a structural lock-down and move toward gender equity today, a structurally-oriented organization would use structural tools. It would reduce barriers through enactment of policies such as affirmative action, flexible work-family

benefits, and group-specific training. It would continue to define gender as an individual characteristic, and gender issues as arising out of the differences between women and men (Fletcher & Ely, 2003, p. 4).

Joan Acker writes that a problem in Kanter's theory lies in her choosing between structure and gender characteristics of individuals, rather than exploring both, as bases for an organizational theory of gender. Acker agrees that structure is one element, but elevates the axis of gender to greater importance in organizational dynamics.

> [A]dvantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity are patterned through and in terms of distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine. Gender is not an addition to ongoing processes conceived as gender-neutral. Rather it is an integral part. . . . (2003, p. 52).

In short, organizations are gendered through and through. Acker's theory supports the fourth organizational strategy advanced by Fletcher and Ely for incorporating gender, which is to revise the work culture (2003, p. 13). Acker's theory conceptualizes gender as an organizational construct, rather than an individual construct. This places the organization front and centre. That is where Acker locates gender, "embedded within belief systems, knowledge systems, and social practices" of the organization (Fletcher & Ely, p. 4). This contrasts with Kanter's explanation of gender as an identity introduced into the organization by the individual man or woman, and maintained by the structure of the organization. According to Acker:

- Gender is a relational phenomenon, produced through the interaction of men and women, and embedded in the organization. Patterns of dominance and submission at the societal level "get translated into specific micro-practices internal to organizations (Holvino, 2002, p. 29). For example, males have been elected to public life in the House of Commons, and have held almost 80% of the seats over the past three Federal elections (It's about time, 2004, p. 20). Similarly, senior officers and decision-makers in the Canadian workforce remain predominantly male. In 1997, only 27% of senior managers were female (Statistics Canada, 2000, p. 111).
- Gender distinctions are reinforced through language, symbols and images, and popular and high culture. The image of the competent professional manager is of the white businessman dressed in an understated, well-cut suit. Excluded populations refer disparagingly to the stereotypical businessman as "a suit." The appropriation of women's knowledge through language also marks gender difference. Sometimes knowledge is not valued until it is "spoken by a man" (Tanton, 1994, p. 12). Magda Lewis (1993) and Deborah Tannen (1995) echo Tanton's view.
- Gender is visible in the construction of families, but is less obvious as a critical element in "organizational logic." However, it influences work rules, labour contracts, managerial decisions, and job descriptions. Regarding work rules, an assumption in organizational logic is the informal precept that time spent at work, called "face time," is a measure of commitment and value to the organization. Consistent with the rational masculine ethic, managers should be available to stay late or meet early in the day. However, this norm favours those in the workplace who do not have childcare or

elder care responsibilities in their private lives (Ely & Meyerson, 1999, p. 29). Mothers in the Canadian workforce, on average work 0.7 fewer hours paid work per week than their male counterparts (Statistics Canada, 2000, p. 111). Full-time working mothers put in an additional 34 hours of unpaid work, weekly, and are among the most time-stressed of any demographic group, according to Statistics Canada data (as cited in Coleman, 2000, p. 23).

- In organizational logic, informal and formal networks play important roles in information flow, development of trust, and social aspects of the working day. Women typically lack access to the informal networks in which information may be passed and critical decisions made. Such networks are often built around gendered recreational and social activities which do not interest or include most women. Given women's disparate commitment to family responsibilities, they frequently do not have time for these or other recreations (Gerkovich, McBride-King, & Townsend, 1997, p. 17).
- The concept of the idealized "disembodied worker" as a basis for developing job descriptions is incongruent with women's reproductive role. The body most likely to fill a job "slot" is a male body. In a study of executive women for Catalyst Research and the Conference Board of Canada (Gerkovich et al.,1997), 61% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that advancement depended on putting their career ahead of their family lives. In concrete terms this meant that 41% of them postponed having children or decided to remain childless, and 19% decided not to marry or to delay

marriage (p. 9). These women, embodied as female, are challenged to fit into the job slot.

- Underlying assumptions and practices governing workplaces, control sexuality and emotion. Women's bodies, and sexuality are rejected or sexualized; male sexual imagery [including military and sports metaphor] permeate organizational culture (Ely, Foldy, & Scully, 2003, 51- 57).

An organization employing Acker's approach would seek to reduce the effects of power by identifying and revamping gendered practices. Initiatives require leadership by senior management, in an ongoing campaign to root out and correct discriminatory acts and cultural traditions. On the surface it appears that the goal of rooting out oppressive elements of the culture is exactly what feminist women have sought for many years, as a principle of fairness. The difference in this case is that, as Acker has argued, gender has been defined as a central organizing feature of the organization. Thus, gender effects are understood to touch men as well as women and to carry over into the realm of organizational effectiveness–what gets valued, what gets ignored, and how the organization does its work (Ely & Meyerson, 1999, p. 30).

I have provided a brief sampling of two organizational theories that attempt to explain the role of gender in organizational life. I have referred to Rosabeth Moss Kanter because of her influential position as the first female faculty member at the Harvard School of Business, and the longevity of her early writing, especially *Men and Women of the Corporation,* published in 1977. The fact that her theory remains today as a building block of subsequent inquiry attests to the strength of her work. The writing of Joan Acker

is significant to me for its provocative introduction of feminist language to a mainstream organizational audience. Her conceptualization of gender as an integral part of workplace structures, relationships, and belief systems is consistent with a feminist definition by Harriet Bradley in my opening comments. This concept of gender as constructed and diffused throughout relationships and structures is reflected in postmodern feminist thought (Lewis, 1993; Weiler, 1993).

For some time, in my role as Coordinator of a women's program I have been discerning a decline in receptivity among organizations, individuals, and UPEI toward the Management Development Program for Women. I have been advised, for example, that if a women's program were ever needed, that time is past. I agree with Deborah Rhode when she speaks of "a widespread assumption that barriers have been coming down, women have been moving up [in organizations], and equal treatment is an accomplished fact of life" (p. 160). Gender scholars Deborah Meyerson and Joyce Fletcher point out that gender inequity has not vanished, "it has just gone underground" (2003, p. 231).

I began asking where I might find some analysis of this invisiblizing dynamic. I wanted to understand the forces working to create an increasingly inhospitable environment for my life's work. I thought that using feminist tools to take a measure of the status of women within management and organizations would provide a window on women in society. It would open up feminist literature to me, especially the postmodern feminist authors and theorists whom I have not formally studied.

As a method of inquiry into structures and instruments that maintain women's oppression, a feminist inquiry is oriented toward "describ[ing] and elucidat[ing] specific

manifestations of an already presumed general pattern" (Patton, p. 131). The goal of this study is to demonstrate that the assumption of equity as a *fait accompli* for women within management and in society is unfounded and damaging, mainly to women, but also to men and organizations. Within organizations, societal patterns of disadvantage, including women's disadvantage are reproduced through the convergence of structural and relational factors. Such assumptions can be effectively challenged by individuals, groups, and organizations who choose to make this commitment, by connecting feminist and gender theory to everyday practice. I will continue to refer to the organizational theories of Kanter and Acker as I uncover patterns of disadvantage revealed by the participants, and in my own narrative.

Women's Relationship with the Labour Force

There is ample evidence to support Kanter's theory of the deleterious effects of structured, routine, and low status jobs. Similarly if we, like Acker, look for signs of gender embedded into the organization, they are there. Women's exclusion from networks of power, and the time stress that dual-career mothers live come to mind. In this section, concrete examples of women's organizational realities are provided, by drawing together quantitative data and highlighting adverse gender effects.

Women made a strong incursion into the Canadian labour force during the 1960s. By comparison, their foothold into the ranks of management has followed that by two to three decades. In 1960, less than 20% of married women were in the labour force (Statistics Canada, 2001a, p. 107). In 1966 women's overall participation rate (i.e. those of working age who are working or looking for work) was 35.4%, versus 79.8% for men

(Statistics Canada, 2001b, pp. 83-85). By 1999, 55% of women aged 15 and over held jobs, and accounted for 46% of the employed workforce, versus 67% of males in this same age range who held jobs. Ironically, in 1999, women's presence in management at 35%, mirrors their 1966 overall labour force participation rate (Statistics Canada, 2000, p.141).

Nor do numbers tell the whole story. In a Conference Board of Canada study, Barbara Orser (2000) reported that even in organizations ranked as having a comparatively high percentage of females on the senior management team, the women themselves view progress differently from their male Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) (p. 5). In their search for signs of positive change, women in this Conference Board study look beyond the numbers to the culture and attitudes of the organization. Orser, comparing the perceptions of female executives and CEOs, reported that 69% of women executives, but only 42% of male CEOs agreed with the statement, "not being taken seriously at work is more problematic for female managers than for male managers" (p. 6). As one respondent stated, "This is about the day-to-day uphill battles [women face] and their struggles to be heard and seen as credible, professional, competent persons" (p. 6). At the turn of the 21st century, much ground has been gained (Hewlett, 2002, p. 88; Orser, 15-24). And yet there are obstacles to surmount before women's presence in senior management is so mainstream as to be unremarkable.

Significance of the Study

The results of this study will add to knowledge about the culture and the developmental needs of women who wish to advance within the Prince Edward Island

public sector. Clearly an issue for the Public Service is the recruitment and retention of executives to replace an aging cadre of managers (Prince Edward Island Public Service Commission, 2002, p. 9). On a practical level, women are recognized as a source of replacement talent (Orser, 2000, p. 2). However there is a caution that managerial women, by taking greater control over their conditions of work, may no longer acquiesce to being a reserve labour force. In recent surveys, respondents have indicated their intentions to abandon non-inclusive organizations in favour of creating and controlling their own employment and work environments (Gerkovich et al., 1997, p. 13; Maley, 1997, p. 62). From an equity perspective, the Prince Edward Island Public Service Commission itself recognizes the lack of balance in representation of women in leadership and management positions. The Commission has named managerial women as a target group for equity measures (Prince Edward Island Public Service Commission, 2002, p. 12). Hence, insights into what senior women say about the organizational climate are directly applicable in this province.

The study is also significant to me in my present role in continuing education, in the creation of educational and career opportunities for women. I have been in the role of women's advocate for almost three decades. During the 1970s and '80s, I was informally schooled in second-wave feminism through a synchronicity of personal events and grassroots feminist activities which, at that time, formed a crucial part of my identity as a woman. I have noticed that the items that make the list of "women's issues" have changed little since then. Communities of women continue to argue for similar advances, such as improved child care, and public civil legal aid, while encountering similar

sticking points. During the late 1990s, I began to sense and observe a declining tolerance for women's issues in my work environment. I had not yet read Susan Faludi's *Backlash* (1991) in which she articulated the decline as backlash against legislated and informal gains in the status of women in the United States. The backlash includes a provocative assumption on the political right that though women are now miserable, they have achieved equality economically, socially, reproductively, and in other ways. Therefore according to the purveyors of backlash, there no longer exists a need nor a justification for equity initiatives on behalf of women as a group. Faludi points out that anti-feminists blame a failed feminist movement for women's unhappiness (p. ix-xii).

This conservative and reductionist analysis allows few options for moving forward a feminist agenda in any fruitful way. Thus I have been scanning the horizon for a workable theoretical foundation as a reference point and a force for action. I have been questioning whether there has been new thought in feminism which would open fresh perspectives, lower resistance to feminist overtures, and lead to new strategies in my personal project to further advance the equitable participation of women as workers and managers within the Canadian workforce.

Theoretical Frameworks in Brief

All forms of qualitative inquiry come with their own sets of assumptions about sources of knowledge, and just what counts as knowledge. William Patton (2002, p. 129), explains that feminist and ethnographic studies are orientational frameworks. As such they carry embedded messages of feminism and culture respectively. The distinguishing feature of feminism is that it is both a politics of social change and method of inquiry into

structures and instruments which maintain women's oppression in many societies. The distinguishing feature of ethnography is that it provides a picture of people in a cultural setting. It highlights the extraordinary in things that appear ordinary to the uninquiring eye. I am naming this study an ethnographically-influenced critical feminist project, meaning that it will reflect the characteristics of its two theoretical bases, and must be interpreted from these frameworks. "Such [orientational] inquiry therefore aims to describe and elucidate *specific* manifestations of already-presumed general patterns [of women's disadvantage] . . . " (Patton, p. 131).

In Chapter One, I have introduced the problem of women's unequal participation in the labour force, and in senior management in particular. The social construction of gender is a major confounding factor which operates in male-female relationships, and has been built into the historical structure of organizations. I have noted that present-day economic and political conservativism are affecting the rate of change in women's access to leadership positions. I have briefly introduced features of qualitative research that I consider important to this study. In subsequent chapters, the terms and concepts appearing in this introductory chapter will figure significantly in an exploration of the perceptions of women in senior management regarding the cultures of their organizations.

Going forward, I will write myself into the text, lay out the theoretical and methodological foundations, and describe three themes elaborated by the 10 Directors in the study. In the final chapter, I intend to recursively connect the data and themes with my introductory thesis statement that gender inequities are alive and well in Canada today.

Chapter Two: Narrating My Self

Have you ever felt like a wick in a candle?

Part of the question and part of the answer – *Rita MacNeil*

A cornerstone of qualitative inquiry is the notion that authors and researchers are present in their research. By narrating my Self into my project, I provide an opening for readers to relate to my interpretation of data and events, and to add their own interpretations. I particularly will refer to Magda Lewis for analysis. She writes beautifully, and has such a grasp of feminism that I am going to rely on her to help me speak more surely. I begin with two quotes about women's stories. I will italicize and indent all of Lewis' words, so that readers will see her clearly in what follows.

> *What is important about women's accounts is that they do not represent some deviation from an otherwise sane context of equality and possibility. By and large women's accounts of our experience are not expressions of unusually brutalizing moments identifiable in opposition to otherwise "normal," "commonplace," "everyday" experiences. The power of these experiences to effect women's notions of self and identity is precisely that they are normal, commonplace, and everyday* (1993, p. 56). And . . . *yet it is the stories that we tell of and to ourselves that provide the conditions for transformation* (Lewis, 1993, p. 121).

Several years into my role as Coordinator of the Management Development Program for Women, I was faced with a dilemma about how to ensure its longevity. With a small population base and a limited number of larger organizations willing or able to support training and development, I was soon to exhaust the pool of candidates. One alternative

was to open the program to men, thereby bolstering the class size, and continuing the availability of a form of management development for women. Although the curriculum on paper would remain much the same, I expected that the classroom environment would change. However some opportunity would be better than no program at all. I was also receiving expressions of concern from employers, reflecting their own or their employees' angst at perceived reverse discrimination. This had the power to affect my enrolments as well, if employers were to withhold support on that basis. I should interject here that in our university's continuing education unit, there is more urgency around running each of our programs at least on a cost-recovery basis, and at best as a source of revenue, than when I came to my position in 1996. At that time as well, I had the benefit of start-up funds. Therefore I proceeded to the "open program," with the condition that I would keep the program for women on the books and run it opposite the new option, so long as the numbers warranted.

During the initial open program iteration, the transition went smoothly: no major takeovers of dialogue, no diminishment of women, no appropriation of their ideas, though some tendency for women to confer leadership functions on males. The dynamics that have shown up in the literature on mixed gender groups were not generally showing up in my classroom. Until a *new* group began the management journey.

I had observed earlier in my writing that it is difficult to discern difference when only the dominant or normative culture (that is, a women's culture within the specialty management program) is present. Teachers know that groups develop a dynamic that would not be possible if they were to relate to the members one-on-one. This group was

displaying an unhealthy set of interactions. It lacked the balance of the previous one. It featured a few strongly masculine men whose style in their regular work day was authoritarian, a few women whose style was also competitive and direct, and a minority of women whose confidence might have flourished in a women's program, but never did in this environment. Despite trying group-building strategies that had worked wonders before now, instructors could not find ways to help this group soar. The instructors and I tweaked this, added that, but did not see the results we wanted. Some members began to air dissatisfactions, but when it came time to put them into an open forum, there seemed to be no issue. I kept remarking to my staff that I could not put my finger on what was wrong. By the sixth month, I felt invisible when I entered the management development classroom, as if I had long since been written out of an afternoon soap. Magda Lewis remarked, while writing on women in the academy

> *The experience of being invisible is brutalizing. To have had our ideas, work and talent considered and contested might have challenged our critical sense; to have them not even noted denied our existence in the most profound way* (Lewis, 1993, p. 142).

A concerned student said there appeared to be some tension between me and the group. Instructors said perhaps it was the synchronicity of many things. We moved through monthly sessions, not soaring.

Against this back drop, the other shoe fell, when a female instructor chose to use gender as an example to structure a discussion of harassment in organizations. Now, she could have chosen a safer basis of harassment to discuss, but we had decided against

picking certain other bases such as race, because there were some group members who might be singled out by using other categories. The decision was not totally mine to make, as I believe in granting autonomy to my very competent instructors. After discussing the risk, we went in with our eyes open to the possibility of manageable conflict. We both felt the topic was an important one for managers-in-training.

I was not present, but I am told that before five minutes had elapsed, one of the men challenged the instructor, saying she was spending too long talking about women.

> . . . *the monitoring of women's words is simply a particular manifestation of a general social condition that is played out among women and men on a daily basis. . . . what we [women] said and how we said it was not quite as problematic . . . as the fact that we spoke at all* (Lewis, 1993, p. 125).

The instructor attempted to use the teachable moment to elicit more of the participant's thinking, but his responses remained acrimonious. OK to talk about harassment, but pick another example besides *women*.

> *Perhaps "in the world of wrongs done" [this] experience may not have seemed a "big thing . . . But small moments or decisions often reflect and /or presage larger dynamics which are important. This [was] one such moment"* (Lewis, 1993, p. 138).

More insults were spoken. The instructor reported to me a comment about her generation (mid-50s), and that she was " 'not with it,' as are the 'modern' thinkers in this classroom." The inference was that not only was gender an issue, but so was age. In *my* management development class! In the program formerly known as Management

Development *For Women*, where no one had ever before broached the subject of our differing identities in this way!

Some group members were embarrassed and clearly dispirited by what had happened. At the break which followed shortly after this incident, some male and female classmates clustered around the man, dropping comments and guffawing. I hoped against hope that his peers would speak up, but no one did, whatever they may have thought privately.

The next day the rhetoric continued as the group gathered, and one of the women brought along a sexist cartoon which she thought related to the incident. I was in the classroom as they passed this around. I felt immobilized by what was happening. The instructor was returning for a second day, and she and I had discussed how she would negotiate the day. We knew there were the ingredients of a galvanizing debate in this incident; however, we decided not to open it up as a case because more conflict and argument could be harmful to some, while it gave the perpetrator a soapbox for his misogyny. Hence, I did not acknowledge what I knew, and she went on with Day 2, and a new topic. She said she was all right.

I was comfortable with her path, given her expertise as a communicator and mediator in conflicted situations. I had agreed on this route, but this did not prevent my feelings of powerlessness, of feeling totally muzzled and stung. I was astounded that this scenario of woman harassment was not discussable, totally not, after many months of trying to open managerial minds to possibilities of less autocratic organizations. I thought about how the managers in this group might have been examining my reaction for signs of my leadership. I thought of the immigrant women, and what they might be thinking about

Canadians and Canadian men. I questioned why one woman in this group who was professionally well-trained to deal with such violations joined the repartee, as that morning got underway. Was she covering up her own discomfort? Did she feel powerless too? I recalled a remark some years earlier by another employee of the university, that my running a management development program for women did not mean that I was the one to run a management development program for everyone. I was stung by that too, back then. What if that person were right after all?

After Day 2, the instructor and I gathered up the markers, flip charts–symbols of our labour, and exchanged comments. Presently she said, "You know, I don't know if I want to keep doing this." I could read disappointment and fatigue in her voice. A fine teacher–facilitator of sterling reputation, I had shared with her on another occasion how grateful I was for her ability to adapt her plan for a teaching day based on student needs, technical failures, or the arrival of a better idea. I always thought of her as solid, dependable, and so in touch with her own values and identity. To see her treated in this way . . . Her voice sounded so thin.

At my next Departmental meeting, I sat through a round with others who were reporting on their work. Everything seemed positive–international recruiting, new contracts, fun courses. And now it was my turn. In general terms I sketched out my dissatisfaction with how management development was going. I did not implicate gender dynamics, only the "difficult group" explanations.

Yet, as social analysis our telling is transformed into an act of indiscretion. . . .

The very act of putting to public scrutiny our private experiences is seen to

> *confirm our inadequacy. There is literally no way to politicize women's experience within the terms of [mainstream] discourse without making ourselves into authors of our own violation and subordination* (Lewis, 1993, p. 120).

