

## **Women's Voices of Resistance: An Analysis of Process and Content in National Higher Education Policy**

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### **Abstract**

This research study explores the various and complex perspectives of higher education's relationships to society as shared through discourse by higher education policy leaders. Leaders' perspectives from 250 university presidents, legislators, faculty, community partners, foundation officers and graduate students during a twelve day national policy conference were considered in the overarching research project. Through examination of the linguistic complexities of this national policy discourse, I found that some women, people of color, and people outside the academy are silenced and/or their perspectives are reframed or discounted. Further, if participants shared more of an advocacy perspective, their voices are marginalized (Pasque 2007).

This particular paper explores further the voices of women during these policy conversations. Specifically, I explore the voices of women who share "advocacy" perspectives and whose perspectives were reframed, redefined, and/or silenced in the discourse. Importantly, I discuss the content – what was said – and the process – how it was said – in order to further our understanding of multiple strategies for educational change. I argue that if a more thorough understanding of women leaders' perspectives is not offered, then dominant perspectives shared in policy circles may continue to perpetuate the current ideas of higher education's relationship with society – from an economic rationalization perspective – without consideration of alternative perspectives. The perpetuation of the current trajectory and the continued marginalization of alternative perspectives offered by women may be detrimental to working toward social justice and educational equity.

### **Introduction**

Talbot (1998) describes the professional importance of public speaking and states that "Women still do not have equal access to privileged professional discourses or to dominant speaker positions within them ... As a consequence, they still struggle to make themselves heard and to have their interests served" (222). I argue that "hearing" all perspectives provides education leaders with vital options needed policy change in order to address current educational inequities; the absence of particular perspectives or voices reduces options and alternative frameworks with which to consider needed educational change.

More broadly, the relationships between higher education and society are changing in the twenty-first century. Changes are taking place in terms of who pays for college, who gains access to college, and the universities' role in the global marketplace. Specifically in the United States, there have been decreases in public support for higher education (KRC Consulting 2002; Porter 2002) and in state funding for public colleges and universities (Brandl and Holdsworth 2003; Cage 1991; Hansen 2004), at a time when state and federal policies have linked higher education to the market in order to create jobs and increase economic viability (Jafee 2000; Slaughter and Rhoades 1996).

Lee and Clery (2004) point out that "recent state budget cutbacks, along with the declining share of state funding devoted to higher education, suggest that state colleges and universities have reason to be concerned about the reliability of government support" (34). It has also been projected that higher education state budget allocations will continue to decrease throughout the next decade (Jones 2002). These changes put pressure on college and university leaders for economic survival and on state legislators to create policies that increase the number of high school graduates, improve college access and promote graduation from college in order to increase states' "education capital" and economic development. In conjunction with these pressures, educational equity issues have been devalued in policy discourse in order to focus on

economic worth and rationalize public funding for higher education (St. John in press; St. John and Hu 2006).

In addition to this financial retrenchment and political directive, disparities regarding who has access to college remain. For example, Carnevale and Fry (2001) found that in 1997, nearly 80 percent of high school graduates from high-income families went on directly to higher education, while only 50 percent of high school graduates from low-income families went on to higher education. In the same year they found that 46 percent of college-age white high school graduates were enrolled in college, whereas only 39 percent of African American and 36 percent of Latina/o high school graduates were enrolled in college. However, these statistics speak nothing of the high school graduation rates for students of the same populations, where, in 2000, 77 percent of African Americans ages 18 to 24 completed high school and only 59.6 percent of Latina/os completed high school (American Council on Education [ACE] 2002). In light of these statistics, approximately 39% of 77% of all 18-24 year old African Americans and 36% of 59.6% of all 18-24 year old Latina/os were enrolled in postsecondary education<sup>1</sup>; a much smaller proportion than any one statistic reveals alone.

US statistics reported by the Pathways to College Network (2004) are even more compelling. They state that by their late 20's more than one-third of whites have at least a bachelors degree but only eighteen percent of African Americans and ten percent of Latina/os have attained degrees. These statistics will change dramatically over the next 15 years when one to two million additional young adults will be seeking access to higher education and a large proportion of the potential students in this group will be from low-income families and be students of color (Carneval and Fry 2001), albeit access to which institutions of postsecondary education is not always fully addressed and may continue to perpetuate current inequities (Brint and Karabel 1989; Hurtado and Wathington 2001).

The support structures and barriers that influence access to higher education continue to shift and this has led contemporary theorists, practitioners and legislators to attempt to understand higher education's current role in contemporary society. A number of national initiatives, conferences, and dialogues have been held across the country designed to gather leaders together to discuss the future of the relationships between higher education and society (American Association of Colleges and Universities [AACU] 2002; AACU 2006; American Council for Education [ACE] 2006; Association for the Study of Higher Education [ASHE] 2006; Campus Compact and AACU 2006; National Forum on Higher Education for the Public Good 2002; W.K. Kellogg Foundation 2002). Higher education leaders who engage in these ongoing discussions about higher education's responsibilities to society come to the conversation with competing visions, frames of reference and worldviews (Pasque 2007).

The implications of each perspective, law, service-learning program and educational policy have direct implications for people in society. I assume that even with the addition or recycling of perspectives, laws, programs, and policies, a chasm – or gap – between higher education and society remains. Oppressive practices and educational inequity have not been extensively interrupted, nor have ways been found to forge stronger relationships between higher education and society in order to do so. Higher education is at a tipping point where new and innovative strategies are needed in order to alter the current trajectory and make needed educational and social change.

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<sup>1</sup> These statistics do not include information about Native American or Asian American students. In addition, they do not break down the statistics within racial and ethnic groups that uncover further disparity within and between student populations.