My voice pitched itself lower as pictures of my shaming and the instructor's came into my mind's eye. I finished by saying this was the hardest year of my life in teaching. Later I told my Director that I would not run this program again without some changes. I said I could not carry out the changing alone. I did not think my words connected. I *was* alone to take care of the problems in my own siloed existence.

> *Taking the risk to speak our social experience is often difficult. . . . While experiences are socially produced, they are individually felt* (Lewis, 1993, p. 134).

Furthermore, I had to meet with this particular group for one more month, and then give them a joyous send-off celebration. I wished I could do it for the ones who truly deserved to celebrate. I put on my blinders and did it for the ones who had truly earned recognition.

My productivity was not great as I struggled under the weight of this unpleasant load. I thought dimly, that the past could possibly inform the present, and so I called together instructors who had taught in the program for women, to explore what had changed. I asked a colleague to facilitate, because I thought I could not. Although the turnout was small, together we generated a useful environmental scan, and recalled and celebrated the program's early years.

At these meetings I received the support I needed, at least enough to move to the next step, which was to pay a modest fee for consulting assistance, resulting in a redesigned

management program. One feature of this redesign is the opportunity now built in, to discontinue a student if it becomes apparent that they are a detriment to other learners. It is also an open program for women and men, with a side bar in the proposal to design a seminar style women's leadership weekend.

In January 2005, I graduated the final cohort of the Management Development Program for Women. Weeks earlier the graduates asked if it were possible for their certificates not to bear the words "for Women" in their title.

> *Women, because we occupy deprived political and economic space are denied power to set the social agenda . . . women cannot assume the position of legitimators of men's* ***or*** *women's discourse nor as supporters of our own interests. It is this reality precisely that often persuades women to vest their interests with patriarchy . . . (*Lewis, 1993, p. 131*).*

This request does not insult me. The students are not unaware of what fetters their futures, and where to align themselves in order to secure their interests.

The guest speaker at the graduation, a woman and a civic politician, spoke about the challenges of being taken seriously while campaigning door-to-door. Older men want to know what her husband thinks of her retaining her birth name, and older women could not vote for another woman, and the candidate's dangling earrings seemed more significant than her ideas and willingness to serve.

Beginnings

My early years were spent in a Prince Edward Island farming family of thirteen children and two hard-working parents. I was born at home, while my parents were just

settling into a new farm. They had purchased it under a program for the re-integration of returned World War Two veterans like my father. By virtue of birth order, as the oldest girl among nine brothers and three sisters, I was expected to assist with household affairs and child care, while my brothers attended to the demands of the farm. My next sister is five years younger than I, and this meant that my mother had to depend upon me for a number of years, until my sister too, was able to help.

I recall that in some farms in my neighbourhood, women played a more active role in the actual farming than the one performed by my mother. However as she was pretty much continuously expecting a baby, or nurturing a newborn child and several pre-schoolers, I think my father realized that her life was already very demanding without added farm work. My father held unarticulated ideas about what was appropriate involvement for girls in farming. I was never allowed to attend the birthing of a new calf, or the slaughter of an animal. I did not drive the tractor, and never learned to drive a car with a standard transmission. By contrast, my brothers participated in all these activities, in the "natural" course of events. When I hear my brothers talk about their escapades in the milking barn or the fields, I realize how different our childhood experiences actually were, both by gender and by age. I lived in quite a different environment than did my youngest sibling, who was born when I was fifteen. By then my parents were older, the pressures on the rural social fabric were growing, and my mother was already working outside our home.

A Learning Environment

My mother was educated as a nurse, while my father stopped his formal education at grade nine. However, both my parents were prolific readers; not only did they read, but they had a book club of two in which they discussed the writing and the ideas expressed. This celebration of ideas, and the informality of it encouraged my siblings and me to read, to think, and to analyze. I must credit my aunt, Dorothy Cullen, who was an eminent librarian in Prince Edward Island from the 1940s to 1971, for instilling a zest for reading, and ensuring a steady supply of books. Education was highly valued, although there was little discussion of what our life careers might be. I believe my mother would have been happy to have a priest and a farmer from among the boys. My father supported education for girls, at least insofar as it prepared them to be good mothers and wives. He thought that his daughters could get what education they needed in their home province; however I had to attend St. Francis Xavier for my home economics degree, as it was not available in Prince Edward Island.

Life Choices

Following secondary schooling in a newly minted regional high school in the 1960s, I chose home economics as a pursuit and earned my way through my degree via scholarships and work in the university cafeteria. Due to my immersion in strong family life, my homemaking role, and an interest I had in food chemistry, home economics seemed to fit. I was curious about what made food ingredients behave as they did when combined, pickled, or baked. In retrospect I see that as a young woman I chose from the narrow range of gender-specific career options open to me in the mid-60s.

Teacher, teacher. Women were only beginning to flood into the workforce in Prince Edward Island when I gravitated into a traditional teaching role in 1969. One thing I remember well from my first school was a teacher of history who denigrated home economics as unacademic, and unworthy of counting into a student's grade average as a basis for passing or receiving awards. I was to discover that this unfavourable sentiment was pervasive also in the way school administrators apportioned resources to programs, set schedules, and chose and positioned elective subjects. More than that, my provincial professional license was designated as "special," and not in a positive way. My special certificate, a devalued certificate, limited me to teaching only home economics despite the concentration of "teachable" sciences within my degree. I was only beginning to learn about how little value the world accorded the domestic or private sphere (Thompson, 1994, p. 184).

After four years of teaching, I took a year of leave to complete a Master's degree in Family Studies at the University of Guelph. My motivation was not to abandon home economics, but to move strongly into the emerging personal development and health aspects of home economics curriculum, including adolescent health and sexuality. I was motivated by the discovery of so many girls in my classes who were entering puberty without the slightest modicum of instruction about their reproductive functions. Their misery and confusion was written on their faces and in their body language. I thought this was wrong, and that schools could help make life easier for young women. This was probably my first foray into advocacy. I was 26 years old.

New realities. By my mid-twenties I had married and established my own family, feeling plenty of ambivalence about home and work amidst a societal debate about working mothers and day care. Working part-time to serve both my workforce and homemaking roles, it became clear that a number of factors would discourage me from committing to home economics teaching as my career. The devaluation of the private or Hestian world was ever present. I should explain that Hestia, the goddess of the hearth is referred to in home economics as symbolic of its field of study and practice. This is in contrast to the public world of markets and trade, which were presided over by Hermes, the god of commerce and cunning. "It is difficult for a Hestian [private] discipline to confront the Hermean [public] establishment and negotiate for equitable treatment" (Thompson, 1994, p. 193). Pat Thompson's words illustrate the challenge felt by home economics as a profession. On a personal level I was feeling a similar oppression.

In retrospect, I think that home economics was so challenged to survive as a discipline, that its theory and practice failed to keep pace with changing family life (Lusby, 1993, 44-46; Thompson, 1995, 53-57). Deborah Britzman writes that language has "the potential either to reproduce given realities as immutable and ubiquitous, or to produce critiques that have the potential to construct new realities" (1991, p. 13). In home economics, while I perceived a conservationist profession speaking in terms of "the family" as one nuclear configuration, all around me society was catapulted toward many varied representations of "families." Home economics' assumptions about sex roles in the home and family irked me and hemmed me in. Indeed, I found my chosen field to be at odds with my own perspectives on parenting, my workforce participation, the

inequalities I lived personally, and those I saw other women facing every day. Like home economics in general, I was operating on the fringes of patriarchy, but my profession was unable to provide me "a theory . . . consistent with my own needs as [a] wom[a]n operating at the fringes of patriarchal space" (Susan Stanford Friedman, in Weiler, 1993, p. 83). I was living in a text that I did not believe represented the evolving society. I felt guilty attending meetings of my professional association, feeling I was failing home hconomics while it was also failing me. Now with three young children, three additional issues told me I must move on: the practical reality of the stresses of substitute teaching, the faint hope that teaching would move to embrace job-sharing in my time, and the experience of a postpartum depression which led to my connection to the Women's Employment Development Program.

New directions. The Women's Employment Development Program provided employment outreach for women re-entering the workforce, as a service of the then-Canada Employment and Immigration Commission. From initially being a client, I moved into the role of worker in the Summerside area of the province. There, for most of the 80s, I saw first hand, examples of women's inequality in the home and workforce: abandonment; reliance on welfare to raise children alone; the insecurity of being a secondary labour force; access barriers to training, jobs, and credit; guilt and frustration about daycare, lack of property rights; and other legal entitlements such as civil legal aid. In the meantime I had launched into a part-time Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) as a bridge from grassroots community development into the social service profession. In a 1987 BSW paper I wrote:

> In the 1980s, married or once-married women are occupying one of two camps–homemaker by choice or dual-role woman. Women have not moved simply from one job at home to another in the paid labour force. Rather they have adjusted their child-bearing, child-rearing, housekeeping routines, and personal time to take on a second role as wage earner. Statistics tell us that a woman's spouse (if she has one) will perform another twenty minutes of housework per week to help her accommodate the new responsibilities.

About part-time work I wrote:

> "I myself am a part-time worker, and am quite familiar with the societal assumption that this is what women workers want. . . . It is an option that women *should have* in recognition of their still-major role in the upbringing of the nation's children. . . . [However] 70% of *involuntary* part-time workers are female. This does not include the clients I encounter weekly who are on welfare because they cannot attain full-time work which will support their families. Neither can they let go of the safety of [having] medications at no cost while on welfare, or of a head- start program for their child.

Politicizing the Personal

Through Outreach I became more connected to the work of equality-seeking organizations such as the Canadian and Prince Edward Island Advisory Councils on the Status of Women (CACSW; PEIACSW); the National Action Committee (NAC); and Women's Network PEI (WNPEI), the Island organization responsible for publishing the feminist magazine *Common Ground*. These organizations came about in the wake of the

Royal Commission on the Status of Women in 1970, which established the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women. Federal funds became available to support community action as a route to increasing the voices of women in public policy decisions. In hindsight the 1970s and early 80s represented the golden era of feminism's second wave. There were resources available to politicize the personal. There was leadership on both the national and local fronts. There were landmark causes such as discussions of repatriation of the Canadian Constitution, in which the women's movement vocally opposed any move to override equality rights guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Internship in feminist community-building. In 1983, I was part of the founding committee and first president of the East Prince Women's Information Centre (EPWIC), an equality-seeking community organization located in Summerside, Prince Edward Island. This involvement provided an experience in applied feminism, through consensus decision-making, a non-hierarchical model of working and commitment to women's advancement (Weiler, p. 79). Second-wave feminists discovered that knowledge sifted out of shared experience could be turned to political purposes. Certainly, under the leadership of a politicized staff, the Women's Centre provided the space and conditions for both structured and spontaneous sharing. Kirby and McKenna (1989) term this work as research "from the margins" (p. 15).

Though some directions seemed to simply emerge from the milieu, one aspect of the Centre's character was strategically nurtured by the board and staff. This was a decision to communicate a politically moderate organizational image, due to hints of early

resistance which we encountered in the East Prince community. One way to do this was to build relationships with government services with whom we shared goals and clients; for example child and family services, mental health and addictions services, and public legal aid. I believe our efforts to run an organization by feminist principles reflected Schneiderwind's concept of feminist process, as "both a vision of equalitarian personal relations and societal forms, and the confidence and skills to make knowledge and vision functional in the world" (cited in Weiler, 1993, p. 75). Through this engagement in the different types of grassroots emancipatory activities, I had completed an internship in feminism during my thirties.

Opportunity comes knocking. In the mid-80s I was feeling comfortable with quiet activism, and envisioned my career anchors to be helping roles, especially with women. To this end, I grasped the opportunity to follow a part-time BSW program on the Island, while pursuing employment counselling positions within the Federal system. In a personal statement to the BSW program in 1986 I wrote, "My present employment holds limited future as it will likely continue to be part-time, and somewhat restricted by requirements set down by the funding department of government." At that time my life took another twist when I was approached to manage the development of the province's family life education school curriculum. This offer represented recognition for my MSc degree specialty which, otherwise had not been effective in opening doors for me in Prince Edward Island. From feeling undervalued in home economics, to being *Other* as a feminist and advocate positioned outside the bureaucracy, I found by contrast, that my

knowledge in family life and adolescent sexuality finally had currency *within* the bureaucracy.

A career theme. As the reader may gather, my career path is not the one assumed in mainstream career development theory. It was not a career normed on the pattern of the white North American male office worker (Powell, 1993, p. 189; Gallant, 2001, p. 23). Such a model encourages making connections and building relationships necessary to advancement through predictable career stages. "Glass ceiling" literature actually identifies this lack of connections, or the lack of power in women's networks as factors which holds women back (Gerkovich et al., 1997, p. 8; Bell & Nkomo, 2003, p. 354). But though it may seem discontinuous on the surface, there is a consistent theme knitting my career together. *My purpose has been to achieve what will be good for women and by extension, positive for children, for families, and for society at large.* From the home economics classroom, to employment field work with women, from the establishment of a women's centre which still operates today, to leading an extensive family life curriculum development, I have been an advocate for girls and women. Some of my choices have been personally expensive, and in this I think I am like others who work for political causes.

A fork in the road. Ironically, my engagement with the family life curriculum resulted in "a road not taken" into the social work/counselling field. About 1992, Dalhousie University had decided to withdraw its part-time BSW from the province. When the final credit was being offered, I was providing in-service to teachers, conducting night meetings with parents, and commuting two hours per day. My children were in their teen

years, and I wanted to be present to, and for them. Adding the course on top of dual roles of work and family was too much to contemplate. I felt unable to attend, and set my BSW adrift, more by default than through an active decision. I am not in the habit of giving up on something I have begun. In retrospect I chastised myself for being short-sighted, for not pushing myself for a few months through this course. How many new roads might have been possible?

Shifting the Family Paradigm

Madeline Grumet (1994, p. 161), writing about transformation in education says: "Even in the most conventional scene of classroom practice we can find traces of transformative consciousness, no matter how masked in apparent compliance and convention." So I could describe my engagement in the development of an integrated family life curriculum during 1989-1992. The rigid statement of principles which prefaced the curriculum "in apparent compliance and convention" made way for the Department of Education to introduce a basic personal development and sexual health curriculum from elementary grades to senior high school. While the curriculum had many limitations, I draw satisfaction from having equipped teachers with tools to counteract sexism and unequal teen heterosexual relationships which see young women bearing the greater cost. I refer mainly to heterosexism because the written curriculum was largely silent on other forms of sexual expression.

I can also claim to have moved beyond convention in leading teacher committees in the development of sexual abuse and family violence prevention curricula. Having come from outside the bureaucracy, I had escaped its acculturation to a siloed way of working,

and in the development of these aspects I attempted to draw in the Public Health Nursing division, the Justice Resource worker, and Child and Family Services. I believe that my background with feminist ways of working led me to assume that collaboration was the normal approach to take when constituencies have overlapping goals. Despite naivete´on my part, these collaborations were mainly successful because of shared agendas and feminist sensitivities of the women who staffed the justice, public health, and social work roles.

Family life education was very politically contested ground in Prince Edward Island at that time, especially in its sexuality aspects, and abuse prevention modules. I define abuse prevention as being about power over others and not about sexuality, as is it often perceived to be. In a memo to my Director written in 1990, I point out how much teachers needed support to carry out a strong implementation of sexual abuse and family violence materials:

> Being asked to teach about sexual abuse or other forms of family violence evokes a wide variety of responses from teachers and administrators. Not only must the curriculum be responsive to the needs of students and society, the implementation of it must allow for the development of the teachers as change agents, with some commitment to the work at hand. Past negative experiences such as false reports . . . exclusion of teachers on a "no-need to know" basis . . . are all barriers.

In my MSc preparation as a family life educator during the 1970s, I think I moved rather unconsciously through gendered ground in the social sciences. This was probably a function of my own youthfulness, together with little apparent consciousness on the part

of my Faculty, of gender, and family as constructed and political concepts. How very surreal when I think that the subject matter included marriage and family through the life cycle, economics, aging, and human sexuality. We studied unequal power in marriage, but I do not remember any striking political base. We completed a project on approaches to measuring poverty, but did not question who was poor, and why these groups were poor. Applying a feminist lens, I now think gender should be situated as "the wiring" of family studies and family life curriculum, because of the power of gender relations to either maintain or change the paradigm of family as a site of inequality.

Family life curriculum values formation of students' identities for rich holistic interpersonal relationships which begin within the private sphere of their families; it recognizes, as feminists do, how the quality of family life impacts upon the quality of public life. However feminists, at least in North America, regard "family" itself as a construct which maintains women in service to the reproduction of an unequal set of social relations. On this topic, Patti Lather quotes several sources, including Margaret Adams. Adams claims that "women feed their skills into social programs they have rarely designed that . . . are fundamentally geared to the maintenance of society's status quo in all its destructive and exploitative aspects (in Stone, 1994, p. 245). Taking feminist discourse on family into account, it is clear that the family life education-feminism alliance could be an uneasy one, but one which I somewhat successfully traversed.

In her 1993 introduction to a new edition of *In a Different Voice,* Carol Gilligan's work on psychological theory and women's development, Gilligan addresses the growth in her theoretical base from the time of first publishing this work in 1982. I can say the

same of myself in relation to sex education. Hence my curriculum, if I developed one at all, would be very different today. But as I bring this up only to expose how my past influences my present perspectives, I will not expand further here.

I have been discussing the ways in which gender infuses the territory of family life education. A final gendered location lies within teaching itself. Patti Lather proposes that as a female-dominated occupation, teaching is an extension of what Sara Lightfoot refers to as "motherwork" (in Stone, 1994, p. 245). She sees women teachers as transmitters of cultural norms rather than as cultural transformers. This is a contradictory position since it reproduces women's position of disadvantage. More broadly, educational theorists have identified how factors such as educational policy and the processes of curriculum development disempower all teachers, whether female or male. Michael Apple states that "the curriculum is never simply a neutral assemblage of knowledge . . . It is always part of a selective tradition . . . (1996, p. 22). The Family Life Curriculum was not a neutral assemblage of knowledge, and I, along with teacher committees succeeded in transforming some practice, and some students.

Moving to Management Development

Women in management are positioned on the margins in a male-dominated field, and my own involvement provided me with another feminist lens on women's lives. As I have already related, I came to the University of Prince Edward Island in 1996, to coordinate the establishment of the Management Development Program for Women. I am struggling with expressing the significance of this assignment to my identity. I do not think it can be captured in a straightforward way, as if I were responding to the question, "so what does

this mean to me?" Rather, I think because the central matter of this thesis is about the culture of women in management, my experiences as a manager, my perspectives, and who I am today will emerge through my writing. I move now to lay out the theoretical details which support my question.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Bases

Theory can leave questions unanswered, but practice has to come up with something.

– Mason Cooley, US aphorist

My purpose in this chapter is to provide a brief theoretical frame as backdrop for my project. My theoretical frame sketches the concepts of postmodernism and constructivism, and then covers concepts of feminism in more depth.

Postmodernism

Thomas Kuhn wrote *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* in 1970. He argued that society's faith in science to generate objective truth was misplaced, because the communication of such "truth" was dependant on language. Language being socially constructed is filtered through the assumptions and world view of individuals and the social groups to which they belong, and cannot be objective. Kuhn's writing had the effect of turning modernism's reliance on objectivity and rigidly controlled systems on its ear. Rather than holding modernism's Enlightenment idea that knowledge deepens over time toward greater truth, postmodernists argue that knowledge is discontinuous, because it is generated socially, and is affected by ideologies and power. As William Patton says "by exercising control over language and therefore control over the very categories of reality that are opened to consciousness, those in power are served" (2002, p. 100). Support for pluralism in postmodern views signalled the death of Grand Narrative, meaning the death of claims to truths that apply to all humanity, or to any large population. To summarize, Diana Mulinari and Kerstin Sandell identify the central contributions of postmodernism to be "the exploration of language, the notion of

discourse, the problematization of difference, and the practice of deconstruction" (1999, p. 294).

Social Constructivism

Social constructivism is a key research tradition which has derived itself from postmodern thought. The foundational questions of this tradition, as captured by Patton (2002), are:

> How have the people in this setting constructed reality? What are their reported perceptions, "truths," explanations, beliefs, and world-views? What are the consequences of their constructions for their behaviours and for those with whom they interact? (p. 96).