Yet, how is educational change possible in a system that silences perspectives that may be useful, particularly perspectives from women with an advocacy perspective? Bensimon and Marshall (2000) state that higher education policy studies “assume academic structures, processes and practices are gender blind. The lack of attention to gender, both as conceptual category and analytical lens, means that the differential experience of women and male academics is attributed to individual differences rather than to consequences of a male ordered world” (134). For example, at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, it was found that men spoke significantly longer than women and made significantly more responses to comments and questions. In addition, women’s participation was lower in less structured aspects of the meeting than in aspects with greater structure (Wiest et al. 2006). Moreover, the larger educational policy environment is not limited to one conference or a specific act – it is enacted in a series of discourses, policy meetings, and reports; it is a cumulative effect where women could potentially make a difference.

In *The Science Question in Feminism*, Harding states, [F]eminist politics is not just a tolerable companion of feminist research but a necessary condition for generating less partial and perverse descriptions and explanations. In a socially stratified society, the objectivity of the results of research is increased by political activism by and on behalf of oppressed, exploited and dominated groups. Only through such struggles can we begin to see beneath the appearances created by an unjust social order to the reality of how this social order is in fact constructed and maintained. (as cited in Fine 2000, 117)

This research study explores how the social order of higher education policy is resisted by women in order to encourage transformative educational change and how some seek to maintain the dominant social order. Through examination of the linguistic complexities of this national discourse in an overarching study, I found that some women, people of color, and people outside the academy were silenced and/or their perspectives are reframed or discounted (Pasque 2007; Pasque in press). The fact that women are silenced and/or their perspectives are rejected or altered is not new (Also see Chase 2005; Gilligan 1982; 1987; 1988; Green and Trent 2005; Rowley 2000; Smith 2004; Stanley 2006; Tannen 1993; 1994). The word “silence” in this context is to mean that ideas are shared and not centered in the discussion and/or not included in final reporting structures or revised models. As Tannen (1993) points out, silencing a person is not necessarily connected to volubility; a person may talk a lot or use many words to describe a concept and still be silenced. In the case of these earlier findings, a participant may or may not have felt silenced in the moment, but when their concepts and ideas are not incorporated in revised concepts of higher education’s relationship to society, then the concept or idea is stifled, shut down or silenced. Or, if someone disagrees with the idea, and the group moves on without addressing agreement or disagreement (i.e. the phrase “sweeping it under the rug”), then a person may feel silenced.

Furthermore, it was found that if participants (women or men) shared more of an “advocacy” perspective, their voices were marginalized (Pasque in press). This finding was relatively new in the field of higher education research. In order to explore the complexities of these policy conversations further, this study specifically considers the voices of women who resisted dominant educational paradigms. In this study, I argue that if a more thorough understanding of women leaders’ perspectives is not offered and—better yet—“heard”, then dominant perspectives shared in academic discourse genres may continue to perpetuate the

current ideas of higher education's relationship with society—from an economic rationalization perspective—without consideration of alternative perspectives. The perpetuation of the current trajectory and the continued marginalization of alternative frames offered by women may hinder work toward social justice and educational equity.

In what follows, I describe the theoretical framework and methods before sharing the findings and implications for this important policy analysis. Specifically, I explore the complexities of the educational policy discourse in detail, considering both the content—what is said—and the process—how it is said—within this national policy context in order to interrupt current patterns of educational inequity and apply more strategic change strategies.

### **Theoretical and Methodological Framework**

Bell hook's definition of feminism is one that has transcended generations of theorists. She states, "simply put, feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" (2000, 1; Also see hooks 1984/2000). This study takes a feminist perspective, drawing from feminist epistemology and feminist theory. Feminist epistemology—the philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible—addresses the connections between knowledge and its social uses and how patriarchal values have shaped the content and structure of that knowledge. Feminist theory is founded on three main principles (Ropers-Huilman 2002). First, women have something valuable to contribute to every aspect of the world. Second, as an oppressed group, women have been unable to achieve their potential, receive rewards or gain full participation in society. Third, feminist research should do more than critique, but should work toward social transformation. Following the feminist paradigm, this study addresses 1) the content of women's discourse about higher education policy and 2) the structure, or process, of these discussions in order to increase knowledge to transform higher education policy toward social justice and educational equity.

In addition, I employ critical discourse analysis and narrative analysis, which include elements of social identity theories and are often used to explore discourse. A number of scholars specifically connect identity with discourse (Goffman 1981; Hall and Bucholtz 1995; Johnstone 1999; Tannen 1993; 1994). For example, performances of identity relate to how social identity (ability, age, class, ethnicity, gender, gender expression, race, religion and sexual orientation) is interconnected with, and cannot be separated from, discourse. This humanistic perspective explores the ways in which verbal language is a representation or a performance of a person's social identity. By way of example, Tannen's (1993) research focuses on how women and men communicate their identity through the use of various linguistic strategies. Tannen explores language and topics such as power and solidarity, indirectness, interruption, silence, and conflict. In this way, Tannen explores performances of gender identity. In another example, Foucault's (1980) historical research focuses on the contradictions between discourses and the ways in which the self is pulled in different directions by discourse. Anna Devere Smith's (1994) performance ethnography research is another way in which social identity and discourse are connected. Devere Smith states, "Words are not an end in themselves. They are a means to evoking the character of the person who spoke them" (1).

Further, narratives serve to highlight culturally recognizable explanations or interpretations, attend to the knowledge and intent of listeners and the protagonists in their stories, make use of a culturally commonsense epistemology and take a moral or evaluative stance relative to the events in the story (Bruner 1990; also see Walton and Brewer 2001). In

addition, people perceive and enact a construction of self based upon their belonging to specific social contexts (Monaci, Magatti and Caselli 2003). For example, in this study I explore the voices of women in a situated discursive practice (policy discussions) that are tied to context-related enactments of identity and society (self and higher education).

Moreover, narratives frame our understanding of an identity of the self or of something or someone other than ourselves (Walton, Weatherall, and Jackson 2002). The cultural practice of storytelling about personal experience constitutes a significant means through which people position themselves in relation to others, and are positioned by others (Harre and Slocum 2003). Narrativity also constructs and is constructed through practical reasoning. In this study, the participants' practical reasoning during the policy conference series conceptualized the connections between higher education and society and models for change. Stated more simply, the women shared their perspectives of how to make strategic change in education. Further, I illustrate how everyday, practical reasoning (what is said) produces various constructs for change (how to make change) and is produced by social interactions (who gets listened to), of which, gender plays an important role.

## **Methods**

In order to examine this topic in a discourse context, I chose to explore discussions between higher education leaders during a twelve-day national policy conference series (four, three day conferences) that focused on strengthening the relationships between higher education and society. The conference series brought together over 250 legislators, faculty, university presidents, administrators, community organizers and graduate students throughout the United States. This micro-analysis data corpus includes agendas, planning materials, reports, twelve days of audiotape, word-for-word transcripts, and fieldnotes.

In order to reduce the large amounts of data, I explored the "peak" sessions, or sessions where there was more conversation among participants (as opposed to sessions that were limited primarily to lecture and question and answer between participants and the main speaker). The "peak" sessions were identified through two different processes. These two processes yielded similar results and add to the trustworthiness or goodness of this study (Jones, Torres, and Arminio 2006; Lincoln and Guba 1985). The first process for identifying the "peak" session included two different techniques that were applied to pinpoint the telling narrative interactions for closer analysis (Mitchell, 1984). First, I listened to the audiotapes from the three-day conferences and identified key concepts mentioned most frequently and sessions where the topic of "higher education for the public good" (HEPG) or "higher education and society" was the topic mentioned most often were selected, as might be expected. In these sessions, topics such as change, dialogues, power and leadership were mentioned often, but less frequently than HEPG. Second, the number of times per session that participants specifically mentioned the phrase HEPG, or a form thereof, was counted and graphed. In the first three conferences, it was the session that preceded the conclusion of the conference that yielded the highest results. Pasque and Rex (2004) attribute the dramatic increase in frequency to the preceding sessions that built toward this climactic session toward the end of each conference. In the fourth conference, no session distinctly emerged (it was a summative conference with little to no large group discussion) and therefore was not selected for this analysis.

I embarked on a second process in order to increase credibility of this study (Lincoln and Guba 1985). I compared the similarities and differences between "peak" and "non-peak" sessions through a constant comparative method (Strauss and Corbin, 1999). I examined each

participant's performance moves utilizing various discourse theories, such as code switching, face-threatening-acts, hedging, persuasion, rules for politeness, silence, as tools for analysis (Brown and Levinson 1987; DeVito 1992; Edwards and Potter 1992; Goffman 1981; Gumperz 1982; Johnstone 2002; Lakoff 1973; Tannen 1994). "Peak" sessions and "non-peak" sessions had a few similarities and numerous differences. For example, in the peak sessions the numerous participants aligned with the speaker more often, disagreed with the speaker more often, and agreed / aligned with other participants more often than in the non-peak session; there was more depth to the discussion. In addition, there were more instances where issues of power came into play and places where negative face (similar to the concept "saving face") was mentioned. In the non-peak sessions, there were more stories shared and participants offered their best practices at their home institutions. A full description of this process and these findings is beyond the scope of this paper however, these differences highlight the ways in which the "peak" sessions I chose for further exploration were more dynamic sessions and important for a deeper analysis (See Pasque 2007 for more details about this process).

An inductive approach was taken for the further analysis of the "peak" sessions in order to allow findings to reflect the richness of the exchange; utilizing a constant comparative method, I allowed patterns to *emerge from* the discursive data (Charmaz 2005; Strauss and Corbin 1999). In addition, I used elements of narrative analysis (Daiute 2004), discourse analysis (Erickson 2004; Fairclough 2001) and intertextuality (Swanson 2006) to more deeply consider the discourse between policy leaders.

Member checking, or taking the findings back to participants for review, was an important element that added to the trustworthiness of this study (Jones, Torres, and Arminio 2006). I chose four participants who represented different social identities and roles during the conference series. No invited member checkers declined to participate. The known member checker identities include: 2 women, 2 men, 1 Latina/o, 1 African American, 2 white people, 1 graduate student, 1 postdoctoral researcher (currently an assistant professor), 1 assistant professor, 1 full professor, and 1 organizer. I intentionally do not connect the gender, race, and role of each member checker in order to ensure confidentiality.

Building off of earlier studies that have found that 1) women and people of color are often silenced or perspectives are reframed and 2) people with alternative perspectives (across social identities) often have their perspectives marginalized in the national policy discourse (Pasque 2007; Pasque in press), this study explores the voices of women who fit both categories. Specifically, I explore the discourse of three women who spoke during identified "peak" sessions and shared perspectives that resisted the dominant paradigms of the national policy conference series. These three women are representative examples of discourse by women in this series and exploring a few cases in-depth allows for more profundity in this analysis of the policy discourse. In this manner, this study hopes to deeply explore the complexities of such interactions including the 1) *content* of what was said and 2) the *process* of how it was said in the hopes of transforming national policy paradigms in higher education to be more inclusive of alternative perspectives and organizational processes for change.