As a research approach, these questions are asked and researchers take them up, bounded by the following assumptions, as quoted from Guba and Lincoln:

- "Truth" is a matter of consensus among informed and sophisticated constructors, not of correspondence with objective reality;
- "Facts" have no meaning except within some value framework, hence there cannot be an "objective" assessment of any proposition;
- "Causes" and effects do not exist except by imputation;
- Phenomena can only be understood within the context in which they are studied; findings from one context cannot be generalized to another. . . ;
- Data derived from constructivist inquiry have neither special status nor legitimation; they represent simply another construction to be taken into account in the move toward consensus (in Patton, 2002, p. 98).

Feminism: Bridge from Postmodernism

Although power as a theme in feminist discourse predates postmodern times, its appearance in postmodern thought is a useful bridge to substantiating feminist claims of women's marginalization. Postmodernists argue that because reality is socially constructed and culturally maintained through language, views which represent and protect the interests of the most powerful prevail. The philosopher Rorty has even questioned whether it is ever possible to determine reality's true nature because that is not the purpose of language. Rorty asserts that the real purpose of language is to "communicate the social construction of the dominant members of the group" whose language is in use (in Patton, 2002, p. 101). When we think of language in this context, it is not surprising that feminists write about women's voice, silencing, and the need for separate spaces in which to speak. (Lewis, 1993, p. 2).

Marxist Antonio Gramsci has written extensively on the way in which the individual's consciousness is determined through the influence of ideologies. He advanced the concept of *hegemony* to capture the ways in which

> the dominant classes in any society impose their own conception of reality on all subordinate classes, and the possible ways in which the oppressed can create alternate cultural and political institutions to establish their own understanding of oppression in order to oppose and change it (in Weiler, 1988, p. 13).

Hegemony has come to broadly mean a world view or organizing principle of thought and social order in every corner of daily life (Weiler, p. 14). Critical and feminist theorists direct their energies toward deconstructing the dominant view by pulling apart its

language to expose its assumptions, and reveal who is being served by the particular view of reality. Critical theory implicates the economy, race, class, discourses, religion, and other factors in constructing unjust and/or unequal social relations (Patton, 2002, p. 131). Sandra Kirby and Kate McKenna point out the results of hegemony for segments of society including women, Afro-Americans, and people of other minority races, and gay and lesbian men and women. Power controls literacy, the research agenda, and the media, and can even define what counts as knowledge (1989, p. 23). This makes construction of alternative "knowledges" an appropriate focus of critical researchers.

The role of experience in feminism. Because feminists have held that women's reality has been diminished or missing from knowledge creation, experience has a central place in feminism. However as Mulinari and Sandell (1999) have noted, the notion of experience has been a changing and contested ground. Thus it is important for me to clarify my own understanding if I wish to claim my experience as a basis for my own authority.

I am familiar with the 1970s second-wave concept of experience, rooted in consciousness raising. Through language and conversation, women discovered that their realities which they first thought were isolated and unique, were marked by common experiences of subordination. This experience-in-common formed the rationale for the collective action that is a hallmark of the Second Wave women's movement. Action involved organizing, marching, problematizing, and raising the visibility of unexamined social practices in much the same manner as civil rights activists were doing during the 1970s. In the context of activism, experience is characterized by "[calling] upon and

creat[ing]women as political subject within a collective practice" (Mulinari & Sandell, 1999, p. 289). In modernism, experience was the feminist analytical starting point (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2000).

The mechanism of women's subordination, in feminist terms, is patriarchy, defined by Magda Lewis as "a total system of entitlements and privileges accrued [by males] through specific acts of [gender-based] domination, oppression and exploitation, in the social, political and economic realm" (1993, p. 20). Lewis notes as well, that patriarchy is a larger realm of power than was realized when this term was first conceived. Originally it depicted how the social relations of a male-headed family were repeated in the public sphere. Earlier, I identified that a particular language is put into circulation by people or groups with the most power to do so. Lewis alludes to this when she notes that "naming, meanings . . . and the symbolic systems through which our social relations are organized and maintained" form a pivotal extension of male entitlements (p. 21). Patriarchy then, is the sum of systems of control and influence by men over women, both in private households and in the public sphere. In postmodern feminism, the analytical starting point is not experience itself, as in the Second Wave. As stated by Pinar et al.(2000, p. 462), the postmodern starting point is explaining the discourses of womanhood that make women's experiences possible.

Key role of context. Context has been at the forefront of the concept of experience, or as Joan Acker says, "we locate individual experience in [the context of] society and history, embedded within a set of social relations which produce both the possibilities and the limitations of that experience" (cited in Mulinari & Sandell, 1999, p. 290). Individual

or "personal" experience holds significance for Patricia Williams. The personal is not the same as the private. The personal is something "highly particular" to the individual experience, but which has broader implications for others (cited in Lewis, 1993, p. 6). My own story in management development is personal, and at the same time, an experience common to other women in teaching. Lewis writes that as individuals we think we are alone in our perspective, until we express ourselves and uncover patterns of thought and feeling among people of similar experience. This is a defining moment. It is a transformative moment when the personal becomes political (1993, p. 4).

During the 1980s the notion of collective experience was criticized by minority feminists who challenged assumptions of inclusivity by white middle-class heterosexual women. Their collective voice failed to include, or possibly even silenced women who experienced barriers of race, class or sexual identification as more critical than gender to their situations. Mafia Lugones, as an Afro-American woman, crystallizes this exclusion in white female academia by saying, "But since your language and your theories are inadequate in expressing our experiences, we only succeed in communicating our experience of exclusion" (in Mulinari & Sandell, 1999, p. 293).

The 1980s saw the growth of narrative and autobiography as genres to offset the rejection of collective voice as a totalizing discourse of feminism. Adrienne Rich captures the importance of autobiography's microcosmic gaze in writing "When we look closely, or when we become weavers, we learn of the tiny multiple threads unseen in the overall pattern, the knots on the underside of the carpet" (Lewis, 1993, viii). Individual feminist writers, writing themselves as single knots on the underside, together have woven a carpet

through rich metaphor and description of feelings, beliefs, and intuitions. A range of postmodern narrative and autobiographical feminist texts emerged. Through these genres, the detail of women's individual lives open to the reader's interpretation.

A feminist-postmodernist dance. I have been discussing the key importance of experience in feminist thought, and, at the same time pointing out that the notion of experience has been a changing and contested ground. Although feminism is supported by some postmodern thought, feminists found it difficult to embrace this thinking on certain questions. Seyla Benhabib, discussing the postmodern concepts of the Death of Man, of History and of Metaphysics, points to the fragmentation characteristic of the era as worrisome. In her view, the existence of Man only in language is a limiting concept. She holds fast to the idea that "we are not merely extensions of our histories [as merely another position in language]. Vis a vis our own stories, we are in the position of author and character at once" (in Brooks, 1997, p.42). Clearly, for Benhabib, holism and experience remain critical in feminist theory.

Regarding women's being in the positions of author and actor, Judith Butler tests a provocative postmodern feminist argument. Experiences, according to Butler, can only be understood as an effect of discourse. To speak, one has to be *inside* the discourse, that is participating in the expression of conventional and sometimes unexamined mainstream thought. Being inside the discourse, using the dominant language implicates women in creating the order they may be trying to resist. This is a problem for feminism, because it is a barrier to "the transformative potential of wording and analyzing one's experiences" (in Mulinari & Sandell, 1999, p. 293).

Magda Lewis (1993), reaffirms feminism's active role as a politics of social change in which women share meanings of their exploitation. She acknowledges theoretical struggles, but reminds readers that theory needs practice, and practice needs theory in order to achieve its goals. She leaves no doubt that women's experience is critical to transformative practice. Lewis would find an ally in Charlotte Bunch, who states that feminist theorizing must not be simply an interesting intellectual exercise, but that it be "crucial to the survival of feminism [and] a basis for understanding every area of our lives . . . " (Mulinari & Sandell, 1999, p. 296). These authors have entitled the closing pages of their article *Reclaiming Experience*. Feminism has understood that claims to represent collective voices of women cannot be supported, and have gone by the wayside. Women can only speak from their many positions within and outside the discourse, for themselves. Others may then pick up and weave the whole carpet, warp and weft co-existing, while not presuming to speak uninvited, for any contributor.

Ethnography

Ethnography is a specific qualitative method used to portray the social construction of groups, a picture of people in a particular cultural setting. Thomas, (1993) quotes Goodenough's definition of a culture as "the totality of all learned social behaviour of a given group: it provides the system of standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating and acting, and the rules and symbols of interpretation and discourse" (p. 12). With its history in anthropology, early ethnographers were intent on producing "descriptive accounts of non-literate peoples," often at a distance from their own place and culture. Without a written record, they needed to collect their data by being there in person. Being there

caused the evolution of fieldwork methods, including many variations of observing (experiencing) and interviewing (enquiring) (Wolcott, 1999, p. 30). Observing is of premier importance in collecting ethnographic detail.

Wolcott has partitioned an ethnography into two aspects, as "a way of looking" and "a way of seeing." A way of looking describes the data collection aspect of ethnography, with observation being the paramount activity (p. 43). A way of seeing refers to the lens the researcher uses to interpret the data. Thomas refers to the ethnographic way of seeing as defamiliarization, in which we "take the collection of observations, impressions . . . and other symbolic representations of the culture that seem . . . mundane, and we reframe them into something new" (1993, p. 43). Ethnography can have a critical bent, if the writer's purpose is to decode the ways that the symbols of culture create asymmetrical power relations and inequities (p. 43).

As I will explain more fully as I describe the research methodology, observation was not a method I could use extensively in the site I had chosen. However, my intention is to produce a picture of women in senior management in their natural setting within the Prince Edward Island Public Sector. My topic is about the experiences of these women within this culture, as well as my own experiences in the broader and still male-dominated culture. I therefore claim that my way of seeing is rooted in critical feminism and is ethnographically influenced.

Summary

In Chapter Three, I have identified key theoretical concepts of postmodernism, of constructivism, of critical theory, including feminisms, and of ethnography. I have

explained key concepts in feminism: the role of experience, the personal as opposed to the private, and patriarchy. In the next chapter, I describe the research methodology, before introducing the participants, in Chapter Five.

Chapter Four: Methodology

Knowledge is a rude unprofitable mass,
The mere materials of which wisdom builds,
Till smoother and squared, and fitted to its place,
Does but encumber whom it seems to enrich

– William Cowper, 1731-1800

The purpose of this research is to explore and critique how women in the senior management levels of the provincial public service experience the culture of their workplaces on a workaday basis. The results will add to knowledge about what sorts of learning and career supports would help women who want to advance within the Prince Edward Island public sector. Specifically, I am searching to deepen my understanding of what women in management need and want in terms of continuing education or life-long learner programs in my own work at the University of Prince Edward Island. Those needs identified are more likely to be served through policy and practice, if I am successful in substantiating continuing gender inequities within organizations. I have framed the research through the question, "How do women in senior management in the Prince Edward Island public sector, perceive the culture of their organization?"

This qualitative research takes the form of a critical feminist inquiry. Because it explores cultural meanings that women in senior management attach to their experiences, it carries an ethnographic tone. *Critical* ethnography describes, analyzes, and opens to scrutiny otherwise hidden agendas, centres of power, and assumptions that inhibit, repress, and constrain those people with less power. Critical scholarship, whether feminist

or ethnographic, "requires that commonsense assumptions be questioned" (Thomas, 1993, p. 2). As Thomas has explained, a critical ethnographer examines a question, always with the intention of acting upon the findings. My intention is to act, in ways that make sense in my situation. Taking actions might include updating curriculum, designing new programs, sharing information, and building new partnerships which take into account what participants have shared with me about their lives within their organizations. In addition, a new grounding in thought and consciousness gained through researching this topic are other skills and tools to utilize. In this chapter I am describing the research design that guides my thesis journey.

Site Selection

My research question relating to the culture of organizations focuses the selection of both the site and the sample. My question asks how women both are affected, and at the same time affect values, beliefs, behaviours, and traditions of their organizations. I chose to study public sector managers because, in Prince Edward Island, we have few organizations in the private sector of sufficient size to warrant hierarchical structures and differentiated managerial responsibilities. I limited the site to the provincial sector because there are significant cultural differences between it and the federal public sector. A comparison of federal and provincial culture might be completed as another study.

Public Sector Profile

The Prince Edward Island Public sector is 1,933 members strong, organized into 14 departments and agencies. In 2003, it was comprised of 1,115 males and 818 females in full- and part-time permanent positions (PEI Public Service Commission Annual Report,

2003, p. 42). In January 2005, there were 54 male managers and 25 female managers. Among directors, 32 were male and 18 were female. (Personal communication, Susan MacLeod, Director of Staffing, January 12, 2005). Table 1 compares the numbers of male to female officers at the Director and Manager levels within the Public Service for the years 1998, 2002, and 2005. I have not been successful in obtaining comparative data for managers in 1998.

Constraints in the April 2004 budget have resulted in a process of program review which could result in employee job loss. The Public Service Commission is aware that, based upon age and years of service, 43% of its managers could retire with a pension by the year 2008. In seven to ten years, 74% of managers could leave the organization (Personal communication, Susan MacLeod, January 2005). The Public Service Commission is motivated to investigate strategies for retention, training, and new recruitment. This background data is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Numbers of Directors and Managers by Sex in the PEI Public Service - 1998, 2002, and 2005.

	Director female	Director male	Manager female	Manager male
1998	15	46	not available	not available
2002	20	35	35	67
2005	18	32	25	54

Approach

I accessed the participants with the cooperation of the Director of Staffing in the Prince Edward Island Public Service Commission (PSC). This one gateway to the population eliminated the necessity of obtaining clearances from several sources. The PSC has been dealing with recruitment and retention issues, and from an equity perspective, it also recognizes the lack of balance in representation of women in leadership and management positions, and has named this group as a target group for equity measures (Prince Edward Island Public Service Commission, 2002, p. 12*)*. In making my approach to the Commission, I highlighted the fact that my study would form a trilogy with two other recent studies that have been completed by graduate students in Prince Edward Island during the past three years (Gallant, 2001; personal communication, Arsenault, 2004, in progress). In the first study, women managers provide insights into definitions of career success in both the public and private sectors, with recommendations for assisting in their achievement of career goals. The second explores women's leadership in a bureaucracy (Personal communication, Ann-Marie Arsenault, Royal Roads Master's student, July 2003). Taken together, the three studies could help to inform equity initiatives and human resource planning in the Prince Edward Island Public Service.

Researcher Credibility

As I have pointed out in Chapter One, I have been involved for the past eight years with the Management Development Program for Women (MDPW), and have met senior female managers in their roles as participants in the UPEI program, as sponsors for other

participants, and as instructors I have engaged in teaching. The MDPW gained its foothold in Prince Edward Island when the then-Minister of the Office of Higher Education, Honourable Jeannie Lea learned of the existence of an established curriculum for supporting women into management, at the University of New Brunswick. Ms. Lea's commitment to improving the gender balance among decision-makers within government and in the community translated into financial and moral support for bringing the MDPW to UPEI.

Another important connection for me happened early in the life of the MDPW. In 1997, I attended a powerful women's leadership forum financially supported by the Province and a Federal labour force development fund. The Generative Leadership Model which formed the basis of this event was nurtured by a loose network of committed women over the ensuing years. This network included several senior managers with whom I shared that important history. These two factors, commitment to MDPW and the development of personal networks, allowed for ready cooperation regarding access to the research site chosen for this study. In addition, I believe my relationships with senior managers, though more on a professional than a social basis, created a zone of safety and led to a level of frankness that I might not otherwise have been granted.

In summary, my chosen research site meets criteria set out by Marshall and Rossman for a workable site (1999, p. 69). Entry was possible; there was a high probability of a rich mix of processes, people, interactions, and structures of interest to the study; the researcher was able to build trusting relationships with participants; and data quality and credibility of the research have been reasonably assured.

Population

Who Are the Directors?

Women at the level of Director within the Prince Edward Island Public Service formed the population under study. The Public Service is comprised of employees governed by the PEI Public Service Act. This includes personnel who work directly for government, called the Civil Service, and those who work in arms-length organizations. An arm's-length organization's funding derives from the public purse, but it is governed by an appointed or elected board of directors or a commission. For this study, I chose to invite participation from Directors of the Civil Service proper. I did not include any Directors in arm's length organizations such as the Boards of Health or Education.

Directors in the Prince Edward Island public sector are those senior managers next in line of authority to Deputy Ministers. There are no Assistant Deputy Ministers within this structure, as there may be in larger provinces in Canada. Directors are typically career bureaucrats, while Deputy Ministers may be either long-time public servants or pleasure appointments of the current government. I chose to explore culture with Directors because they are more likely to have progressed through the Public Service, and to have experienced the culture at several levels. Directors are classed as excluded employees; that is, they are excluded from public sector union membership, and are governed by other terms and conditions of employment.

The Directors in the study are all white, able-bodied, and educated, possessing undergraduate, and in several cases, post-graduate level degrees. I did not collect data about the presence of children, or about sexual orientation. Both of these may be

significant factors in the career paths and perspectives of the participants. The topic of children was raised, often in the context of work-family balance. However, the topic of sexual orientation was not. This is not to imply that it is unimportant, but may indicate how the lives of senior public servants, or of almost any gay or lesbian person in positions of responsibility and visiblity, are circumscribed by that dimension. Because of the homogeneity among the participants, care must be taken when interpreting the study, not to generalize the results to represent the experience of women who are absent from the study.

Process

With permission of the Chair of the PEI Public Service, and through the cooperation of the Director of Staffing, letters of invitation to participate were sent to the entire population of 20 female Directors in the PEI Public Service. A courtesy letter of information about the study was distributed simultaneously to the Deputy Ministers of each of the departments to which the Directors belonged. The privacy and confidentiality of Directors were protected by routing the prepared letter through the Staffing Division, with responses to be mailed to me in the stamped self-addressed envelopes that I provided. Had I not been successful in achieving sufficient participation from among the 20 female Directors during the fall of 2003, I would have asked permission to contact women at the manager level. Due to the ready response from 11 Directors, I did not need to take this step.

Data Collection Strategies

Participant Selection

My approach to data collection was to conduct an initial focus group, followed by six in-depth interviews. From the 11 positive responses to my letter of request, I first chose the six interview participants by having a colleague draw their names from an envelope containing names of all possible participants. The remaining five participants were invited to a focus group which preceded the individual interviews. There were no participants who were both part of the focus group and the individual interviews. In the end, one focus group member was unable to attend, making that a group of four.

The Focus Group

The focus group was a valuable first step. It allowed me to ask questions and rely on a group dynamic while I found my voice in a discussion that was important to me. I also wanted the group to provide feedback on the questions I had developed. Were they sufficiently substantive? Would participants identify with them? Were there better questions that I should ask in order to reach my goal? In the focus group I could also become familiar with tape recording and transcribing before beginning the individual interviews. To increase my comfort level with the equipment and process, I also conducted and transcribed one pilot interview with a volunteer from a separate population.

Data collection began in January 2004 and was completed in May 2004. The focus group was approximately one hour in length. It was held over lunch in a boardroom in the government complex. The individual interviews were semi-structured in format, and about one hour in length. The focus group and individual interviews were taped and transcribed by me personally.

The Interviews

The six individual semi-structured interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the participants, and held in the location of their choice, usually their own office space. The interview schedule appears in Appendix "B." Being in the participants' space was beneficial, because it allowed me to observe physical signs of the culture; for example the office location, the type of reception area where they received visitors, the people who received them, and personal artifacts within the office. I found as I transcribed the data, that I could bring the person to mind in their setting, and be aware of their "Director" context.

Data Management

Following transcription of the first interview data, I sent the transcripts to each individual participant for review. A follow-up telephone interview was scheduled to ensure the accuracy of the transcript, correct erroneous interpretations on my part, identify missing words, and raise questions coming from the data. The second interview was not transcribed; however I made notes during and after the phone conversations. Throughout the research process, I have observed ethical requirements: the population received information about the steps I would take to protect their identities by assigning pseudonyms, removing context, and properly storing tapes and transcripts in a locked cabinet in my home. The participants were also assured of their right to strike aspects of their transcript from the data and to withdraw at any time with no adverse consequences. One participant did exercise her option to declare aspects of our conversation off-limits. When she read the transcript, she was uncomfortable with the degree of frankness she had

granted me. Participants in the focus group were cautioned that confidentiality could not be guaranteed in a group setting.