## **Findings**

Women resisted the dominant discourse at different points during the national policy conferences on higher education and society. In each case, the content of what the woman offered was different than what was presented earlier by organizers. Each time a woman offered an alternative perspective, the content of what women said was reframed, redefined, or silenced

by participants, organizers, or in final reports. Stated another way, alternative perspectives that attempt to change educational inequity and social injustice around gender, race and/or class are not “heard” nor centered in policy discussions or final reporting structures. In addition, the process by which the women who resisted the dominant narratives spoke up was different across the various women who spoke. One woman used a “bridging move” which connected academic and non-academic language, another utilized more of a one-down approach to challenging the dominant models, and the third spoke with passion and emotion in order to ensure her perspective was heard.

In the sections below, the qualitative findings are discussed in detail using rich, thick description (Creswell 2003) and quotes from the word-for-word transcripts. Pseudonyms are used for participants in the conference series.<sup>2</sup> In this section, I share three representative examples of the various discourse of women who resisted the dominant perspectives and explore language 1) of the women, 2) between women and men, 3) between women and women. For the purpose of this article, “content” is *what* is said or the overt and obvious meaning of the performance move (Trenholm and Jensen 1992). “Process” is *how* it is said including the impact of the performance move on the situation.<sup>3</sup> I consider each of the challenges through the theoretical and methodological lenses used in this study. I offer a reflective analysis, which speaks to the implications of women the national policy discourse and potential locations for educational change.

### *Redefining Judith*

This example explores the dialogue that ensued after Judith’s plenary speech on the topic of how to make change in the relationship between higher education and society. Judith is a white woman director of a national policy organization on education and a professor. Relevant to this discussion is that conveners used a familiar ecological or systems model (Figure 1). This circular model includes the “individual” level, surrounded by the “institutional” level, surrounded by the “system of higher education” level, surrounded by the “society” level. Between each level, a crescent overlaps the two, touching levels. The organizers described the focus of this national conference series as the relationships between higher education and society, or the crescent between the “system of higher education” and “society” levels. The ecological model, and other models, were presented in the material that participants received prior to their arrival, mounted on a poster placed on a tri-pod in the room, mentioned by organizers in each conference opening session, and referred to by organizers and participants throughout the conference series.

**Figure 1. Ecological Impact Model.**



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Judith sparked the discussion by resisting this model and calling for differentiated change. Specifically, she disagreed with the conveners about where change should be defined. Judith stated,

And I think the “just doing it” has to be—I guess it’s the first thing, very differentiated. Because if you’re a university president, you’re going to “Just do it” [Nike reference was referred to earlier in the discussion] in a very different way than if you’re a tenured faculty member or if you’re a graduate student or if you’re in some other kind of role. And for that reason, I think that in a bizarre way, that we have to violate one of the principles that’s set out up here on the chart [see Figure 1] and that’s about “Systems Perspective.” My suspicion is, and my experience is, that this [change in higher education and society] can’t and shouldn’t be systematic – that there’s an inherent contradiction – that it’s got to be idiosyncratic, opportunistic, differentiated. And, that maybe in the end, that’s a different way of thinking systemically, but it liberates us from the, “Let’s sit down and get a vision and a strategic plan and figure out what next steps are and what are our benchmarks,” and all those things which I’m convinced will never get us to working for the public good in a way that’s very different from the status quo.

In this narrative, Judith identifies the role differential between college presidents, faculty and graduate students. This statement situates Judith in more of an advocacy framework, where power is recognized and different strategies for making equitable change in policy on the topic of higher education and society is employed.

From here, the majority of speakers who followed positioned themselves in agreement with Judith (in favor of differentiated methods of change), in disagreement with Judith (change should be conducted in a systematic manner), or viewed change as requiring both a systems and differentiated method. The effect was a contentious polarization of the two positions. In fact, eight of the eleven speakers who followed Judith in this session took up this topic to position themselves in relation to the issues she framed. The next four segments of the discussion demonstrate those who positioned themselves in agreement or disagreement with Judith, or who reframed what she was “really saying” to include both the systems and differentiated perspectives (for more detailed analysis see Pasque and Rex 2004).

Nicole: [To Judith] I too feel the tension between the good yet idiosyncratic differentiated activities that are out there—and the sense of urgency I feel—and yet, also a sense of hopelessness about a systemic change.

In this example, Nicole, a white woman director of a national institute on community dialogues, aligned herself with Judith in support of the “good yet idiosyncratic differentiated activities.” Nicole took this support one step further to state the sense of “urgency” and “hopelessness” about change that she held when a systemic model is utilized. This statement mirrors other comments of support by women in this discussion. In the next example, Michael positions himself in disagreement with Judith.

Michael: I’d come back to the “systemic part” just for a moment. I didn’t agree with everything you said, [Judith], but I think in the conversation and particularly in [Kenneth’s] comments, the central nub of this is that there are many different definitions of systems and then language that has evolved in the last decade or so as

this becomes more public—and I’m a systems scientist so these are sensitive issues for somebody like me. [Laughter].

In this example, Michael, a white male professor, started his narrative by stating that he “didn’t agree” with everything Judith had said. He offered that there were “different definitions of systems” and implied that her definition of systems might be limited. He couched this disagreement with humor while naming himself as a “systems scientist” thereby aligning himself with the systems perspective and positioning himself (and not Judith) as an authority on systems. This is a subtle way in which power operates in national policy conversations; where Michael devalues Judith’s comments while positioning himself as the authority.

Below are two examples of participants locating change around higher education for the public good as both a differentiated (Judith’s perspective) and a systems perspective (Michael’s perspective). These two men illustrate ways to bridge the two perspectives.

Angelo: I agree with everything you [Judith] said, the only part that I would perhaps want to talk about more is your mentioning about systemic maybe not being the way to go, and I hope, I think, what you’re really saying is that maybe one has to work simultaneously from different perspectives. There is something to be said about the kind of organic “Just doing it” kind of approach.

Kenneth: I think that the theory is to construct big boats with tall masts just over the horizon, and then to encourage them to sail into port by which time they’ve filled the field of vision of everybody who’s standing on the land. And so I guess I don’t see a distinction between idiosyncratic, entrepreneurial adventures and systemic change as long as you create the wind to make one lead to the other.

In the first example, Angelo, a male president of a national foundation, reframed what Judith was “really saying” in order to redefine the concept not as a bifurcation, but as a combination of multiple perspectives, thereby creating a third definition. In this example, Angelo takes the liberty of redefining what Judith is “really saying” as though she may not have known herself, or may not have been clear enough with her description. A white college president, Kenneth, reached a similar point by stating, “I don’t see a distinction between idiosyncratic, entrepreneurial adventures and systemic change.” His narrative also created a distinct and alternative repertoire in which differentiated and systems perspectives coexisted as boat and wind. More specifically, during the policy conference men advocated for the ecological/systems model for change—or both a differentiated and systems model—while women advocated purely for a differentiated model for change.

Judith’s question about whether the ecological model sustains the status quo rather than supporting change is an important one. Tactically, Judith invoked a slogan from advertising that was used earlier in the conference as the conceptual framework for change, but applied it in an external way consistent with academia. Judith assumed a different idea about making change and presented it in a discursive genre familiar to policy leaders in higher education. By articulating a minority position and casting it in language the majority could hear, her discourse appears politically strategic in this context. She has given voice to a position that might be heard but not extensively discussed in such settings. Other female participants, such as Nicole, took up Judith’s strategy and continued to push against the dominant ecological model.

Further, Michael positioned himself as an authority of systems and simultaneously tried to reduce Judith's influence in this context. Michael may have chosen humor as a form of minimization – a way to soften the hierarchical positioning (DeVito 1992; Tannen 1994). In addition, Angelo redefined what Judith was “really saying.” Angelo may have intended to help Judith during a volatile conversation by modifying her main point (Tannen 1993), or wield power in the situation through his redefinition (Tannen 1993). Kenneth, on the other hand, used a metaphor to disagree with Judith's differentiated model and find a compromise of both a differentiated and systems approach. The boat with the tall masts did not redefine what Judith said or reduce her authority, but offered a differing perspective delivered with the dominant intellectual approach. The intersection of gender, power and humor in this policy context should be explored in further research studies.

These four examples demonstrate the various ways in which higher education leaders located change in the relationships between higher education and society by constructing their experience and observations through a differentiated perspective, a systems perspective, or a combination of the two. Judith offered the differentiated model, which the women group members accepted and some male group members disagreed with or outright re-defined. This redefinition or rejection of Judith's idiosyncratic – or alternative – method of change furthers Michael's perspective and limits the options of policymakers as they work toward transforming education. This taking of positions reflects the group dilemmas that play out in other “peak” sessions as explored in the next example.

### *Reframing Stephanie*

A number of women who attended conferences during this national policy series challenged the content of the organizers model. In another “peak” session, the rejection of the model comes from conference participants and may have been prompted by the challenge of Bob, a white man, full professor of sociology. In the discussion, Bob states, “And I noticed the psychological [ecological] impact model does not have a **team**, a small group component. So, individuals, to me, are isolated. That's why they are individuals.” With this comment, Bob explicitly shows how this idea of “team” is absent in one of the primary models utilized by the organizers of the conference.

Approximately one third of the way through the session, Stephanie, a white woman professor of sociology returns to the question of the organizing model. She states,

I think that as a relative newcomer to **this** level of meeting, I have been very excited about what feels like, although I'm not sure, an agreement that the organizing [ecological] model, the social movement model is, maybe, a best way to do this. And what, what would be useful to me, and maybe . . . I'm not thinking that that's always the model that I see that many institutions, I think, including my own, are necessarily using to develop this work. So, I feel that the [organizing organization] in this group could make a contribution if that was part of the shared vision and purpose. And what would be useful to me is if somebody could contrast what are some of the other models of change, which I sometimes hear, kind of, taken for granted. I'm thinking of entrepreneurial models, for example, more, forgive me, top down models for change. Whereas I have tended to agree that the way you brought about change was from the grassroots and organizing, but I don't think that's been taken for granted in the civic engagement [community].

Stephanie starts this comment by putting herself in a one-down position, stating that she is a newcomer to this level of a national meeting. She goes on to share her excitement about an “agreement” about the organizing model for this conference series. In this move, she articulates how organizers and participants have, up until this session, agreed upon the model. Stephanie mentions that this model may be “a” or one way to think about the topic at hand. The word “a,” of which she verbally emphasizes, is a key distinction. It signals to listeners that she believes this is one of *many* models that could be used.

Hedging (using a verbal pause, or repeating words, which is different than a stutter), Stephanie states, “And what, what would be useful to me, and maybe...” This hedging reduces the strength of her request—that the organizers present more than one model for considering this type of work. As a potential way to strengthen her request, she provides personal evidence that her own institution is of one of many institutions that does not use this model. She asks that someone contrast “other models of change” that are “taken for granted” in this conversation and that these other models would be useful. This question to the group may be Stephanie’s way to get the group to acknowledge the top-down models that many institutions currently use, or to enable the group to think more deeply about the various models that are used in higher education.

Stephanie, and a number of other women participants, use non-direct performance moves to state opposition to dominant narratives. For example, through her request for additional models, Stephanie resists the model presented during the conference. In this indirect way, Stephanie resists the dominant perspective presented by the organizers – that this ecological model is *the* way to make change in the relationship between higher education and society. In another example, a woman of color graduate student resists the dominant discourse in the conference, but prior to stating her opposition, she starts by hedging and putting herself in a one-down position by saying, “Um, I just wanted to say a couple—we’ve been talking about social movements and some of these side movements—I mean, I still have a lot to learn, but ...” Further, a woman who supports the ecological model begins her disagreement by stating that her position sounds “Pollyanna-ish.”