Data Analysis

Characteristics of Qualitative Research

Data analysis is the process of organizing, structuring, and interpreting the mass of collected data. The starting point for structuring the data was with the transcription of the audiotapes of each interview I had conducted. I chose to transcribe these myself, because I felt this would give me familiarity not only with each participant's words, but with the meanings in tone, and speech inflection. By the time I had completed the transcriptions, I had formed some tentative notions of headings or topics that seemed to be emerging most frequently. However, in compliance with Patton's advice (2000, p. 44), I was careful not to impose my ideas on the data too soon, and risking pre-empting the inductive process. Next, I read each transcript through, penciling key words and phrases in the margins. I did not begin to add codes to the data until I had cut and pasted the data by question, into composite documents, one for each of the 12 questions. At this point, I colour-coded and categorized the data, aiming to keep four to six categories per composite question. As I completed each step, I re-read the data in its new form.

An example of my process with the composite data may help explain. For question nine, "What are your perceptions of the equity and diversity policy of the public service?" I arrived at four response categories: feelings, perceptions, challenges, and recommendations. I next added a top sheet, on which I listed all the statements of each participant, relating to each heading. Here I relied on the colour-coded material, and also

scanned my original pencilled margins. I found that the act of physically writing the data into a list was a helpful exercise. Later, equity and diversity became a sub-theme under the theme "a public service culture." (Subsequently, it became a stand-alone chapter).

Reviewing the top sheets, I was next able to find overlapping topics, which I collapsed into one theme that best described this data. Eventually, I had subsumed all related topics into a heading broad enough to hold and connect them all. I also decided that some proposed topics did not merit extensive discussion, because they may have been raised several times by the same participant, and did not reflect a pattern in the perspectives of the Directors. This whole inductive process is referred to as "data reduction" (Marshall and Rossman, p. 203). I did not use a software program at any stage in the organization of the data.

As I have stated earlier, this is a qualitative study of women and the culture of senior management in a relatively large PEI setting. This study should reflect the following eight characteristics of qualitative research and of researchers, as they have been organized by Rossman and Rallis. These are so succinctly phrased that I have quoted them directly:

> [Qualitative research] (a) is naturalistic, (b) draws on multiple methods that respect the humanity of participants in the study, (c) is emergent and evolving, (d) is interpretive. Qualitative researchers (e) view social worlds as holistic and seamless, (f) engage in systematic reflection of their own roles in the research, (g) are sensitive to their personal biographies, and how these shape the study, and (h) rely on complex reasoning that moves dialectically between deduction and induction (cited in Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 2).

This study is categorized as a critical feminist ethnographically-influenced study. I have previously outlined, how the aspects "critical" and "feminist" are integral to the final product. I have also explained the nature of ethnographic writing. The next chapter, "A Public Service Culture" describes the ordinary occurrences, activities, and perspectives of women in Directorships within the Prince Edward Island Public Service.

Chapter Five: A Public Service Culture

Remember, I have done thee worthy service,

Told thee no lies, made no mistaking, served

Without grudge or grumblings

– *Shakespeare: the Tempest*

In this chapter, for the first time, readers will meet the Directors who agreed to participate in the interviews and the focus group. I have provided pseudonyms, and unfortunately cannot provide any information such as the size or location of their departments or their own physical attributes, which would make them more real. Given the small size of Prince Edward Island it becomes quite easy to identify individuals from contextual information. Keeping ease of identification in mind, I believe that I will have to omit details which could influence my interpretation of events, or limit interpretation by my readers. However, my ethical commitment is to protect the identities of participants. Therefore I have referred to participants by pseudonyms, but have generalized by using *Director* much more frequently than I would have preferred. I have chosen to capitalize my use of Director, in recognition that it is so frequently the closest to proper naming that I can achieve. The six Directors who were interviewed were: Glenna, Lorna, Meg, Barbara, Tara, and Rhonda. In the focus group I met Heather, Sarah, Emily, and Jill. The fifth participant was unable to attend the group meeting.

A Day at the Office

"Qualitative designs are naturalistic to the extent that the research takes place in a real-world setting" (Patton, 2002, p. 39). What could be more real-world than a Director's

typical day? For each participant the typical day holds meetings and interactions with staff. Meetings with senior management are on the agenda about once a week. These are meetings with an agenda, or as one participant put it,

> these are not for the sake of meeting. We are generally trying to move an initiative along. A certain act may have passed recently in the legislature, but now it must be implemented. Meetings [are] about how to do that.

It may fall to the Director to plan the agenda for certain meetings, and to attend on behalf of an absent Deputy Minister. In addition, according to Barbara, a senior manager may be "at the desk, working on projects, answering mail, responding to requests, answering questions, doing analysis." There are conversations with staff, both formal and informal. These can take up more time when there is a changeover of managers, because some employees prefer to bypass the new person and deal with the Director.

Physical location flavours the typical day. It can involve the Director with staff in the manner just illustrated, increasing trust, but also claiming valuable time. One Director commented that not being co-located with some of her staff has made it more difficult to create a unit identity. Similarly, maintaining a network with peers is a challenge if one is located outside the mainstream; in fact, being separated by just one government building can make or break ties to informal sources of information and support among female Directors.

Lack of predictability. The common thread to a typical day might also be its lack of predictability. One Director said:

> I don't think I have a typical work day, because it's very dependant on [whether] the Legislature is open, if we have a significant piece of legislation here in the office, if we're at a crucial stage of a Federal-Provincial agreement on a funding issue, or if we have a crucial HR issue on the go. Whatever will become the focus of my day will be dictated by what the most troublesome issues are.

In this fluid environment, agendas get derailed: "My days are quite unpredictable; like, rarely, rarely . . . do I get to accomplish what I had hoped to accomplish during the day." Another stated

"There would be some fielding phone calls for hot issues . . . trying to diffuse things before they get blown out of proportion. There is a lot of crisis management. I find the position very reactive as opposed to proactive."

The constants. At the same time, any organization is also characterized by certain things that hold constant, such as an inventory or year-end routine, as Tara pointed out. In government the constant is the budget cycle. It will be followed by the Throne Speech marking the opening of the Legislature. Because of budget cuts in this 2003-2004 fiscal year, the budget process within departments has been time consuming and stressful. One Director reported, "If I hadn't come in weekends there wouldn't have been one other piece of work . . . completed." She was very aware of the impact which the cuts during this budget cycle were having upon staff: "We are dealing with people in a much more delicate fashion . . . spending a lot of time trying to support people, and encouraging them to find different ways of doing what they'd like to do."

Uniqueness. As I went into this project, I pondered whether I would be looking for signs of one culture or of several. The Directors seemed to see something unique about their particular department which suggests smaller cultures existent within the larger public sector one. Tara noticed that in her department, staff tended to be more entrepreneurial because there were several contract workers in the mix. Their expectations were not of "jobs for life." They tended to be high performers who were accustomed to team work in their previous environments and their professional preparation, and they brought these attributes with them. She noted the team focus particularly, because while she views the public service as generally client-focussed, Tara sees her staff and peers as more team-focussed than usual. In her view, the greater turnover with contract employees brings about an infusion of new perspectives, as new employees come on stream.

Nature of Public Service

My challenge is to illuminate those abstract characteristics of the PEI Public Service, by drawing from the perspectives of certain female Directors to make the abstractions concrete. The Directors' stories represent the character, spirit, activity, traditions, and present-day behaviours of the Public Service as it is experienced by the group of women Directors. Through conversations with the Directors I listen for depictions of attitudes, feelings, symbols, beliefs, and behaviours that, taken together, portray the day-to-day life of the group.

My second question asked participants how being female affected their view of the culture. Magda Lewis writes that "being women and men within different social/cultural

environments renders not only our experiences, but our understanding of our experiences, different" (1993, p. 17). Simone de Beauvoir's perspective that women are made, not born, also captures the social constructions of woman hood (1974). We now accept that sex and gender shape experience, including the experience of female Directors within an historical organizational construct designed without women's participation (Acker, 2003, p. 50).

Rhonda responded to this question about being female by contrasting her experience in male-dominated and female-dominated cultures within the Public Service. In her view the male-dominated culture featured a more black and white decision-making style: "So my demeanour was more a spade's a spade. No beating around the bush and saying 'there's a little bit of grey there, a little bit of black'." Rhonda believes that the female-dominated culture attends to maintaining relationships and does not appear as goal driven. She recounts that the female-dominated group wants to "look after the social side of things and [not] insult anybody around the management table." Rhonda's awareness of the cultural difference resulted in her changing her behaviours in order to achieve a fit between her style and that of the present male leadership. Her observations are consistent with Rosabeth Moss Kanter's explanations of how perceptions in social situations, such as in being a token woman generate unique pressures on those members of a group. A person in the minority position may feel compelled to fit in or assimilate (in Ely, Foldy, & Scully, 2003, p. 38).

Another participant found that when she came into her organization as Director, she was dealing with a deeply rooted culture built upon the relationships of a relatively static

and mainly male staff complement. This is the challenge of being an outsider, both in terms of gender, and of not having risen to the position from within the hierarchy. "[At first I would go] in and work with them, and then go away, and they continue on [doing] their own little thing." This is a significant slice of culture to highlight, because it illustrates Kanter's work on the influence of "dominants" and "tokens" on an organizational culture. The introduction of a female Director results in greater solidarity among the dominants, and an exaggeration of her difference from them. In her research Kanter observed that dominants ensured that tokens got the message of their outsider status, by placing them in the position of interloper or interrupter in the flow of group events (Kanter, 2003, p. 43).

What's in a word? In the focus group of four Directors, the group began by listing descriptors of the public service. They quickly supplied adjectives such as *professional*, *corporate*, *extremely busy*, *overworked,* and *collaborative*. The conversation flowed easily from one to the other, incorporating one newer Director into the group as it went.

Heather: Well, I think our senior management is really quite professional. I'm impressed, favourably impressed that way.

Jill: I find in that in our department, people are quite collaborative.

Heather: It's better than it used to be, that way. It's more corporate thinking. It used to be that people were more in their separate islands; it's good to hear you say that, because I think the goal across government is to have more collaboration.

Sarah commented on the pace of things:

> One [term] that immediately comes to mind for me is "extremely busy," especially in this last year to year and a half, I find there is a momentum of activity in almost every corner of the work. Rather than sort of having a more, I would say, balanced approach. And I think that is a reflection . . . that we are in fact, becoming more corporate; and it has its downside in terms of the time to build relationships across sectors. Necessity and corporate focus are bringing people together fast. And I think if we sustain it, it will build relationships, just from the fact of rubbing shoulders with one another frequently.

Jill: And I think collaboration asks for more time. Because you can't . . . you know, you work in a different way, and in some cases it takes a lot more time. It can be good in certain cases, but in other cases, it can be, you know . . . (laughter).

Sarah: Yeah. If you're tuned to be action-oriented, if you're tuned to get results fast, sometimes collaboration can feel like a very slow and ponderous way to get there.

Jill: [But] at the end you have a better result, I think.

The focus group participants have given a description of an organization in transition from working as a traditional bureaucracy, to working with one another across departmental boundaries. They have touched on key ingredients which will make the transition successful, such as time and frequency of contact to nurture relationships. On the opposite quarter, they have marked what could sink the effort: pressure to achieve results quickly and allowing things to become unbalanced through overwork. Overwork and busyness, according to Emma is

> a story we tell ourselves. It's a self-perpetuating kind of story, that once it gets into the management team, people start to spin faster and faster, unless there is someone there to say "No, we don't have to meet Saturday morning to do that, or we don't have to meet late on Fridays."

I note that Emma is employing a constructivist view, when she attempts to change the narrative and reframe the meaning of being busy and overworked. She is interrupting a world view that has been in place at least since the evolution of the modern organization described by Kanter (1975, 42-49). As I will discuss later, the women are advocates for work life balance; they find that they are the someones who say "No."

Servants of the public. As Directors talked about the impact the public service has had upon them personally, they were depicting their roles as servants of the public in real terms. Meg captures this well:

> In my previous job as manager, I liked the work because it was work that was important, that people valued and needed. I think it's important to make a contribution and I also have a commitment to trying to improve the [government] system over time. My previous Director . . . set a really good example. We really are there to serve the public. We're not there to make as much money as we can; we're there to serve, and that's what [public service] is about.

The participants were quick to acknowledge the negativity they encounter as public employees. Meg said

> There are a lot of misconceptions, like they [public servants] don't work hard and they make lots of money. What I find irritating is that some people are slack . . . I

> think some people are in the job for the wrong reasons; they don't expect fulfilment from their job. It gives a bad reputation to the Public Service as a whole, because the vast majority . . . are really committed public servants.

Meg's concern about "slackers" is echoed by Glenna, who observed that the culture of the service includes a lot of tolerance for bureaucracy, meaning plodding and rule bound processes, and politics. "The word *bureaucrat* suggests a lot of red tape. They do a lot of paper shuffling and that kind of thing, and I much prefer *public servant."* One focus group participant noted the contradiction between the external culture which labels bureaucrats as holding plush, cushy jobs and not doing much, versus the internal culture in which "you are expected to be a bureaucrat." I take this expectation to mean fulfilling functions such as applying legislation, researching and developing policy background, weathering political decisions, consulting, listening, and serving the public interest. In other words there is a demand for work in the job.

Large P politics: the intersection of public service and politics. Participants identify the negative image of the bureaucracy as one challenge to serving the public; however an even larger one is politics. I am labelling two levels of politics *Large P*, for the relationships between the public service and the political machinery called government; and *small p*, to describe the internal politics of the public service system.

"Let the managers manage," said one participant when I asked them what they would change about their work life. "Let the managers manage" summarizes the participant's broader recommendation to separate the civil service machinery from the government machinery. The directors identify the key location of the Deputy Minister role as at the

permeable border between two systems. This is reflected in their comments on how business is conducted:

> . . . our Deputy Ministers get nickle and dimed to death with administrative stuff, like signing out-of-province forms, stuff the Directors should be able to handle. I know our roles require that the deputies do approve out-of-province travel, [but] it's the Director's budget. Our Directors are senior enough. You clutter up the Deputy's desk with trivia, and [then] you expect them to think globally.

I asked about the source of that aspect of Large P culture:

Heather: Well first, some Ministers want to see it, so its got to go by the Deputy's desk. They're dabbling in [administration] too much. [Instead] give directors their budgets and give them the guidelines, and let them run the department.

Jill: I think this comes from the public too. The Ministers are questioned on all their [responsibilities], and they don't feel confident when you don't have the information up front.

Heather: When they do get the budgets in the House, they get into stuff they should be nowhere near. They look foolish compared to other legislatures.

Emma: It's a lot about trust. And if we had more trust those issues wouldn't be there.

Some participants expressed a wish that Ministers and Deputies were more knowledgeable about the mandate and internal workings of their departments. The lack of clarity was especially noticeable during the recent downturn, when Ministers were looking for places to cut budgets: "And if I [as a minister] don't know what you [as a program] do and how you contribute to government and to serving the population of PEI,

you're out of here. . . ." As one Director in the focus group concluded, "I mean, those are the people who go out and get elected, right? And that's the process."

This Director also identified advice given by the bureaucracy as advice sometimes not taken, because the Large P decision is based upon what is going to satisfy the public for the next two years, and not what's best 20 years down the road. Rhonda has also experienced the frustration of seeing what needs to be done to spend tax dollars wisely, and then . . .

Rhonda: But when we start working on very significant policy directions that allow us to do something [we are told] No.

Isabelle: There are sacred cows?

Rhonda: Yes, sacred cows.

Isabelle: So you're feeling a little itchy, like, there's the public service system, and then there's the political system, right?

Rhonda: Yes. Take the politics out of government. I'm not partisan. I've worked for both parties and there is not a lot of difference in some ways. In the old Liberal government there were [also] lots of decisions [where] you'd have to take the politics out . . . to make the right decision. . . .

Barbara thought the Large P system could improve governance if it were to use its staff more effectively.

There are some really bright spots in the Public Service, bright people, and some ideas . . . The political leaders don't really know what they've got . . . I'd like to

see a better bridge between the politician and the public service, and that's the role the deputy ministers [should take].

Another participant viewed the role of the deputy as pivotal; however they are rarely given enough preparation and support; such as having an orientation course similar to that provided to Canadian Parliamentarians. She observed that a lack of role clarity and skills "could be at the root of some of the dysfunction of the public service."

Collaboration under fire. It happened that my data collection process coincided with a 2004 provincial budget crisis, in which each department of government was required to trim its spending and return funds to cut projected deficits. In all instances that I report in this sub-topic, the observations were volunteered by participants as they reflected on the culture of their organization. I did not ask a specific question about budget activity or about collaboration.

The impact of a public service in crisis was observable not only in what Directors told me but also in their physical expression and mood. Tara spoke with animation:

> If you had done this [interview] months ago, I wouldn't feel like I do today. [Normally] I feel really energized . . . I felt like we were getting somewhere, reaching some of our goals, and I love being busy. . . . I'll generate energy and pass that energy along to others. That's the kind of place this usually is. But right now it's killing me. I don't want to participate in this [process]. Right now it feels like we've taken ten steps forward and got cut back nine. . . . And how do I work with my superiors so that they don't get demoralized? A lot of this is about

people. If it was just about cutting money, but we've been told that we had to cut positions. And I find that really hard.

As I called participants for brief second interviews, they reported new insights because of the budget exercise. Barbara noted that Director behaviours varied by gender. While women in her department supported one another and expressed frustration with "unacceptable" processes handed down the line, men seemed to shrug this off, as if to say "this too shall pass." Meg commented that her assumption of a collaborative culture was shaken through internal debates surrounding the budget process. It is hard to talk about collaborative culture when jobs may be lost. In another department, Directors simply were more individualistic in their decisions, reverting to a pattern they had been accustomed to prior to the team-building efforts of the current female leadership. Meg stated that the females in the group were "out-muscled" with the males using "voices of authority and black and white thinking." Said Meg, "People will go along. Basically things are quite good with the Deputy we have here, [but] it can still be difficult."

Tara's experience was similar: "And the funny thing is, in this [budget] process the ones who've been more difficult, closed in, and over-protective of their turf have been the males. The females have said 'I can do this,' or 'Let's look at this.' So I think being female has something to do with that."

Nel Noddings theorizes a relational ethic of caring which she attributes more to femininity than to masculinity. This moral position is based upon care rather than Kantian duty. She portrays the "motive energy" of the caring person "flowing in the direction of

the other's needs and projects" (1994, p. 174). The women's declarations, ("I can do this") and invitations, ("Let's look at this") convey that kind of energy.

Andy Hargreaves would agree that being female does influence a scenario like Tara's (1996, p. 16). Writing about teaching, Hargreaves maintains that caring occupations require huge emotional labour. It is plain from earlier comments by the Directors, that constructing a public service is caring work. Hargreaves comments that "emotional labour is particularly important for women leaders in times of change" (p. 17). He refers to Blackmore's 1995 observation that women are the emotional managers of educational reform, while usually male top executives take the hard decisions which circumscribe the roles of others down the hierarchy. According to Hargreaves,"women use emotional management to offset resistance to the changes and stimulate the desire to make them work." (p. 17). This is consistent with Jo Anne Pagano's view of women as being in the role of guardianship of culture, but not in the role of creators of culture. "Women do not beget culture; they mind it–both in the sense of tending, and in the sense of obeying" (Pagano, 1994, p. 256).

It appears that the men of equal status perceive their relationship to their work differently than the female directors do. The Canadian Centre for Management Development (CCMD) reported that in a study of 20 female and 20 male public service managers, there were definite gender differences in regard to what influences work satisfaction. While the women rated support of co-workers and supervisors as most influential, men were most satisfied when there were no barriers to carrying out their

projects (Phillips, Little, & Goodine. 1996, p. 32). Certainly a budget cut qualifies as a barrier. Women it seems, focus on relationship, while men focus on task completion.

Sociologist Arlie Hocschild writes that an alternate reaction to overwork besides excessive effort, is removing oneself physically or psychologically from the process (cited in Hargreaves, 1996, p. 17). It appears that this is what the male Directors did when they disengaged from previously collaborative processes within their departments. Taken together, this constellation of research I have explored explains both the caretaking and the extra effort by the women Directors in the public service culture, to collaboratively make the budget directives work.

Career Satisfaction of Executive Women

In Orser's study of high performance organizations referred to earlier, one-third of female senior executives surveyed reported leaving positions in which they felt under challenged and bored (2000, p. 13). My question about a similar possibility of leaving because of boredom or blocked career path, elicited several insights into the nature of work in the public sector. Barbara credited her organization with being flexible about employees exploring lateral opportunities, and taking leave to pursue other interests. She viewed her department as a learning organization, possessing at least some of the attitudes and behaviours prescribed by Peter Senge (1990) as necessary to a learning organization.

Supervisor relations. Another participant remarked on the importance of having the right supervisor. "For me, the most important person is your supervisor . . . and if you

have a good relationship there, it means a lot. And I do." Lorna's recognition that "as an employer, Government has been extraordinarily good to me," echoes this sentiment.