These non-direct manners of engaging in conflict are consistent with the work on gender discourse by Gilligan (1982; 1987; 1988). Gilligan’s “different voices” framework is particularly useful for interpreting face-to-face verbal conflict across gender (See Sheldon 1993). Gilligan found that girls/women operate from a care orientation and try to seek agreement in the way they frame conflict resolution. Specifically, Stephanie frames her resistance to the organizer’s model in a way that provides the organizers with a resolution—the option of presenting additional models for consideration.

Interestingly, the next speaker does not take up Stephanie’s request for additional models, at which point, Bob, the same full professor who originally mentioned that the concept of “team” is not included in the ecological model, requests that someone answer Stephanie’s question before moving on with the discussion. In this performance move, Bob views the direction of the conversation as negotiable, and steps in to make certain Stephanie’s comment receives a response. More specifically, this professor uses his power in the room in order ensure that an organizer responds to Stephanie’s request for additional models. Bob could be using his situational power as a male ally in order to make sure Stephanie’s important point is addressed by the group (for more on allies see Reason, Broido, Davis and Evans 2005). Or, he could view Stephanie’s request as one that supports his own resistance to the ecological model (the topic at hand) and helps to make certain that the request is entertained as it furthers his own perspective.

At this point, the white male facilitator asks, “What topic is this? Is this important?” A white male organizer (Joseph) responds with, “I suspect your [Stephanie] question about what other models are available, is not invitational but rhetorical. You didn’t want us to elaborate those at this moment, I hope not.” When Stephanie states that she would, in fact, like to hear at least one more model, the organizer redefines her original question. Joseph states,

We believe that part of the excitement of this work could be found in placing values along side a new way of thinking and working and pushing those two together. That—that might help us to sustain interest and engagement because people would be learning a new way of working at the same time that they’re focusing on values, which they hold deeply, so—if you wanted insight into some of what preceded this that was it.

In this performance move, Joseph reframes the question that Stephanie asked by stating, “if you wanted insight into some of what preceded this.” Stephanie never requested more information about the preceding conversations that led to the use of this model. She requested different models of change. This example connects to additional research by Gilligan (1982; 1987; 1988) that found boys/men have a need for an external structure of connection. In addition, boys/men tend to step back from the situation and appeal to reason, often losing site of the needs of others. In this example, Joseph connects himself with others by using “we” often in his response. This provides him with an external structure of connection—the group of organizers. In addition, he provides a rationale that is different from what Stephanie requests, thereby losing site of what she states she needs. He resists Stephanie’s challenge of the models and uses his power as an organizer to reframe her request in a polite, yet political, manner. Further, the challenges to the organizers’ models are not incorporated into revised models for change; the models remain unaltered at subsequent conference sessions and in conference summary reports.

### *Silencing Courtney*

In the middle of another “peak” session, Courtney, a Latina graduate student does not challenge the model, but instead challenges the dominant narrative in the session. She states, What sacred cows are we willing to slaughter? What pain are we willing to endure? I mean, people who participate in social movement think about risks all the time, they think about retribution. I mean, they pay with their lives, they pay with their futures, their reputations. And, I don’t **really** hear us or see us talking about those things. We were talking about making change in very safe ways that allow us to maintain our status. That allows to maintain our privilege and our comfortability [Woman participant says, “that’s right”] . . . we **have** to be true and we have to get up and admit we made mistakes. We have to get up and we have to tell the truth about things and we **have** to be willing to give some of our own power and our own privilege up in order to make things better for other people.  
Woman participant: Amen.

Courtney challenges the group’s (organizers and participants) dominant ideology thus far by stating that participants are talking about making change in the relationship between higher education and society “in very safe ways.” In her full narrative, Courtney describes truth telling as naming the historical and contemporary inequities that exist (e.g. the history of segregation) together with the structural ways to interrupt these inequities (e.g. diversifying the faculty).

Courtney expresses that the group is not telling the truth in terms of naming historical and contemporary inequities and structural ways to interrupt these inequities. With this comment, she advocates for continued efforts that increase sources of capital, as is highlighted by Bourdieu (1986), and for participants to name simultaneously the power structures that sustain cyclical oppression as is discussed by Foucault (1976).

Courtney goes on to say that social movements, such as the movement to strengthen the relationships between higher education and society, are about “fundamentally challenging the status quo”—something she stresses the participants have not done during this conference series. She articulates that even though they are engaging in conversations, participants in the conference are not addressing what they are willing to give up in order to make change. Participants are “talking about making change in very safe ways that allow us to maintain our status.” Courtney resists the status quo by posing a direct question to participants through her use of the metaphor, “What sacred cows are we willing to slaughter?”

As Courtney becomes more assertive in her challenges to participants, she hedges less often and becomes more emphatic with her weight on particular words (as noted with the underline). Her statement is met with verbal supportive gestures from two other woman participants of “that’s right” during her statement and an “Amen” at the end of her statement. Courtney’s performance move is a point in the session where the conversation topic changes (a horizontal performance move) and participants begin to talk more deeply about the way in which this group of participants are engaging with each other and with the topic of educational in/equity (vertical horizontal move); but only after a male speaker expands upon her comments. This is different from previous conversations, which focused on higher education’s relationships with society in general or specific best-practices. However, even though Courtney’s comments shifted the conversation during the conference, her comments were not incorporated into the final reporting documents. This is one example of where alternative perspectives that challenge the status quo and encourage giving up power and privilege are relegated to the margins of the discussion (also see Wackwitz and Rakow 2004). Courtney’s alternative frame is not included in follow up sessions by the participants and organizers with dominant processing models, even though she received verbal support from some other women participants. In final reports, they are silenced by omission.

Courtney’s situation is reminiscent of a colleague of mine who refers to herself as having to take on the role of an “angry woman of color” in her regular research team meetings<sup>4</sup> before white colleagues “hear” her comments. Stated another way, the “content” about educational inequity in research processes is only addressed when the “process” she uses for communication fits in this self-described stereotypic manner around the intersections of race and gender. At a minimum, this consistent cycle has relegated her voice to the margins of the research and added anxiety to her research experience.

In a similar vein, Dr. Behling (2007) urges facilitators of intergroup dialogues on the topics of gender, race, class and religion to be mindful that marginalized viewpoints are not often heard unless conflict is present, otherwise the comments get passed over and people are silenced. Facilitators, he encourages, need to pay attention to these dynamics in order to encourage that all viewpoints are considered. This relates to Chase’s (2005) finding that “if a previously silenced narrator is to challenge an audience’s assumptions or actions effectively, the audience must be ready to hear the narrator’s story—or must be jolted into listening to it” (668).

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<sup>4</sup> This colleague has seen my written description of her experience and I have her permission to use her story in this context.

In light of Courtney's experience at the conference session, my colleagues' experiences, and current research, I assume that if Courtney did not get "passionate" in the process of sharing her perspective, then fellow participants may not have addressed the content of her comments or may have "reframed" her language, as in the case of Stephanie. Further, to juxtapose the voice of women of color with white women adds an important antiracist feminist perspective which argues against assumptions made about gender by and about predominantly white women (MacDonald 2002); this perspective stresses the interconnections and complexities between gender, race, and class. To be sure, it is wrong to assume that any one woman's perspective speaks for all women's perspective.

Smith's (2004) concept of racial battle fatigue is useful in uncovering further the dynamics between people who articulate dominant and alternative frames during this conference series. Smith describes racial battle fatigue as "a response to the distressing mental/emotional conditions that result from facing racism daily (e.g., racial slights, recurrent indignities and irritations, unfair treatments, including contentious classrooms, and potential threats or dangers under tough to violent and even life-threatening conditions)" (180). Smith relates documented various psychological and physiological symptoms (tension headaches, backaches, trembling and jumpiness, chronic pain, upset stomach, extreme fatigue, constant anxiety and worrying, etc.) to the combat fatigue experiences by military personnel<sup>5</sup>. In addition, the anticipation of a racist event may add to the stressor. Smith furthers that "unfortunately for African American faculty . . . higher education was and continues to be much more racially exclusive, oppressive, and antagonistic than society at large" (185).

It follows that participant's who hold alternative perspectives which directly address issues of educational inequity and challenge the dominant perspectives—who are also being marginalized in the context of this policy series—experience a form of battle fatigue. If this is the case, then participants who continually address issues of educational inequity and hold intersecting target social identities (e.g. woman, person of color) may experience a "double dose" of battle fatigue. Further, by not directly addressing issues of educational inequity around gender, race and class, the dominant perspectives contribute to Rowley's (2000) description of symbolic violence and social reproduction.

## Discussion

Parsons and Ward (2001) state that "academics are disciplined not to recognize the subtle, unconscious sexism that permeates the academy" (56-57). These three examples of women who resist the dominant models and narratives in the national academic policy discussions may appear unconnected, yet represent a pattern of institutionalized sexism displayed in a policy context even with participants who may have had the best of intention to embark upon transformative educational change (an assumption based on participation in this series). Such resistance by women is found to be a political strategy toward change (Gilligan, Rogers and Tolman 1991) and provides a foundation from which to explore the complexities of gender in educational policy and alternatives to current paradigms. This discussion explores both the process of the discourse—how comments were said—and the content—what was said.

In terms of process, Judith's strategy to "just do it" in order to strengthen the relationships between higher education and society is supported by women and redefined by men. In the second example, Stephanie requests alternatives to the foundational model and an

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<sup>5</sup> Smith does footnote that he is not equating the daily experiences of people in the military with daily experiences of faculty of color, but he is suggesting a useful metaphor.

organizer reframes her question to ignore the request and further the foundational model of the conference. In addition, her request is only addressed when a white male full professor steps into the conversation and asks that someone respond to Stephanie's request for additional models. This male serves as an important ally in order to stop the facilitator from moving past Stephanie's request. In the third example, it is when Courtney becomes more emphatic and "angry" when questioning the ways in which participants are maintaining their privilege and status in this national policy discussion that woman participants verbally support her. Her challenge to the group is silenced at the end of the conference by participants not following up on her comments and not including them in final reporting documents.

As Marshall (1999) notes when discussing educational policy, people use speech as a power tool to create power, to effect a desire or goal, and to block, resist, and create opposing strategies (Ball, 1990; Foucault, 1981). Privileged speakers' truths (and policy analyses) prevail; a "discourse of derision" can be used to displace or debunk alternative truths (Ball, 1990). Research on how marginal issues get into the public discourse is about gender and about democracy. (65)

In this case, both women and men use speech as a power tool to communicate their perspectives. However, when women challenge dominant ideologies, the discourse of derision specifically redefines what women are "really saying", reframes questions that challenge dominant models, and silences perspectives in order to maintain the current social order. As mentioned, silencing is not necessarily connected to volubility (Tannen 1993); omitting comments from the final reporting documents is one method of silencing perspectives in a policy context.