In a longitudinal study of supportive managers in the Canadian Public Service, Linda Duxbury, Lorraine Dyke, and Natalie Lam surveyed 40,000 employees regarding the factors that attract and keep talented people within an organization. Their findings confirm the provincial Directors' views. Employees want to be involved in the continuous process of learning, and lateral appointments and special projects effectively encourage a sense of going forward. In addition, the quality of supervision has a huge impact. An increase in the numbers of supportive managers cut job stress by almost half; twice as many employees reported high job satisfaction; organizational commitment rose by a third, and absences dropped by about 15% (Duxbury, Dyke, & Lam, 1999).

Subjective effect of a public service career. Many participants in this research are career civil servants. My question about the impact of being a public servant yielded more data about their individual versions of the Public Service in Prince Edward Island. For Meg, the Service has engaged her passion for making change in certain societal issues, "because it was work that was important, that people valued and needed." Another participant drew satisfaction from having an impact where she is: "I really, really like the impact I can have here. I'm right in the heat of everything. . . . I pretty well have involvement in every decision that's made in [my department]." Barbara credited her career with offering opportunities to grow and change, finding things out about herself that she'd never imagined were within her. The experiences included leadership development opportunities and challenging work assignments. The women in the focus

group agreed that it is possible to feel a degree of power. The question I asked was "what makes you feel powerful at work?"

Sarah: Being listened to.

Heather: Being respected.

Jill: I find when I'm faced with obstacles and problems, that's when I feel like . . . the adrenalin comes rushing in! (Laughter).

Isabelle: So that's where the power comes from; it's from challenge.

Heather: Well I think respect is exceedingly important. I'm not saying that people have to like each other to work together. That's nice too . . . but what's really important is that they respect each other.

Sarah: I think I feel the most power when I can take a project and see it all the way through. There's a great sense of 'whoa, that was possible.' That's when I feel good.

Altogether, among senior women in the Prince Edward Island Public Service, there does not seem to be the strong measure of dissatisfaction which was reflected among the executive women in the study for Catalyst and the Conference Board of Canada (Gerkovich et al.), as well as in Linda Duxbury's research on world-class workforces. In fact they report feeling empowered, involved, and respected. If there is a downside, an issue which emerged is the lack of possibilities for continued career advancement. One participant was uneasy with the idea of her present position as the possible end point in her career path. The size of the Prince Edward Island Public Service limits the possibilities for advancement as the candidate moves into senior positions. There are fewer and fewer options, for both women and men, unless one takes a risk to attempt a

transition to the federal system. In this province, Veteran's Affairs Canada has the largest Federal presence, at 1,154 employees, including 81 executive managers and professionals (Personal communication, staff of Departmental library, March 17, 2005). Other federal departments are typically small. In addition, the second language requirement in the federal service can limit further opportunities unless one is prepared to take language training.

In this chapter, I have developed a picture of the day-to-day environment of senior women within the Prince Edward Island Public Service. In their own voices, they have described aspects of the organization which are specific to public service: its relationship to the political arm of service; the covenant relationship they have with serving the public; time-related contradictions, such as how quickly and how slowly the context can change; what frustrates, and what satisfies. Because the topic of equity and diversity policy generated a lot of discussion, I have devoted the next chapter to it alone.

Chapter Six: On Diversity and Equity

If we cannot now end our differences, at least we can help make the world safe for diversity – *John F. Kennedy*

Views and Feelings on Diversity Policy

My question to participants was "what are your perceptions of the equity and diversity policy of the public service?" When I decided to include an exploration of equity and diversity policy in my research, I was expecting that this question would serve as an indirect way to tease out further perspectives on gender and culture. Specifically, I was interested in whether or not the Directors viewed themselves or other women as in need of systemic interventions to level the managerial playing field. As Robin Ely and Erica Foldy note, "Gender is often a central focus of many diversity initiatives, so the logic surrounding gender equity becomes intertwined with diversity more broadly" (2003, p. 324). Joan Acker reminds readers that gender neutrality is often a starting point in explaining how men and women are differently affected by organizations. Gender-constructed behaviours and attitudes then "contaminate" that neutrality (2003, p. 49).

In April and May of 2002, the PEI Public Service Commission surveyed 2,687 employees to collect data in connection with its new Diversity and Equity Policy. The response rate was 43.8%, with 228 persons self-identifying as members of five groups designated under the policy for employment-related considerations. Over half, or 117 of those responses came from the designated group *women in management*. The gender breakdown of the 228 respondents overall was 70% female, 30% male. I will be referring to this report, as I discuss the data from my interviews. However I must emphasize that

the Public Service Commission considered that "this low return rate . . . limits the confidence with which conclusions may be made about how representative these results are . . . " (Phillips, 2002, p. ii). There are plans to complete a second survey and to encourage a higher return rate (Personal communication, T. Tennekone, Diversity Consultant, Fall, 2004).

In some ways, my question has accomplished the goal of teasing out gender perspectives on diversity policy; however, participants also took this conversation in unexpected directions. They said less about women as a designated group, and more about practical implementation issues, regardless of the designated group. In fact, I was surprised that no participant spoke of themselves as members of the groups *women in senior management*, and *women and men in non-traditional occupations*, which are designated for consideration under the Prince Edward Island Public Service Equity and Diversity Policy. This is especially remarkable because of the high number of responses contributed to the Equity and Diversity survey by the Women in Management category (Phillips, 2002, p. 6). This could be interpreted to mean that the participants think of themselves as managers first, with gender being a secondary workplace identity. It could also be an indicator of the degree of gender assimilation which has occurred, so that participants are not bringing their whole identity to the workplace.

With regard to my question, feelings and views of the women in senior management about the value of this policy varied widely. Two participants who supported having a policy in place considered it "really important" and "forward thinking." One Director

thought that the policy was "a frill adopted off the shelf" from another province, and as such it had missed the mark as a policy for Prince Edward Island:

> I'm a little uneasy on the diversity one, on what's being made of it. I went to the workshops when the policy came out, about what can we do to increase diversity. We don't have a very diverse population to begin with; there's something artificial, like we're doing it because they're doing it in other provinces where there is a huge gap between who's in the police force, the civil service, or something. So it's not something I've thought a whole lot about.

It is significant that the Director does not count gender as one type of diversity, when she and others say the Public Service does not manifest much diversity. This situation demonstrates that gender has become an invisible category, and lends support to my concerns that as a society we perceive that women's equality has been fully achieved.

Barbara observed that this policy so far, could not compare in impact to that registered with the introduction of the harassment policy:

> Well, it was a very male culture when I first came into it. Things as simple as no girlie calendars around any more. Women who have been harassed on the job felt freer to come forward, or go face to face with the person who is harassing. It is no longer acceptable to use sexist language. It isn't part of everyday conversation, as it was. So that's definitely had an effect.

Although the harassment policy may have had an immediate impact, the problem has not been eliminated. Of the 117 women in management responding to the Diversity Survey, about one-quarter reported one or more experiences of disadvantage including lack of

support and harassment in the workplace. Overall, 39 persons in the five groups reported experiences in this category. Three categories of experiences of lack of support or harassment emerged. These included exposure to inappropriate language; feeling a lack of respect by exclusion or not being taken seriously; and feeling that their formal complaints were ignored, or no steps were taken to address them (Phillips, 2002, p. 14).

Implementation Challenges

As with any policy, bridging the space between policy formation and implementation is a challenge. The perception of homogeneity in the community and the Public Service, plus the small scale of the workforce in the Canadian context, leads to thinking that it is unrealistic to set targets. Paraphrasing the wisdom of management strategist Peter Drucker, Linda Duxbury says that measuring something is a precursor to managing it. Using Drucker's corollary, Duxbury supports target setting (slide presentation, Charlottetown, 1999). In fact she warns that the lack of targets signals that the employer is not committed to its own policy (Personal notes from a seminar presentation to the Federal Public Service, Charlottetown, 1999).

Other barriers to implementing a diversity policy emerged, and include: unintended effects of special funding, lack of suitable candidates, and lack of leadership. Tara noted that sometimes funding can drive a diversity hiring, and it is then supported only as long as the funding lasts. Another Director cited lack of suitable candidates as a reason not to start down the diversity road. Tara has identified both the pull of funding and the lack of suitable candidates as part of the vicious circle of trying to make the policy work:

> But I don't think it's actively put into place. I don't think people actively recruit people with handicaps, or of colour or whatever, [through the normal process] when they can get funding from some kind of an organization that encourages them to [take an incentive]. This stimulates hiring. However it's a kind of a vicious circle because sometimes there isn't someone who is qualified to do the work; so therefore you don't hire. So that's a kind of perpetuating problem.

One way out of this dilemma is to conceptualize the hiring as a developmental position, and proceed from that point of view, to support the candidate's learning in the role.

Reality connection. Diversity policy can be an instrument of awareness and education; however, as Tara noted, unless participants can apply new knowledge to a situation directly affecting them, the value is lost:

> And people don't participate in education unless they're living it. So if I work with a group of people that are pretty much the same, and somebody says "Well, we're going to give a workshop on how to work with a disabled or an aboriginal person," or if it's 50 men, "How you're going to work with a woman." Unless the situation is presenting itself and is real, nobody pays attention too much.

This principle appears to apply as well to directors, since the ones with the most direct experience with diversity demonstrated the most learning. For example, one participant cited demographics which predict that the province will replace knowledge workers who are soon due for retirement, through immigration. Another spoke about the senior manager's role in helping to integrate the person hired under equity guidelines. She stated that managing the differences introduced into the work culture, and helping co-workers to

understand these differences were paramount. " . . . [Y]ou have to do a lot more than tolerate [them]. You have to get to know them and respect them, and like anyone else, get to know their strengths and help them along."

Leadership tested. Researchers at The Centre for Gender in Organizations at the Simmons School of Management have identified eight preconditions for making a paradigm shift such as promoting diversity (Thomas & Ely, 2003, p. 370). Two of these speak to leadership, which is what Tara is identifying when she speaks of doing more than tolerating difference. The first is that leaders must expect that in a diverse workforce there will be different views and approaches to doing the work. It is critical in the implementation, that leaders truly value diverse opinions, insights, and ways of working. The second is that the leadership must look for both the learning opportunities and the challenges that multiple perspectives bring to an organization.

The possibility of creating learning opportunities through diversity actually surfaces in a third option, providing a choice to move beyond models which aim toward either assimilation or market-based exploitation of difference (Thomas & Ely, 2003, p. 369). Much of what Tara prescribed as the leader's role is positive: respect employees from identity groups, understand their strengths, and help them along. However, beyond a fairness rationale lies integration, a model of critical reciprocity, which capitalizes on the value that diversity presents, promotes an ethic of fairness, and seizes the opportunity to make the most of our diversity to the benefit of all Canadians.

Monitoring hiring processes. Another participant thought that some equity issues could be managed through quality human resource management practices. For example, if

women are not gaining fair representation in senior positions, discovering and removing barriers to participation is a better response than falling back upon a policy. Our conversation went as follows:

Director: I've always been a big proponent of ensuring the best person gets the job regardless of race, gender, and of those sorts of things. At the same time it is important that the opportunities are there. Are the women applying for the senior management jobs, and if not, why not?

> Like, are there [unrealistic] requirements? In senior management you often expect a large time commitment; often you work overtime, there may be a large travel commitment. Things conflict with other roles and responsibilities of women, such as looking after their families at home, which make these sort of positions less attractive. And I think that's an issue to address, as opposed to saying we want *x-number, x-percentage* of women, in these jobs.

Isabelle: So what you would support is getting the job by merit?

Director: By merit. Oh, absolutely!

This Director's view is that if there are no barriers built into the job description, persons should then expect to compete on the basis of merit. However, as Joan Acker has written,"the structure of the labour market, relations in the workplace, the control of work process, and the underlying wage relation are always affected by symbols of gender, processes of gender identity, and material inequalities between women and men" (2003, p. 52). While organizations on the surface appear to be gender neutral, Acker argues that this is not so. As I have explained in my introductory chapter, gendering occurs within

interacting processes such as the construction of divisions along gender lines; and interactions within and across the sexes, which sometimes produce patterns of dominance and submission. Systems of job evaluation are equally gender-laden (p. 52). Acker theorizes that under usual circumstances, a woman or a person from a racial minority, for example, fundamentally cannot achieve a level playing field in the workplace. Two barriers exist. Firstly, managers are still overwhelmingly male; thus their concept of *job* carries the male world view of its designers. Secondly, when a job is described, it has no occupant. It is a job for an abstract "disembodied worker" which can be rendered concrete only by the insertion of a worker into that slot (Acker, p. 54). In social and economic theory, workers are assumed to exist only for the work, and cannot have other concerns which distract them from the duties of the job. Acker further states that women are "assumed to have legitimate obligations other than those required by the job . . . "(p. 54). Therefore the worker who comes closest to the theoretical disembodied worker is a male who is supported, possibly by a wife in an unpaid caretaker role. She is quick to acknowledge that many males today do not fit the prototype worker either. However the constructions of the categories of *job* and *worker* remain as powerful sub-texts within the culture of hierarchies today. Thus as a starting point, the concept of merit is inherently flawed.

Returning to the Director who shared the assumption that women may encounter more conflicts with the requirements of a senior management job, I have demonstrated that she was quite accurate in her perception. Although she assumed that organizations are gender neutral, I have drawn upon the work of Joan Acker to substantiate that

organizations are overwhelmingly gendered (2003, p. 49-61). I agree with the participant's suggestion that addressing the barriers to women's full participation will have a more lasting effect than setting targets. I do question whether these two strategies are mutually exclusive. Targets can be a way to measure movement as we attempt a cultural shift away from privileging the disembodied worker.

Recommendations

So what actions would the Directors in my study suggest to further the implementation of the Equity and Diversity Policy? What could help it, as an official directive to the Public Service, achieve its desired ends? Meg commented:

> I think it's a good forward thinking policy. It's difficult to put into practice. People need to keep being aware that it's there, and that they need to take these considerations into account when making hiring decisions. . . . It probably needs to be pushed; people need to be reminded.

Her words are echoed by Tara who reiterated the importance of making training and awareness relevant to the moment when the policy is being applied. The Public Service Commission's survey made similar recommendations. Seventy-one respondents indicated their willingness to participate in training or in helping train others. Training for managers was explicitly suggested by some respondents (Phillips, 2003, p. 15). A second related request of these respondents was to have managers listen respectfully, and to act on complaints. To do this, managers may need to acquire at least basic conflict resolution skills, as well as a firm grasp of the process for correctly dealing with a complaint.

The Public Service Commission could look at the early intervention model into various forms of harassment in use in the Federal Public Service in Prince Edward Island. This involves staffing an office in a benign location, to which employees may take their concerns. This office might be designed as a part of the Employee Assistance Program, with an education and awareness function included.

Finally, like many initiatives to improve organizational life and enable organizations to live their purpose, integrating equity and diversity policy requires leadership. In this case it is very much at the level of attitude that leadership is required. Knowing how to properly administer hiring and complaint processes are not enough for leaders. As Nicholas Burbules and Suzanne Rice write about the possibility of pursuing a dialogue across difference, "the greater our awareness of, and sensitivity to dimensions of difference, the stronger the imperative to pursue means of understanding across them" (1993, p. 15).

Chapter Seven: A Female-Influenced Culture

I think as do many others, that the
problems concerning the homeless,
drugs, the environment and our
country and the world should be solved.
I think a woman could handle it.

Melissa Mabey – a young woman of Nova Scotia

I was asking Barbara about how being a women affected her view of the culture in the public service. She told me that she was always aware of being female in senior management, and of being conscious that the numbers are not very high. She commented that it was in the culture for some women to check their gender at the door on the way in, and "behave more as clones of men," while other women "come to work as women." This is observable in their dress, but more importantly, Barbara notices, they are whole people who integrate their lives lived elsewhere into who they are at work. They exude a presence that the women who surrender their gender identity at the door are unlikely to replicate.

I am searching for a measure of the impact women are having in this culture. The participants in this research represent the first wave of women to achieve critical mass at the upper echelons of public sector management in Prince Edward Island. My next question was to ask what evidence there is of a female subculture across government. I was trying to understand whether women in senior positions supported beliefs and goals that were unique or distinctive to their gender group. These beliefs and goals could be in

opposition to the overarching goals of the organization, but, as Joanne Martin points out, not necessarily so (1992, pp. 83-99).

> **Barbara**: Oh yes. A *female-influenced* subculture. It's not a *female-only* subculture, but there are some groups, some formal, some informal that have a strong female influence, or . . . no, *bias* is not the right word. But if there weren't women in these positions you would not see some things happening in government.

What are the perceptions of the senior women about the effects they are having within their various work groups, agencies, departments, and within Government overall? Combing through the transcribed interviews, I have identified claims by women that they act as leaders and agents of change, as managers of the organizations's collective human resource, and as voices for equity and work life balance. These Directors serve as role models and path finders. They will be succeeded by young university-educated women and men who are already entering junior management positions in Government. The Directors express their excitement about the qualities which these younger managers bring. But at the same time they voice concern, especially for young women. As the Director's reflections will reveal, they believe that young women continue to encounter gender barriers as the price of claiming their careers as women in the public service hierarchy.

Leadership

Asking the good question. When I asked Barbara the question about what she thought she brings to the public service, her face lit up. This question was on her mind, because of

an exercise the Directors across government had recently undertaken. They were writing *accountability agreements*; that is, in line with a thrust toward results-based management, they were learning how to articulate their own accountabilities as a starting point before involving other staff. Her colleagues often mention that she can be counted on to ask the unusual question. She terms this a talent for positive deviance. "It's positive deviance, and I think much of my work life I've brought that wherever I've been, but I didn't really learn to articulate it until [a later stage]." Positive deviance is a valuable tool for change, because it interrupts the status quo, and reminds leaders of the power of unexamined world views or hegemony.

Team environments. Lorna described the concentrated effort in her department, to level the hierarchy and build team environments through carefully considered staffing processes and mentoring. She noted that this direction was initiated by a previous Deputy Minister; however she has maintained the initiative and added her own flavor to it by being very strategic about fitting new members into the existing team. As the participants thought about evidence of a female culture, viewed that culture through a gender lens, or described their own imprint upon the public service organization, people issues frequently surfaced. Respecting staff confidences, curtailing gossip, believing that people give their best, drawing upon staff expertise, encouraging participation in learning and development opportunities, and supporting flexible work life practices emerged as positive applied leadership behaviours from their daily practice.

Artifact of change. Rhonda told me a story about her unintentional contribution to changing the culture, by relaxing the look of a Director's office. She described the

circumstances, as a young and expecting mother, of having coincidentally inherited a rocking chair in her office. On one occasion the Minister passed by while she was working late. He was puzzled by the scene. As she concluded: "No lights on . . . pregnant and a rocking chair. He just found this so odd, that this was how I would set up an office. It wasn't bureaucratic, it wasn't the right environment. It wasn't the norm.[But] I wouldn't say it's like that today." Rhonda's office space fulfilled what Barbara had hoped for. A woman manager was taking her whole self to work. She was using physical space to "work against . . . feelings of alienation that affect our institutions, by bridging the gap between the demands of efficiency and the need to nurture the human spirit" (Helgesen, 2003, p. 27).

Inclusive decisions. Two of the six Directors interviewed identified decision-making style as a leadership contribution. Tara saw a gender link underlying her insistence on involving staff in the critical decisions. The following dialogue regarding budgetary cuts illustrates this:

> I'm not making these decisions by myself. I don't want to impact on the people who know the job better than I do. I felt it was really important to bring them in and say 'You've got to help us here. You know your work better than I do. I may be your . . . Director, but I can't know everything.' I don't know if this would have happened if I had not been there. Certainly the last time we went through cuts . . . [even] directors weren't brought in, and it created a lot of bad feeling. . . .
>
> So I think that is an example of something I would have brought as a woman. I think that women tend to want to [include others] more. They don't want to be the

boss. I have no interest in bossing people around at all. But I want to be someone who moves the organization along.

Tara noted her strength at being a big-picture thinker. When she finds her unit in a huddle and upset at something going on in the system, she can see "two sides, three sides, ten sides to the issue. . . . There are a whole lot of relationships there. I think I bring that too, that I can see different points of view." Tara's perspective on complexity contributes to a deeper understanding by the staff of the issues faced in their department.

The myth of the female advantage. Perhaps one of the more provocative views on women's leadership emerged from comments about the meaning of a burgeoning presence of women in politics and the senior bureaucracy in Prince Edward Island in the early 1990s.

Director: But now [pause], I find we're not progressing as much, perhaps with the exception of Patsy [MacLean] and Shauna [Sullivan Curley], at the Deputy level.

Isabelle: You mean that women are not progressing, or not arriving at that level?

Director: No, I find women are, perhaps, but . . . [hesitating]. I felt differently when Verna [Bruce], Jeanette [MacAulay], and that whole gang were moving through it, that there was more openness, and we were progressing more than we are today. And I can't tell you exactly why. It's just my gut feeling, in terms of female influence and having a real solid say at the Deputy level and at the Cabinet level.

In a second interview I probed this viewpoint further, and the Director compared the present with that past era when Catherine Callbeck was Premier, and female Ministers and Deputies included Jeannie Lea, Verna Bruce, and Jeanette MacAulay. While she did

not want to appear negative about who is in leadership, "today there is an all-male team and a different style." As a possible explanation she suggested that previous experience with a group of strong women may have changed how she now views things around Government.

This latter observation validates Joan Acker's point that it is difficult to discern difference when only the dominant or normative culture is present (2003, p. 49). It also speaks to the power of role models in changing deeply rooted structures and culture in organizational life. In the era of Premier Catherine Callbeck (1993-1996), public life in Prince Edward Island also featured a female Lieutenant Governor, a female Leader (and only elected member) of the Opposition, as well as the first female President of the University of Prince Edward Island. The loss of these leaders translates to a loss of both networks and role models for those in the minority position.

What the participant may have been perceiving in the more feminized culture of the previous Callbeck administration, has been called *the female advantage* or *post-heroic leadership* in organizational literature (Fletcher, 2003, p. 205; Helgesen, 2003, p. 26). In contrast to the heroic action of one charismatic individual, the post-heroic model describes leadership as a "collaborative social process, one that is more mutual, and relies on egalitarian . . . interactions between leaders and followers (Fletcher, p. 204). A post-heroic model, according to Fletcher, challenges the *who* of leadership by urging that rugged individualism is not the key to success. It challenges the *what* by valuing collective learning and mutual effort. Finally it challenges the *how* of leadership by

insisting that egalitarian relations and emotional intelligence are the premiere skills of a leader for today (p. 205).

This description of the new leader is congruent with the stereotypic socially ascribed description of women's relational style. When the profile of the new leader first emerged in research it was quickly christened the female advantage because women already possessed the required qualities, whether through learning, nature, or some other effect. In the past, within the Management Development Program for Women, I had distributed an article from *Business Week* entitled "As Leaders, Women Rule," which celebrated the female advantage. However, as the Director in my study confirms through puzzling over lost ground after the Callbeck years, the female advantage had failed to materialize in North America.

Fletcher cites several factors to explain why the female advantage has not been realized (2003, p. 206). Firstly, leaders continue to focus on individual action when they tell their own success stories. As a corollary to individualism, there are few high profile leaders willing to advocate for a shift to relational leadership. Sylvia Bashevkin also frames individualism, capitalism and rationalism together, within the societal context of neo-conservative thinking. This world view is reflected in politics, economic policy, and obviously, within business and management. As I will demonstrate later, neo-conservatism had a huge impact on women's equality in North America and Britain during the 1980s and 1990s (Bashevkin, 1998, p. 13-46).

The second barrier is tied to language and culture.The word "work" is associated with symbols of masculinity such as taking charge, and being a knowledgeable and competent

individual in the public world. In Chapter One, I referred to Rosabeth Moss Kanter's use of the term *masculine ethic*, to capture the normative work culture. Relational qualities are not a part of the masculine ethic because they are associated with the caring work of women in the private sphere. Like women's unpaid labour, they are assumed to take little skill, and may in fact be categorized as a personality trait (Fletcher, 2003, p. 207).

The third barrier is related once more to individualism. In a nutshell, strong individuality and belief in meritocracy together are the antithesis of mutuality and openness to working collaboratively. Needing others, according to the masculine ethic, is a weak position held by a person who lacks the power to demand something and win. Thus, while it is not possible to prove the existence of a more relational style in the Large P leadership during the premiership of Catherine Callbeck, this was a time of extraordinary representation of women in key political and public service positions in Prince Edward Island. There was contrast enough to suggest that a germ of post-heroic leadership existed, and could emerge again in the future.

Work and Life Balance

There were twelve questions in the interview protocol for this study. None was directly about work-life balance. Therefore, I think it significant that the participants raised this issue in responses to eight of the twelve questions, and in the focus group as well. One predominant theme concerns the leadership the Directors and other women have shown in advocating for changing the paradigm about time commitments required in the workplace.

Talking about the impact of female Directors, one participant identified herself as "a model for a sort of healthy work and life balance," which can be observed in the flexible work arrangements she has negotiated with the employer. She has taken advantage of special assignments in order to freshen her perspective, and has experimented with shortened work weeks while successfully holding her senior portfolio. Another Director told of defending staff in the face of criticism by a senior bureaucrat, who complained that a certain Department abruptly emptied of staff at 5:00 pm each day: "And I said, 'Our professional staff are people who go home, feed their families, bathe their kids, and put them to bed. Then they sit down and work for three hours.' I've been communicating the message that work values have changed but the [demand for] output is increasing."

Time Bind

Arlie Hochschild (1993) has documented a time bind for working parents of either sex who want to spend more time with their children, but fear others' negative perception that they are not serious contenders for the next rung on the corporate ladder. She has found that the most educated and advanced professionals, such as the Directors in this study, experience the most severe time bind (p. 198). This happens despite their being more powerful, more articulate, and more in control of resources to spend on supportive services than lower-payed employees. Hochschild proposed that a hypothetical movement against *time famine* cannot be restricted to the workplace alone. It would have to make the links to family life if it were to accomplish anything in workplaces (p. 246).

Although there is a tendency in the literature to look at organizational demands as the source of time stress, Hochschild has identified another major stressor in issues of work-

family balance. It is workers' curious relationship to work itself. Her respondents plainly derived more gratification from the workplace in terms of identity, challenge, and escape, and less from increasingly devalued family life (1993, p. 198). Hochschild's view is that as a society we are being pulled deeper into the vortex of a work-family system which has spun out of control. Women, she asserted, have accepted the work place on male terms, while men have not embraced equal participation in home life. Thus, the time bind affects women disproportionately because employment is not optional for most women, yet they continue to anchor family life, where, according to Hochschild, they find fewer and fewer rewards. Work is revered in North American society, and both men and women enjoy feeling appreciated for their job performance. "Cutting back on work hours . . . means loosening ties to a world that, tension filled as it is, offers insurance against even greater tension and uncertainty at home" (p. 247).

Rendering the time bind concrete. Ron Coleman's secondary analysis of Statistics Canada data in the context of Atlantic Canadian women's health (2000), supports Hochschild's analysis of a time bind, including the acknowledgment that women are in the work force to stay. Tracing time stress in the 1990s, Coleman had documented increases for women and men at every age category. Women record about 20% higher levels of time shortage than their male counterparts, although men are rapidly closing this gap (p. 24). For those who are working (unemployment represents yet another set of imbalances), hours are increasing; the pressures about which workers are complaining are real. In a two-parent family today, employed parents are logging about 20 hours more per week, in combined paid and unpaid work, than their ancestors did in 1900. Married

mothers working full-time typically add 34 hours per week in unpaid work, for a total work week of 73.5 hours (p. 23). Because women continue to bear the larger share of household responsibility, in statistical terms they "have experienced an absolute loss in free time" (p. 23).

The time bind has been documented to have severe health consequences, such as depression, cardiovascular illnesses, immune system disorders, and unhealthy lifestyle behaviours such as increased smoking and unhealthy weight gain (Coleman, 2000, p. 24). Coleman has stated, with Hochschild, that work life balance initiatives must take a more holistic view. Otherwise as the latter has stated so eloquently, "policies may serve as little more than fig leaves concealing long-hour work cultures" (Hochschild, 1993, p. 248).

In Hochschild's view, the lack of movement toward family-friendlier work situations is related to male leadership at the top, to leaders who do not fully experience and own the issue of balancing family life with work life. Thus the hope expressed by Tara holds promise, that "more women getting into management positions will focus more recognition of this issue." Fortunately, the best practices of other countries such as Denmark demonstrate that it is possible to shorten work hours without compromising productivity. In fact, by redistributing work hours, workers with too little work may also be served (Coleman, 2000, p. 25).

A retention issue. Rhonda has pointed out that work life balance is a retention issue for the public service, especially regarding the new generation of employees: "I make sure, that everyone is gone from here at 5:00 pm. We can't expect the new management

group to be working like we were." "Like we were," as she described, was her own story in a very male-modeled organization about a decade ago, where "we just worked our butts off. I can remember being pregnant, and going in at 7:00 am . . . [and] then not coming home until 7:00 at night. And I hadn't eaten anything but coffee. [I remember] feeling very, very sick. . . . I would never do that today." Rhonda reflected that this was the style of her male leader at the time, and she did not want to show any weakness, especially about being pregnant. Today, according to Rhonda, when young women stop to admire the visiting newborn children of colleagues on maternity leave, they are simultaneously voicing the possibility that they will not be having children. Women interested in a management career track are aware that work-life balance is unlikely to be achieved in the near future.

Concerns about retention were echoed by the focus group, which noted the superior benefits offered by the Department of Veteran's Affairs, the largest Federal presence in Prince Edward Island:

Sarah: . . . what worries me the most is we may not keep them [young women].

Heather: They will have other opportunities as the baby boomers go, and there are opportunities everywhere. Like, we're going to be raided by the federal government, so bad. . . .

Sarah: We're already being raided.

In situations such as this, the conditions of maternity leave, and the organization's attitudes and behaviours centering on reasonable demands for work will figure in retention of young women in the public sector.

Work-addicted culture. The Directors in the focus group surfaced two other interesting perspectives on work and family conflict. The first was an observation that as family occupied less time, they began to shift that time to the organization, working longer hours because the workload was there, and they could be there too. "I found myself in that position for 14-15 hour days. And then I just said 'this is crazy. . . . ,' so I just stopped doing that." The Directors concluded, a little facetiously that "having kids brings balance, forces you to have balance. The Christmas concert won't wait." This conversation reflects how work culture draws the unsuspecting in, as Hochschild has described (1993, p. 201). Luckily for Sarah, her organization did not infringe upon her freedom to change her behavior when she decided to stop doing long days.

The second insight from the focus group was about the frequency with which family pressures are cited as the reason high profile women leave an executive position. These Directors view work-family conflict as a rationale which will be acceptable among colleagues and staff, but one which may be covering up other factors such as lack of opportunity, boredom, or overwork. Sarah noted:

Sarah: I'm thinking that your question here about some of the women who have left . . . women are often reluctant to say it's because of the culture. 'It's OK because I'm going to this,' or 'I'm doing that.'

Isabelle: They often quote family reasons?

Sarah: Family reasons *are* quite often quoted.

Heather: It's not professional to be negative when you are leaving, so you may not [give] the honest answer.

Sarah: Yeah. And somehow balancing work and family still legitimizes your choice. I wonder what happens when people don't have a family. . . .

Barbara Orser, reporting for the Conference Board of Canada, ranked women's top three reasons for leaving a position: greater opportunity, better compensation elsewhere, and lack of professional development programs. Orser also summarized their qualitative anecdotal comment to say that inhospitable corporate cultures and incompatible organizational values played major roles in their departures. Work and family balance ranked further down the list in Orser's study (2000, p. 14). However, perhaps in Prince Edward Island, with its strong discourse on the place of family, the ranking would have been stronger.

Consciousness of a need for work and life balance sometimes extends beyond the Director level. Tara related the story of a female Minister, who once rose from an ongoing late afternoon meeting and offered this advice: "I am not keeping you here. If you want to stay past 5 o'clock in your offices, that's your decision. But I am not going to be responsible for that here." Tara related that with one previous CEO, they could expect to be at work on Saturdays, or all night, "but it is a change of culture when a leader tells people 'Your life is important. I value your family.' And workers come back tomorrow in a much healthier frame of mind." In a similar vein, another participant stated that she did not think work life *was* manageable, but than went on to describe the discretion she took occasionally, with employee vacation and sick leave forms where she thought circumstance dictated not filing them.

Senior women certainly are very aware of the pressures exerted as women progress through increasingly responsible career assignments, and they are advocating for staff at many levels. Both Tara and Rhonda identified alternatives to excessive emphasis on face time as a measure of worker value. Valuing the work that people do, being reasonable about the load, allowing flexible work arrangements, and focusing instead on the product rather than on excessive controls are not expensive practices, yet they can make a difference. These Directors are influencing the culture to incrementally broaden its perspective about what makes work-life balance possible.

Costs of buying in. In a study by Duxbury, Dyke and Lam (1999) on achieving a world class workforce, 20% of female and male respondents in the Assistant Deputy Minister (ADM) pool of the Canadian Public Service said they would not want to advance to the Deputy level, because they would have no chance at balance (Presentation slides, Charlottetown, April 1999). This lack of enthusiasm for advancement is similar to something Lorna perceived within the PEI Public Service. She said:

> What I find a little troublesome is, I think we are creating an environment where people don't look at the work that we do, and seek to attain it. I know of an instance in a division [where a senior position will become available], and no one there wants the job. You know how those of us of a certain generation were raised to think "work really hard, do the best you can? Get on that corporate treadmill and try to reach some form of utopia at the other end" Nobody wants that anymore. I think people look and say, "I don't want to work like that."

An alternate view. I have been discussing the impacts of women in leadership upon the Public Service of Prince Edward Island. On the topics of relationships and work-life balance, the participant Directors perceive themselves, and experience other female leaders generally, as champions for the "people aspects" of management. However, as William Patton has noted, those cases which do not fit the overall pattern in data prove interesting to the researcher (2002, p. 554). Such a case arose from my question about identifying a female subculture. Lorna agreed that such a subculture existed. Our conversation continued:

Lorna: Women are very demanding to work for. The expectations are different, and the expected turnaround time is different. It's almost like two entirely different things. On the one hand there is considerable understanding of the pressures and demands of being a working mother . . . But on the other hand, I think I can honestly say that any woman I have ever worked for has had higher expectations than any man. Because these are women who really push themselves, and have a greater respect for women who push themselves in the same way. I never want to work the way those women work. They typically work 15-16 hour days. You can get phone calls from them at 10:45 at night.

Isabelle: I wonder if that's just a continuation of the dominant culture?

Lorna: I think men are easier on themselves.

Isabelle: So men are walking away and not working the 15 hours?

Lorna: They're better able to put boundaries around the different parts of their lives. I think they are more talented with that.

As Arlie Hochschild has identified, we are seeing a general blurring of home and work life which is challenging both women and men to distinguish between the two. However, the reality of women's second shift on top of their paid work roles leaves an exceedingly thin boundary for any negotiation. Lack of balance seems to be one price women expect to pay for admission to the corporate hierarchy.

Although I have noted patterns in the impacts and legacies of the Directors participating in this study, I am not concerned with proving a Grand Theory in this research. In an ethnographical vein, I am recording a picture of a specific culture, the culture of senior management in the PEI Public Service through the eyes of women within that culture. As I have previously mentioned in discussing the methodology of this study, postmodern feminism acknowledges that individual experience is contextualized through history and social relations. Although women's history as Other forms a powerful backdrop to collective and individual identity, as Benhabib has emphasized, we are not determined by our history. In our own stories, we play active roles as "author and character at once" (in Nicholson, 1997, p. 21). We do not all tell the same story.

Lorna had juxtaposed the latitude given by a female manager regarding time to deal with family matters against that manager's simultaneously high expectations for work output. Based on her experience, Lorna has formed a different view about high performing women, one that can serve to trouble the discourse about women's greater sensitivity to excessive demands on employees. Lorna's perspective reminds me that sensitivity to work-life balance is not a natural characteristic of all women, even though it is a pattern revealed in the conversation with five of the six Directors interviewed.

Feminization of Professions

A Worrisome State

During interviews I asked participants to predict what the effect would be if, in the near future, women were to outnumber men in positions of leadership and management. Among the six directors whom I interviewed, three raised the subject of feminization themselves, while a fourth gave a ready and thoughtful response to a prompt from me. Women's participation in, and even domination of certain professions has caused the term *feminization* to re-enter the education, career, and labour market discourses. One might think that achieving a critical mass and establishing a presence in a profession should feel positive for members of an under-represented group.What is problematic is that, in regard to women's equality, feminization is viewed in the mainstream as a concern.

History repeated. The process of feminization is not a new phenomenon. As Alison Prentice has documented, elementary school teaching underwent this transition in Canada as early as 1856-1900, when women were relegated to the instruction of infant children, and could then be engaged for lower pay. This action ceded secondary teaching and principalship to men, who received a larger cut of the total teaching budget (Trofimenkoff & Prentice, 1977, p. 51). When Charles Dickens wrote the Christmas Carol, in 1843, secretaries were men like Bob Cratchit (1983/1843). Gender balance has been highlighted for examination as part of an academic planning process at UPEI, as "politically and socially pressing in coming years." Nationally, women earn 1.48 bachelor's degrees for

every one earned by a male. At UPEI the ratio is even higher, at 1.89:1 (UPEI Academic Planning Framework Committee, 2004).

Thinking about medicine and law, Meg observed that young women have flocked into law schools at a time when there appears to be an overpopulation of lawyers. Her perceptions are reasonably accurate. A recent study by the Nova Scotia Barristers' Society documents the barriers experienced by women and men who are not in private practice of law. Almost double the percentage of women than men chose not to enter private practice, or have left that arena (2001, p. 2). In the 1990s women were admitted to the bar at a marginally greater rate than men (p. 2). And more women perceive bias in the legal profession in regard to remuneration, attaining partnerships, career advancement, and lack of accommodation for family commitments, among others (p. 13). This is the double-edged sword of feminization, when women attain the critical mass to change the face of their chosen career, even as it is losing its luster in the marketplace. Curiously, there is not a parallel dynamic when dominant males populate traditional female-dominated occupations such as elementary education or nursing. Joan Acker (2003, p. 50) states that "White men . . . are likely to be positively evaluated and to be rapidly promoted to positions of greater authority."

Impacting a system. A participant close to the health system provided unique insights into the impact female doctors are making on the compensation system of publicly-funded medical care. Her experience is that female doctors are increasingly seeking part-time hours to accommodate both their child-rearing lives, and later, when they want to

slow down the pace. By contrast, male physicians "want to work full-time as soon as they get here, and they tend not to retire early."

A similar view of the downside to feminization was expressed by Barbara Clow, Executive Director of the Atlantic Centre of Excellence for Women's Health at Dalhousie University in Halifax (http://www.acewh.dal.ca). She has observed that as the specialty of Family Medicine has become female-dominated, it has lost both resources and prestige (Personal communication, January 2005). Across the country, governments are reconsidering the terms of compensation for medical practitioners in order to accommodate the differing needs and preferences of female general practitioners. In this regard, achieving critical mass has placed them in a stronger bargaining position, and turned feminization in a positive direction.

Education today. Two participants connected the issue of feminization to current discussion in education about the under-performance of boys in school and dropping university enrolments by males.

> I think we've spent a lot of time helping women, but guys have their issues too, and we've learned a lot about how people learn, and how boys learn. . . . I'm afraid we're forgetting about 50% of the population. I'd like to see both groups equally served. . . . If you look at universities across the country, I think in medicine, 2003 was the first time in Canada that we saw more women enter than men. Which is great, but is it because the men don't think they can do it? Because, if that's the case, that's a problem. We're seeing more women in engineering and

more female accountants. It creates a nice new dynamic in the culture. But I'm scared that twenty years from now, we're not going to have any managerial men.

Parallel trends. In the second wave and postmodern feminism, from Friedan in 1962 to Faludi in 1991 (Dicker & Piepmeier, 2003, 9-13), the women's movement set its sights on legislating rights, and the fruits of struggle could be enumerated in terms of courts and constitutions. Now in 2005, inequality wears a subtle chameleon quality. Many rights are enshrined in law, and the community must now find ways to implement the laws. Changing attitudes and creating awareness are critical factors in successful implementation of the law. Because they are not concrete, in the manner that placing a law upon the books is concrete, creating awareness and shaping attitudes are the tougher challenges. I believe that this point is frequently missed by equality seekers when they are seeking to understand the socio-political environment.

In my view, there exists a parallel between what Susan Faludi describes as the backlash against the inroads of women into the power base during the 1980s, and the current concerns about the over-representation of women in universities and the professions. Faludi suggests that the strength of the backlash 20 years ago "blind[ed] women to their own prodigious strengths" (1991, p. 457). Faludi observes that men in various positions in power were *not* blind to the fact of women's momentum at the time, but "it was women, tragically, who were in the dark" (p. 459). As the founder of the political movement, Fund for the Feminist Majority said, "the reason men 'over-react' is *they* get it" (in Faludi, p. 459). The feminization of professions seems to be surrounded by a similar aura. Threats to patriarchal hegemony are not going unnoticed.

Something Barbara said may yield a hint of things to come. Referring to Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, Barbara noted that in this novel, attention has shifted from valuing bureaucrats and managers to valuing scientists, whose knowledge in Atwood's scenario creates tissue for generating or saving lives. Thus women are on shifting ground, as always, with respect to which work will be valued and which yardstick of success may be applied in the future. We can be certain that professions and jobs held by men will continue to be regarded as high status and successful.

In this chapter I have chosen to focus on three areas of impacts that women are exerting in the management of the public sector. These are leadership, work and life balance, and the double-edged effects of feminization of professions. Barbara has summed up the quality of their influence. "It's not a *female-only* subculture, but there are some groups, some formal, some informal that have a strong female influence. . . . If there weren't women in these positions you would not see some things happening in government."

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

I am myself – a Black women warrior poet doing my work – come to ask you, are you doing yours? *Audre Lorde – Sister Outsider*

Revisiting the Data

During my thesis journey, I have described aspects of the culture of the Prince Edward Island Public Service from the specific viewpoint of women in senior management positions within the Service. I have established the presence of a culture of management upon which women have etched their signatures. This is not to say that the culture is built by women alone, but rather that in this particular time and place, these women have provided moral leadership for equity and fairness, and for positive human resource policies. They have modeled communication and team and group skills as tools to improve work processes. They have brought a female perspective to the policy table, with the result that decisions affecting people are more reflective of the people, female as well as male.

They are powerful in the ways I have specified, not because of an essential set of characteristics ascribable to a genetic code or to socialization alone. However some women are powerful in these ways because of the contribution of inherited traits, combined with their unique experience and consciousness that springs from experience and professional learning. Rosabeth Moss Kanter speaks about the power of the masculine ethic of rationality to define membership in, and to establish organizational culture as we continue to know it (1975, p. 43). Women are rational as well, though we

are not often granted this. With the Canadian philosopher Prudence Allen, I agree that women's rational thought may differ from a man's because:

> The lived experience of the body is different for a man than it is for a woman; being brought up in the Western world as female or a male brings to consciousness an entirely different range of data; being born into a world of stereotypes, archetypes, and historical facts provides a different range of information for a man's reason to appropriate as a specific history than for a woman. Therefore we can say that reflection on the different data available to the reason of woman and man points to a significant differentiation between the sexes (in Nemiroff, 1987, p. 12).

I have taken you, the reader, on a tour through ten women's lives lived in public service. The participating Directors talked about the pace and lack of predictability and the routine aspects of their days, but they also spoke about the uniqueness of their departments when compared to others across Government. They expressed a heartfelt wish for respect in exchange for professional service which, they felt, was given by the majority of public servants. The interface between politics and public service produced intense feelings. Earlier I compared the depth of the Directors' commitment to the caring implicit in dedicated teachers. Thomas Sergiovanni draws a parallel metaphor of school communities progressing from a contract relationship to a covenental relationship. "A covenental community is a group of people who share religious or ethical beliefs, feel a strong sense of place, and think that the group is more important than the individual" (1992, p. 102). Some of the Directors in this study, I believe, through their caring, their

work ethic, and their moral leadership have entered into such a relationship with their organization. Closing out this topic of public service, the women spoke about their own career prospects in the senior ranks. Several Directors acknowledge that alternative careers for senior bureaucrats are few in Prince Edward Island; yet there is not a groundswell of dissatisfaction about this. Some of the Directors envision themselves leaving the Public Service to pursue other interests; however they plan to write their own terms of departure.

In an exploration of equity and diversity policy in my research, I was surprised that no participant spoke of themselves as members of the groups, *women in senior management*, and *women and men in non-traditional occupations*, which are designated under the policy of the Prince Edward Island Public Service. Some participants were positive about doing what it takes to take advantage of the diversity in the organization.Two Directors held an opposite view of the policy as a frill. Overall, there were indications that Directors need to more fully understand the rationale behind the diversity policy and implementation processes of diversity and equity policy. Rounding out this chapter, I asked the question about the depth of Government's commitment to its own policy statement.

Are senior women making their mark upon the culture of the Prince Edward Island Public Service? In Chapter Seven, I have shown how the women view their contributions. My question about their personal impacts spawned invigorating discussion filled with reminiscences, stories, sadness and hope, about being instruments of change, of troubling the status quo, of wanting to make a difference, and of sometimes experiencing success.

The participants claimed their influence as leaders who reduced hierarchies and nurtured teams, who practiced inclusive decision-making, and who were much-needed mentors and role models. On the subject of work-life balance, the Directors showed how excessive demands of work have tipped the scales toward imbalance for women and men, but more so for women. They illustrated how one can be drawn into overwork, and how balance is a gender issue in the retention of a superior workforce.

Finally, in Chapter Seven, the participants surfaced a theme of feminization of professions. This theme dealt with the impact of women's rising numbers in select career areas such as law, medicine, and management. It is a source of concern for the Directors because of the pattern of devaluation accompanying women's increased participation in these fields. The fact that this continues to occur is a symptom of a backlash (Faludi, 1991). Backlash occurs despite, or perhaps because of, the many positive gains by executive women in public service, corporations, and professions. As Faludi remarks "rising economic participation coupled with an embattled and diminished stature is the central paradox of women and backlash" (p. 54).

In general the participants appear to have had rewarding public service careers, and outwardly did not reveal strong feelings about the disadvantage of being female in a managerial career. There was little rancour, and surprisingly little celebration of the tremendous progress made by these Directors and their colleagues, who comprise the first significant wave of women entering into the most senior positions of Prince Edward Island government. One explanation for this is that for the most part, the Directors did not seem to separate gender impacts from other factors which might be operating

simultaneously with them. They sometimes questioned whether a certain phenomenon could be attributed to, or correlated with something other than gender. To illustrate, here is a sampling of their dialogue:

"If the most qualified candidate is hired, I don't get too concerned about whether it is male or female. . . . "

"People get to the places where they end up because of their ability."

"I don't think any of my concerns with working for government would be gender-based. There are issues . . . [and] how they are dealt with might not be the way we would deal with them ourselves. But sometimes I think that's just the reality of government."

"I thought it was a male-female [factor], or is it the work here that brings [feeling victimized] out?"

And finally:

> If you had have [held] this discussion with me five years ago, I probably would have had more to contribute about women's roles. But I don't think about that any more. And I don't know if it's because of my age, or my own experiences, or because of familiarity, [since] there are so many [more] women leaders in my profession. When I [lead] I don't think of it as a gender question any more. I did at some time, when I was questioned about being a woman. You don't see that any more. It's just what has to be done, and I just do it.

This last contribution captures two points that I want to re-emphasize. The first is that gender inequity is more difficult to see today (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2003, p. 231). The object of attention is not a blatant case of sexism, because this has been legislated

into a degree of submission. In the 1920s, feminists sought suffrage or the right to vote. The second wave was the site of varied campaigns for rights, based on being equal but different from men, and for the protection of those rights through legislation. As Sylvia Bashevkin points out

> Both early activism in the suffrage period . . . and also what became modern feminism in the late 1960s and following were predicated on a positive role for government. *Intervention, regulation* and *bureaucracy* were far from dirty words in the lexicon of the twentieth century women's movement, because achievements like . . . equal pay laws were grounded in these very concepts (1998, p. 5).

In spite of a rise in social conservatism from the 1980s to the present, many rights today are enshrined in law. The challenge for social movements now is to insist that the law fulfills its promise. To this end, the accompanying actions are less quantifiable than when major pieces of legislation could be tallied and made concrete. Adults born during the second wave, who are in their thirties and forties, are not conscious of the struggles which resulted in an improved status for women. They lack the history and perspective which might increase their appreciation of what has been won, and of how easily the momentum can change. Like this last-quoted Director, many people do not think about it any more. They assume that the playing field has been leveled for women and men.

In a way, feminism's success has become its Achilles' heel; the invisibility of critical issues contributes to resistance and intolerance of feminist voices. I have named this syndrome in my own mind as the *Get Over It Syndrome*. I have not found this term referred to anywhere in the literature, although it seems very possible that others could be using it. I characterize it as encompassing

- an assumption that women's equality has been achieved ;
- discernable resistance by many men, and some women, to airing any issue having gender overtones;
- a belief that employment equity measures on behalf of women, racial minorities, or other social identity groups are unfair to men of the dominant group. If women win, men must lose; win-win solutions do not seem possible;
- impatience that activist women seem to keep raising the same themes *ad infinitum*.

In the face of intolerance like the Get Over It Syndrome, how can feminism strengthen its message? How can feminists increase the possibility of generous listening by men and women, across the gender divide?

Taming Feminism

Repackaging the Feminist Commodity

In Susan Faludi's words, "[in order to] illuminate the ways in which societies have been shaped by the relations of power between men and women, we need to move away from a focus on women, to an analysis of men and masculinity as well as women and femininity" (in Robinson and Richardson, p. 91). Faludi seems to capture a position of some academics, that a consideration of "gender" rather than of "woman" provides a broader analytical base from which to examine complex questions, and riddles about the construction of identities and male-female relationships. Beginning in the 1990s, others weighing in on the question of women's/gender/men's studies observe that "gender" has long been used when what was being discussed was women. For example, Townsley notes an assumption in organizational literature, "that 'gender' equals 'women' and gendered organizational studies equals 'women's work' " (2003, p. 618). She also

acknowledges the contribution of feminist theory to the development of gendered organizational studies, saying this field was "partially enabled by research previously categorized under theoretical frameworks such as feminist 'standpoint' [theory] . . . "(p. 619).

At present, feminist theory has propagated diverse "feminisms," and these form an important component of gender analysis and gender studies. In the organizational literature, Townsley traces three pervasive gender meta-themes to capture the directions of postmodern feminism as it applies in this context (Townsley, 2003, p. 617). They are "gender as body-counting," "gender-as-power-relations," and "globalizing gender." I will discuss the first two of these as they relate to the present study.

Regarding "gender as body-counting," Townsley hastens to explain that a count of male and female bodies in the organizational space does not convey enough to explain relationships among women, men, and organizations. More important is to illustrate how work is imagined and executed, and what values and forms shape the work of the organization. An example of this category of postmodern theorizing is Joan Acker's work on hierarchies, jobs, and bodies (Ely, Foldy & Scully, 2003), in which she concentrates on unmasking the processes, performances, and practices that constitute gender. In my statement of intent in Chapter One, I propose that

> the assumption of equity as a *fait accompli* for women within management and in society is unfounded and damaging, mainly to women, but also to men and organizations. Within organizations, societal patterns of disadvantage, including women's disadvantage are reproduced through the convergence of structural and relational factors.

Throughout my project, I have interpreted and contextualized the processes, performances, and practices of the public service, shared with me by ten women in positions of senior management. I believe I have demonstrated, by revealing how work is conceptualized, valued, structured, and enacted, that inequality, though less pronounced than a quarter century ago, remains a part of public service culture. I hasten to add that this conclusion is not meant to single out the PEI Public Service, or any singular male for censure. It is meant only as a case study to show how gender operates in the background of organizational systems, much as a computer runs on an unobtrusive operating system such as *Windows XP*.

A focus on dynamics of "communicative processes" (Townsley, 2003, p. 619), reduces the tendency, when body counting, to be reductionist and essentialist about the identities of "women" and "men," and the universal oppression of women. Such "one-size fits all" definitions result in "naturalizing" of identities, and lead to losing the identities of subjects within the dominant identity (p. 620). Linked to essentialism are ideas of "power as patriarchy . . . conceived as an abstract masculine phenomenon or a centrally identified static construct residing at the top of . . . hierarchy" (p. 620). These too, are being set aside as feminist theory and practice continues to evolve.

Townsley's analysis has increased my understanding, because I recognize myself in the description of body counting. Throughout my thesis work, I have been concerned with making generalizations about women, or men and patriarchy, when I believe that blanket descriptions rarely apply to gendered situations. However it is repetitive and distracting to keep qualifying my statements, to say " this does not apply to all women" or " not all men hold power over women." This problem exists not only in writing, but also in discussions

about gender. It becomes a liability when I am reaching out to build understanding and cooperation toward my equity goals. Essentialism invokes a Get Over It response, because the language of unitary categories such as "patriarchy" escalates feelings of impatience, lack of respect, guilt due to privilege, and even threat in the listener. The idea of making embedded gender concrete, by pointing out how it is reproduced in processes and practices, will be helpful to me.

The second meta-theme is a "gender-as-power-relations" theme. It integrates Lacanian discourse theory about the power of language to construct realities, as in the preceding example about generalizations. Feminist and gender scholars of this persuasion deconstruct the normative relations that establish gendered positions. They also view gender as "a primary way of signifying relations of power" (Townsley, 2003, p. 621). The ideas of multiple identities or subjectivities of subjects who actively shape their own outcomes are central to feminist discourse theory. These ideas appear in my text as well.

Although there are theoretical developments that help explain a move from feminist stances, and the suggestion of gender as a stronger foundation, Victoria Robinson and Diane Richardson suggest that more practical and pragmatic influences are driving change within universities in Britain. One pragmatic consideration is the re-positioning of women's studies from 1980 to the present (1994, p. 86). By moving women's studies out of the margins and to the centre in universities, more students, both male and female may take feminist courses. Gender and men's studies are "safer, less controversial places . . . " as compared to "separatist women's studies courses" (Robinson & Richardson, p. 91). From a market perspective, "such shifts in the institutions towards gender and men's studies parallels publishers" increasing use of a context "perceived as being safer and

more acceptable to a greater number of readers" (p. 91). Robinson and Richardson also note the suppression of terms such as *feminist*, *anti-sexist*, and *patriarchy*. The authors conclude that the two trends in general; that is, developments in theory, and the pragmatics of marketing; and the softening of language, in particular, "represent a repackaging and a deradicalization of women's studies, taking the heat off patriarchy." Together they account for "the construction of a different reality" concerning feminism (p. 92).

Enacting gender. Throughout this thesis there are numerous references to articles from an anthology entitled *Reader in Gender, Work and Organization* (Ely, Foldy & Scully, 2003). The Reader captures the tone and substance of gender analysis, and illustrates how this discussion is imported into organizational theory and practice. Although I echo the concern within feminism and women's studies that this re-invention of feminism for the consumer market cannot be all good (Robinson and Richardson, 1994, p. 92), it does hold possibilities for attaining a feminist agenda by an altered route. Gender studies opens up possibilities for feminism to be heard. It offers an opportunity to examine the socialization of both men and women, and their complicity in maintaining the status quo. Whether feminists follow this path may depend upon choices each makes, taking into account their own knowledge, principled positions, pragmatics, and specific contexts.

Donna Haraway speaks about irony as "the tension of holding incompatible things together, because both or all are necessary and true" (cited in Townsley, 2003, p. 625). Townsley adds that irony is "the political imperative of the present" (p. 626). What does this mean for me as a feminist looking within organizations for answers to my own

confusion about gender politics? Townsley asserts that it is fruitful to apply different analytical lenses to my questions. Through irony, it becomes possible to hold "incompatible things together, because both or all are necessary and true." I have just recalled Acker's detailed pictures of processes, practices, and performance within organizations. This is one lens, and deconstruction of discourse is another useful way of seeing. At another scale, I could, at different times utilize a feminist or a gender frame of reference. Using multiple and sometimes contradictory lenses is "a way to keep oneself within a situation that resists resolution in order to act politically without pretending that resolution has come" (Ferguson, cited in Townsley, 2003, p. 626).

A Final Word

In this Chapter, I have drawn some threads together to bring this stage of my quest to a conclusion. I have dealt with two concluding themes: "Revisiting the Data," a look back at what I discovered through the participation of ten women in management; and "Taming Feminism," a look forward at strategies for broadening and repositioning the dialogue on women's equality, and maximizing women's talents within government organizations.

I have come to a special place, a place that is at once a stopping point, and a source of new questions. They are questions for another time. There are so many ways to finally take leave of my project. I have decided to close with Antonio Gramsci's view of hegemony as an unexamined world view of the social order. Hegemony is "never complete, always in the process of being reimposed and always capable of being resisted by historical subjects . . . " (cited in Weiler, 1988, p. 16).

Chapter Nine: Postscript

Only the willingness to share private and sometimes painful experience can enable women to create a collective description of the world which will be truly ours.

– *Adrienne Rich*

My Dear Ellen:

I am here at my desk, zoning in once more on what comes next on the road to completion of my thesis. As I have described when we visited together in the summer, my writing focuses on how women in senior positions within the provincial public sector feel about the careers they have fashioned within that environment. Since you have worked for almost thirty years as a federal bureaucrat in Ottawa, I know a goodly portion of the picture they paint will resonate with you. Not all, mind you, for I am well aware that the Federal bureaucracy outpaces Prince Edward Island's in terms of size, formality, competitiveness, politicization, and more. You will also be able to identify with the thinking and feelings of the women I have interviewed, because you are a contemporary of theirs and of mine. You have lived in the same social spaces, dealing with parenting alone, and then together with a marriage partner, combining career and family, hearing that you did not have "the right stuff" for the promotion you wanted; experiencing cycles of the women's equality struggle. Of our close circle of friends from university, I have always known the most connection to you. You have granted me profound understanding over the life of our relationship. Often this understanding has been unspoken, because you are a reflective thinker like me, and you have to warm up to verbalizing what's in your mind, and especially what's in your heart. Too bad we did not live next door, to just drop in for chats while our thoughts were fresh, and our feelings not forced down, as we have

to do sometimes, to survive. But I'm in Charlottetown and you are in Ottawa, and neither of us has become adept at text messaging as internet-savvy younger Canadians do. Would it really be adequate anyway?

To remind you, I had told you that I had chosen to research the perspectives of women at senior levels of government as a sort of window into women's status overall in Canada, and as a way to understand what's going on in feminism in the 21st century. True to my acculturation as a second-wave woman, and with long practice, I am double tasking in this thesis. Bear with me.

Think of this: I am in my ninth year at UPEI, having been attracted here to launch a Management Development Program for Women (MDPW). How did I ever survive the transition into an academic setting? Certainly the MDPW initiative was not welcomed by everyone, but the fact that it was underwritten by government funds helped to smooth the waters. Universities are always interested in funds! And, with powerful advocates for the Program, it would have been unwise to resist.

Over the course of those nine years, I can trace helping the MDPW take root, leading an innovation in online learning, and adapting it into a parallel management development opportunity to accommodate men. On the surface this may seem like progress; however, I have to confess that my decisions, which greatly impacted upon the program, were often financially driven. They were not well-grounded in the formal theory and practice of education for women. In fact, what I know about the education of women, some would call instinctual; however, I know it as knowledge generated through my experience in my own education and in women's equity work for a long, long time–my working theory.

So I knew a lot, but I always felt I was missing a lot too. What I was missing was some larger connection which would anchor my practice. It is difficult to feel anchored somewhere when your framework is incomplete. You are constantly consuming your psychic energy fending off threats from new arguments and oppositions to your practice. Have you had the experience of sitting at the boardroom table while a colleague devalues your equity work, and feeling unable to articulate what you know? I'm saying you *know*, not you *feel*. If you could say it concisely, firmly, and authoritatively, you could turn that situation around. If you had the figures at hand . . . Oh, how numbers do speak! But you can't muster that response. It just won't come, even though it is causing a burning hole in your belly. Your head is full of *buts*, those too-short runways of failed flight of words. It doesn't help that you feel discouragement and sometimes even rage. (I usually come to a slow boil, after I've had a chance to reflect. It saves embarrassment, but can also leave you as a late-comer to decisions). That's what it's like to have practice, but too little framework. And as Magda Lewis has demonstrated, there are situations in which women have never found their voice, or they lose their voice. I find that I have been losing *my* voice lately. When you are not heard, why continue to speak?

For quite some time, I have been discerning a decline in receptivity among organizations, individuals, and the University toward the Management Development Program for Women. I began asking where I might find some analysis of this dynamic. There was a time when I would say I was running a management program for women, and my listener might respond by saying "Oh that's good. I suppose we can use more women in management" or "It's not before time." If they thought otherwise, they sensed it was politically incorrect to admit to that. I think, in the mid-90s, with the women's

movement more present in the press, rights enshrined in the constitution, and workplace policies on harassment and diversity, misogyny and ignorance were to a degree, held in check in Canada. Today you are liable to hear the *Get Over It!* message directly, loudly and clearly. Strangely, doors seem to be opening for Blacks and lesbian and gay populations, and these are hopeful signs, but the words *women's issues* or *feminist* can be conversation stoppers.

As I was telling you this past summer, I have had direct experience with the conversation-stopping effect of misogyny in the classroom. I won't say it was the first time, because I have felt the aura of outsider status while teaching in high school. But nothing to compare to what happened to me and my instructor in the mixed Management Development Program.

No doubt about it, conditions for women have improved overall. But, it depends which women you are using as your yardstick, and whether you have factored in race, income level, age, or rural-urban location, to name a few. I wonder why it is not obvious to the purveyors of the Get Over It message that women still disproportionately forego their own economic security when they drop out of the workforce to care for elderly parents, or their own children and grandchildren. Do they realize that women and children are today losing supportive social programs for parenting and protection against violence in their homes? So what was gained is now disappearing as we are told to Get Over It.

Regarding the female Directors in my study, I was at first puzzled by the participants' equanimity in the face of conditions which they identified themselves as fettering their leadership. I think what I am seeing in them is influenced by the Get Over It discourse,

clothed as business as usual; no rancour, no fireworks, just small daily wins. There are larger issues to be shouldered by senior public servants either female or male, or so it seems. Do you think this makes sense to you, from your own experience?

So as I was working my way through my Master's of Education, this became the overarching question for my thesis. I wanted to know if there was an analysis to help me make sense of my environment. I wanted to know what forces were at work which are creating an increasingly inhospitable environment for my life's work as a feminist educator. At the risk of mixing metaphors, I see women in senior management collectively as the vessel of exploration of the much larger questions I have about how women are faring in society, and what both academic and grassroots feminists are saying about the situation. I am double tasking in researching women in senior management, a topic of definite interest to me, which also contributes to my bigger project of exploring recent thinking in feminism.

Thank God my eyesight is holding up; I have read so much in the past year (I think of my brother, who has retired his practice because he cannot read enough to keep up, and what a waste that has been). I have found myself agreeing with the grassroots complaint that feminism has moved to the academy and surrounded itself with dense and difficult terminology. I think that although feminism needs theory, the complexity has limited its utility for people who really want to take action. However, if community activists had the benefit of the knowledge that theory generates, they would not be so prone to pursuing ineffective strategies, and using trial and error. This process really dissipates energy, and discourages people who want to make a difference in life.

I had to read the literature of postmodernism, which provides a context for much of the thinking of the 1980s and 1990s. Some would say now, that we are into the "post-post" era, but I won't go there. A major contribution of postmodernism is the end to what's called Grand Theory, or those projects which make very sweeping claims to knowledge. I think perhaps feminists were onto this train of thought on their own; but to use feminism as an example, the end of Grand Theory has closed any claims to speak for all women about *anything*. In postmodern feminism, women have only been heard when they speak from their own positions, without claiming that it represents Black experience, blue collar experience, and so on. We have become much more careful in presuming to know what we cannot really know, and instead we are telling our own stories. Since feminism is a type of critical theory, the stories we tell are intended to show how in some specific situation our lives are circumscribed by an institutionalized system in which women do not share power on an equal footing with powerful men. There are of course, men who do not belong to this category. Magda Lewis has writes that the power of our stories is that they concern ordinary events of our daily routines, our bodies, and our relationships. Perhaps we present them with extraordinary insight. Have you noticed, though, that despite what academics have agreed to, it is still common that women continue to be homogenized both by including them with men, and also by assuming an internal sameness within the category "women"? I know I have been guilty of this myself, while writing my thesis. Is this another example of disconnection between academia and the community? Not that all knowledge starts in academia, mind you.

Two of the theoretical concepts that I have found useful are about knowledge being socially constructed and about consciousness informing our experience. I'm sure you

have read more on consciousness than I have, as you went on in psychology while I may have touched on it as a backdrop to teaching. Speaking of the social construction of knowledge, in 1996 I participated in a three-day leadership development program by the Generative Leadership Group, a United States consulting firm. One of the leaders was Rayona Sharpnak. You may have noticed that some of the Directors have mentioned her in their conversation. What I recall is that Rayona frequently reined in discussion of a participant's presenting problem with the words "it's all made up anyway." This had the effect of putting power into the hands of the participant, and keeping the door open to possibilities. So now I have discovered that *it's all made up* is really about constructed knowledge!

Whatever term you use, this thinking is powerful if your mission is to change something such as women's economic, political, social, or cultural devaluation. Scientific knowledge is subject to challenge, philosophy is subject to challenge, and feminism wants to challenge what women generally had little part in constructing. Even more so, laws and policies and cultures that limit my aspirations are fair game, though I would prefer to have the strength of multiple voices to support me. Those words *it's all made* up have allowed me within myself, to challenge a lot of puffed up proclamations in need of a little deflating. I may be guilty of rattling on a bit here; however I want to say a bit about where consciousness fits in.

In nature-nurture debates, although I did not agree that we are determined by our genetics, I have thought that explaining women as a product of socialization is also too simplistic. It also contributes to the woman-as-victim psychology that Naomi Wolfe names in her books. The literature on the place of experience in feminism answered some

of my questions. If you decide to read my thesis you'll see the essentials there. (Perhaps you are like my husband, who goes to the end of the book, first). The "A-ha moment" for me was when I came across Prudence Allen's viewpoint about experience being informed by consciousness. So when we read that women and men have different experiences, that partially explains how we can come at an issue so differently. But the consciousness piece adds another dimension: Because of gender differences, we probably don't even *see the same data* to bring into our experience in the first place. David Silverman has written that "every way of seeing is also a way of not seeing." His subject was ethnography, but it applies here very well, and I have added it to my toolkit. I am still deciding the meaning of this in relation to socialization theory. I don't think it totally negates the socialization argument, but it broadens the theoretical base of my practice.

In the latter stages of my writing I came across a work by Sylvia Bashevkin which I think you would enjoy. She teaches at the University of Toronto, and in *Women on the Defensive: Living Through Conservative Times*, she chronicles the effects upon women's rights of the rise of neo-conservative governments in the democracies of Canada, the United States, and Britain. This book provided me with a political and economic context that I had not put together on my own. What was amazing was to have been personally a part of the action on some of the issues of the times, such as the Court Challenges Program and the lobby to block the Charlottetown Accord, and now to read the analysis. The crux of her argument is that the new, or neo-conservatives elevated rugged individualism and the business interests that rest upon it, while denigrating the ideas of shared social values and collective action. She is saying that conservative philosophy has moved away from its roots, which explains the *neo* piece. She writes that Brian Mulroney

and organized feminism had a highly acrimonious relationship, and although polls showed that the women's agenda had gained supporters, this "nasty, polarized [debate] was a turn-off" to the public (p. 235). The Conservative policy response was to reduce funding to social programs, and they took deliberate aim at the funding for feminist and other groups opposing their swing to the far right.

I remember when funding changed from stable grants to project funding in Women's Centres in my locality. Workers spent so-o much time justifying their existence, in order to receive the next project handout. Besides, like-minded groups had to tussle over the same bone, because there was so little support. Bashevkin has explained how communities were affected under Mulroney, and even with the Chrétien regime. Would you have been working within Status of Women Canada then? Could you see what was happening? Better get Bashevkin, Ellen.

I hope you have enjoyed my capsule of what was playing out in the larger political environment during the 1980s and 1990s. It has probably brought back a few triumphs and disappointments in your own work around that time. Moving forward a few years, and to a different plane as well, I have been thinking about present-day programs for women. I have been asking myself why it is that some continue to operate while others have been closed out. I am thinking, for example, of a successful and well-funded government initiative in Prince Edward Island to support women in business through their start-up and expansion phases. I am thinking of the Women's Network which stays in the game, although project funding is their life-source. Then there is the Atlantic Centre of Excellence for Women's Health, one of five research centres set up in Canada in the late 90s to move action research on women's health into the community.

Close to home for me, at the University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI), an application to Senate by the Women's Studies Department to establish a minor program in Women's Studies was recently denied. I don't pretend to have the whole picture; it's just that it does not feel like a good sign. A draft discussion paper on a 2005 academic plan for UPEI includes enrolment statistics for UPEI undergraduate courses. It is discouraging to see that there were a mere 73 registrations in Women's Studies courses in the 2002-2003 year. This compares to 362 registrations at inception of the Women's Studies program nine years earlier. What's behind these numbers?

Your next question, after what I have been sharing, might be whether I think programs for women will continue to exist. I think, because of the resurgent character of feminism, that there will be continued pressure on legislators to think plurally and diversely about who makes up the electorate. Sylvia Bashevkin substantiates my view, as she gives examples of the diversity of approaches used by the women's constituency during the turn to neo-conservatism in government (p. 243). They organized to run female-friendly candidates in the next elections, they used court challenges, they worked on keeping the momentum in the movement, and they linked with other movements to use public protest tactics. Governments may have quieted oppositional voices, but there is always potential for them to grow strong again. Therein lies the power of the female vote at the polls, as well as in continued organizing.

Looking to the future, I am also curious to know more about the direction feminism has taken, by broadening the field of play (see how masculine terms seep into language!) to consider gender, not only questions of women's gender. I feel badly that I did not move into the gender literature soon enough in my thesis work. Just when I am ready to delve

into it more, it is time–past time–to wrap up my writing. In my thesis preamble I said I was looking for ways to move the feminist agenda forward. Perhaps gender studies is the vehicle. It has sufficient history now that there is probably research to indicate whether it is paying dividends as an approach. I like the way it can encompass gays, lesbians, and the range of masculinities that are being researched today. Are feminists aligned with doing gender studies? I do not have a sense of this. I think the answer is "partly." I would love to work in a more academic setting to pursue my curiousities. Personally, I do not want feminism, and the many feminist thinkers and actors to disappear from view. We are the roots of gender studies, after all.

Two movements to watch, the third wave of politically-conscious young women, and gender studies. But all work and no play makes Janie a dull girl. I need a break from brain gymnastics. Are you coming to the Island this summer? I'm so looking forward to walking the beach again.

In friendship,

Isabelle

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Appendix A

Participant Information Letter

Date

Dear _____.

I am writing to ask for your voluntary participation in a study about how women in senior levels of public service experience the culture of their workplaces on a day-to-day-basis. More specifically the study is entitled, *Perceptions of Organizational Culture in the Prince Edward Island Public Sector: Through the Eyes of Women in Senior Management.* I am completing this study to fulfil a requirement for the degree Master's of Education in Leadership in Learning at the University of Prince Edward Island.

As an adult educator, I have chosen this research topic because of my professional and personal interest in the opportunities for women in society, and how these opportunities change over time. The research results will add to knowledge about what types of learning and other career supports would help women who want to advance within the Prince Edward Island public sector.

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in one of two activities: either unless you have a definite preference, I will randomly assign each volunteer to either the focus group or an interview. If, however, you are willing to be interviewed, but not to be in a focus group (or vice versa), this can be arranged. Otherwise you will have an equal chance of being assigned to the focus group or an interview. The focus group will be held in a location mutually convenient and agreeable to all participants. The focus group will be scheduled during regular work hours. The interviews will take place at a mutually agreeable location, to be arranged. The

interviews will be scheduled during regular work hours for the most part; however the time can be arranged at your convenience. Both the focus group and interviews will be held during the period November 15, 2003 to January 30, 2004.

Rather than a very formal interview, I am hoping to have more of a conversation with you. I will have a number of preset questions, but there will also be the opportunity for you to raise new topics or give more explanation on any subject that may come up. I will be asking questions about your sense of a women's culture within the Public Service, the impact of gender on your career, how women in the management pipeline can be assisted to reach senior positions, and your views on women-only developmental leadership and management programs. I would like to audio-tape the focus group and interviews, with your permission. After transcribing them word for word, the hardcopy transcript will be returned to you so that you may check what was said and make any changes, or clear up errors or oversights on my part. When I return the transcript to participants of individual interviews, I shall also arrange for a second interview to review it, and to also ask new questions that have arisen from our earlier conversation. Once the interviews and transcriptions are complete, I will analyze the data.

Your participation in this study is **entirely up to you**. You are free to refuse to participate, to withdraw from it at any time, or to refuse to answer certain questions, without any negative consequences. I will ask that any information gathered up until that time be used for the final report. If you do not permit me to use the information, it will be destroyed immediately. It will simply be noted that you did not participate further in the study.

In order to protect your identity in the study I will be assigning a pseudonym to the tape for each participant. I will be the only person with access to the file matching the pseudonyms with the actual participants. While I **cannot guarantee** that people will not be able to recognize that you are referred to in the study, I will be making every effort to maintain the confidentiality of our interviews. I am using pseudonyms; I am choosing private interview sites; and I will be sensitive to use of data as direct quotation or description, which may reveal the identity of participants when it is combined with other data from the overall interviews. In a focus group setting it is not possible to guarantee confidentiality either. I will remind participants at the beginning to share only to the extent that they feel they would disclose views and experiences in everyday encounters.

At the conclusion of the study, all of the information collected in this study will be kept in a cabinet in my home for three years, unless you ask that it be destroyed immediately, which I pledge to do. I may wish to use the data again within three years, should I decide to expand upon this study in a future research project or journal article. I will obtain your permission again at that time, before engaging in any new research or writing. After three years, the tapes and transcripts will be destroyed. The results of the study will be presented to an examining committee of the Faculty of Education at the University of Prince Edward Island. I will be inviting the participants to attend. The study will be published at a later time and will be available in the Resource Centre at the Faculty of Education. I will provide you with a brief summary of the findings upon request. I would be pleased to consider presenting the research at a meeting or workshop related to your work.

Interview Consent Form

Perceptions of Organizational Culture in the Prince Edward Island Public Sector: Through the Eyes of Women in Senior Management

I, _____have read the information outlined in the Participant Information Letter. I fully understand the contents of the letter and I have no further questions at this time.

If are selected for an interview, or you volunteer only to be interviewed, you will be asked to do the following:

- ❑ Participate in two one-hour interviews. These interviews will be audio-taped and conducted in a private room in a mutually acceptable location during regular work hours, or at your convenience, sometime in the period from of November 15, 2003 to January 30, 2004.
- ❑ Review the typed scripts of your interviews so that you can check what was said and make any changes, or clear up oversights or errors on my part.

If you are selected to participate in a focus group, or you volunteer for the focus group only, you will be asked to do the following:

- ❑ Participate in a one-hour focus group. The group discussion will be audio-taped and conducted in a private room in a mutually acceptable location, during regular work hours, or at your convenience sometime in the period of November 15, 2003 to January 30, 2004.
- ❑ Review the typed scripts of your interviews so that you can check what was said and make any changes or clear up any mistakes that were made.

Some other important considerations:

- ❑ Your participation in this study is **entirely up to you.**
- ❑ You can withdraw from the study at any time, or refuse to answer any questions, without any negative consequences.
- ❑ If you withdraw from the study, I will ask you for permission to use any information gathered up until that time, in the report of findings. If you do not allow me to include this information, I will destroy it immediately.
- ❑ Your real name will not be used in the report of this study; instead you will be given a pseudonym.
- ❑ Typed scripts and audiotapes will be identified using your pseudonym and this information will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my home. I will be the only person with access to the information needed to match your data with your actual name.
- ❑ I will keep this information for three years, unless you ask that it be destroyed immediately after transcription.
- ❑ I may wish to use the data again within three years, should I decide to expand upon this study in a future research project or journal article. I will obtain your permission again at that time, before engaging in any new research or writing.
- ❑ I will present the findings of my study at a later time, and the study will be published and available in the Resource Centre at the Faculty of Education at UPEI.
- ❑ I will provide you with a summary of the findings, and will present them to decision makers within the public service upon request.

Thank you for considering my request to participate in my study. The extra copy of this consent form is yours to keep. Please complete the other copy and **return it to** me at:

The Centre for Life-Long Learning

University of Prince Edward Island

550 University Avenue

Charlottetown, PE C1A 4P3

Employer Information Letter

Date

Dear _____

I am writing as a courtesy to advise you about a study which I am conducting to fulfil a requirement for the degree Master's of Education in Leadership in Learning at the University of Prince Edward Island. The study will explore how women in Director and senior manager levels of public service experience the culture of their workplaces on a day-to-day-basis. More specifically the study is entitled, *Perceptions of Organizational Cultures in the Prince Edward Island Public Sector: Through the Eyes of Women in Senior Management*. As the Human Resource Strategic Plan for the Public Service indicates, creating an inclusive culture within the Public Service is an important recruitment, retention, and productivity strategy. I am hoping that my research will prove to be a valuable current resource to your organization.

As an adult educator, I have chosen this research topic because of my professional and personal interest in the opportunities for women in society, and how these opportunities change over time. The research results will add to knowledge about what types of learning and other career supports would help women who want to advance within the Prince Edward Island public sector.

Participants will be asked to participate in one of two activities: either a focus group of eight or fewer persons or two one-hour interviews with individuals alone. Both the focus group and interviews will be held during the period November 1, 2003 to January 30, 2004. Their participation in this study is entirely voluntary. They are free to refuse to

Appendix B

Interview Guide

Perceptions of Organizational Culture in the Prince Edward Island Public Sector: Through the Eyes of Women in Senior Management

Introduction

Thank you for coming today.

The purpose of this interview is to explore what it's like on a day-to-day basis to be a woman in a senior management position in the PEI Public service. What we'll be doing is having a conversation about the culture of your organization. The culture is the total package of learned behaviour of a group. It is as if the culture spells out the rules of the game – what it's like for you on a day-to-day basis as a member of a certain group. I am interested in collecting your thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and knowledge about the culture of the PEI Public service from the perspective of senior women managers. There are no right or wrong responses. As I have outlined in the consent form, I will do everything I can to keep this interview content confidential.

1. If I followed you through a typical work day, what would I see happening? Hear? What rituals?
2. In what ways does your being a woman affect your view of the culture of the public service?
3. As people with common characteristics develop relationships based upon their commonalities, they form new cultures or subcultures. Do you have a sense of a subculture developed by women in senior management? If so, describe that subculture and how it feels to you?

4. What do you think has been the effect of the organization upon you as a person and a leader?
5. What impact have you had upon the culture of the public service?
6. Senior Managers can find themselves in situations where they feel very alone with decisions and responsibility. If you have had this experience, what can you recall thinking or feeling?
7. Some people say that in the Western world, we have outgrown the need for women-only developmental programs such as management development for women and women's leadership forums. What do you think?
8. Given women's rising participation in education for professions, the day could arrive when women in leadership and management could outnumber men. What do you say the effect of that would be?
9. What are your perceptions of the equity and diversity policy of the public service?
10. Women managers have told other researchers that they have left organizations to start their own businesses because of blocked career paths and boredom in the job. What do you think are the chances you might do this in the next five years?
11. If you could change anything about the organization's culture, what would that be?
12. This covers the things I wanted to ask. Is there anything you'd like to add?

Focus Group Interview Guide

Perceptions of Organizational Culture in the Prince Edward Island Public Sector: Through the Eyes of Women in Senior Management

Introduction

Thank you for coming today.

The purpose of this focus group is to explore what it's like on a day-to-day basis to be a woman in a senior management position in the PEI Public Service. What we'll be doing is having a discussion about the culture of your organization. The culture is the total package of learned behaviour of a group. It is as if the culture spells out the rules of the game – what it's like on a day-to-day basis as a member of this group. I am interested in collecting your thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and knowledge about my question. There are no right or wrong responses. **I want to caution you that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in a focus group.** We can make our own informal understanding *that what is said here is not reported anywhere else.* However, the important thing is that you understand that **there is no guarantee of confidentiality when you are in a group setting.**

1. Let's begin by listing words that describe the culture of senior management across the public service

   Prompts:

   - Remember, we are looking for the picture of "what it's like" as the main focus
   - Words that describe behaviours, beliefs, feelings, knowledge are great

2. In what ways does being a woman affect your view of the culture of the public service?
3. As people with common characteristics develop relationships based upon their commonalities, they form new cultures, or sub-cultures. Do you have a sense of a subculture developed by women in senior management? If so, describe that subculture and how it feels to you?
4. What strengths do you have which you consider to be specific to women? What opportunities have you had, or created to use these attributes?
5. What makes you feel powerful at work?
6. When you think about younger women in the management pipeline, what excites you? What worries you?
7. If you could change anything about the organization's culture, what would that be?
8. Is there anything we have not discussed that I should be raising with the other managers I will be interviewing one-on-one?
9. Now that we are finishing this session, do you have anything at all to add that you think will help me describe the experiences of women in senior management in the PEI public service?