In addition, the narratives from all three women include examples of hedging and two include examples of one-down positioning. These nonverbal pauses or non-direct manners of engaging in conflict are consistent with the findings on gender discourse by Gilligan (1982; 1987; 1988). Coupled with these hedging moves are women's own attempt at leadership and educational change. Higher education researchers Astin and Leland (1991) offer a feminist conceptual model of leadership which "rests on the assumption that leadership manifests itself when there is an action to bring about change in an organization, an institution, or the social system—in other words, an action to make a positive difference in people's lives. Leadership, then is conceived as a creative process that results in change" (116). Each of the women attempt to bring about change in this policy conversation or in educational policy as a whole. As such, Judith, Stephanie and Courtney would be included within Astin and Leland's definition of feminist leadership. However, the educational policy question becomes, how is the content of what these women share "heard" when their comments are being reframed, redefined, or silenced in the national discourse? What is the content or alternative perspective that each woman offers for consideration?

In terms of content, Judith talks about differentiated change to strengthen the relationships between higher education and society. She describes the "just do it" strategy as having multiple and simultaneous entry points. Her perspective is much like Al Gore's approach toward addressing global warming. In myriad speeches and his movie, *The Inconvenient Truth*, Gore discusses the layered complexities of global warming and then offers numerous strategies to simultaneously address this problem with a world-wide approach. In a similar vein, Judith talks about differentiated educational change as an issue for all, where one collective strategic plan will not necessarily interrupt the status quo. Such an approach offers a new way for political



strategists and education leaders to consider the layered complexities of educational inequity and provides alternative strategies for change.

Stephanie's content also questions the foundational model for change between higher education and society. She requests the group consider additional models from more of a "grassroots" organizing perspective. It is important to note that Stephanie did not attend the earlier conference series where Judith provided an alternative model and the organizer (and a number of other people in the room) did attend both sessions and chose not to resurrect Judith's differentiated change model. Instead, the organizer reframes Stephanie's question to provide "insight into some of what preceded this" conference series: A verbally strategic tactic in order to alter her question and answer s different question. This is a tactic utilized often by politicians when interviewed about their political perspectives or strategies for change. Further, Stephanie's request is only addressed when a white male ally speaks up and suggests someone answer her question. The vital role of allies in educational policy contexts cannot be underscored enough. It was only with the support of this ally that Stephanie's request is acknowledged. Even the facilitator did not pick up on her request for additional grassroots organizing models.

Finally, the content of Courtney's narrative asks participants to spend time engaged in truth telling and to name strategies for change that may not be as safe or allow participants to maintain their current status. Making visible one's own power and privilege is a difficult task, particularly for people in privileged positions with agent identities (Wildman and Davis 2000). In the work of Adams, Bell and Griffin (1997) it is the first step toward engaging in difficult intergroup dialogues about gender, race, class and individual, institutional and systemic oppression. Such a step prepares one for interrupting the cycle of oppression and embarking on systemic change (Harro 2000). Courtney's strategy follows this model. It starts with identifying privilege and admitting the mistakes that have transpired in educational policy in the past. This process of identifying the current system of inequity becomes the starting point for interrupting the dominant paradigm and crafting an action strategy for change.

Each form of resistance poses a dilemma for the group as a whole, as some participants and organizers do not agree. In each case, the content of the dilemmas are not captured in recrafted models or in revised visions for change that hope to strengthen the relationships between higher education and society. Instead, the dilemma is couched in a process of "broad, if not universal, agreement" in the final reporting mechanisms for the conference series (2003, 20). The final report does briefly mention the resistance of the model but in a short and strategic manner. The document states, "The question, perhaps, is not which model is the right one but rather how to find effective leverage points for institutional change" (39). This language suggests a shift of focus by the organizers from the ecological model to various leverage points for "institutional" change incorporated within the model (on the crescent between the "system of higher education" and "society" sections of the model); however, this focus on the crescent was originally presented during the conference series as a foundational principle. The crescent starts off as, and remains, the focus of the ecological model during this educational policy series. With this rhetorical move in the final report, organizers continue to ignore the alternative concept of differentiated change and requests for additional grassroots models. In this manner, the dominant cognitive processing models continue to be perpetuated during the conference, throughout organizational processes, and with the formal documentation of the conference series. As is the iterative process with policy discussions, this is not where the organizers left the conversation, but the organizers have continued to work through other venues to try to strengthen the relationships between higher education and society, with each other and independently. Some of

this work continues to utilize this ecological model and other work introduces new models for change.

Dominant discourse can subdue, redefine, reframe, and resist divergent perspectives and represent a “consciousness” of general support. In this sense, organizers universalize discourse to coordinate people’s diverse perspectives into a unified frame (also see Smith 2000). This is not to say that all alternative perspectives are “better than” the dominant perspectives, however consideration of multiple options opens up viable opportunities from which to interrupt the current cycle of educational inequities. As Bensimon and Marshall (2000) note, feminist perspectives of higher education policy demand new agenda-framing and, as this study shows, also require facilitation that supports, not restricts or redefines feminist and alternative perspectives. In this manner, an emergent process of policy discussions will support new content and an organic form of democratic principles, which may provide alternative action strategies for educational change.

## **Conclusion**

Acknowledgement and inclusion of various perspectives of the relationships between higher education and society is paramount as leaders make more informed choices about how to work toward systemic and equitable change in education. Understanding multiple models, the ecological model and revised models based on alternative perspectives presented, provides multiple frames for considering the relationships between higher education and society. This inclusive information becomes important as leaders strengthen arguments for effective policy change and particularly for developing change strategies that address educational inequities across gender, race and class. If organizers and/or participants dismiss alternative perspectives offered by participants through discourse processes and only pay attention to the dominant frames of understanding, then they will not have an inclusive understanding of the problem to the exclusion of particular educational change strategies.

On a related point, Kezar (2004) argues that if legislators, policy makers, and the public are unclear about why higher education is important to society, then other public policy priorities may gain support at the expense of higher education. Based on the findings from this study regarding the voices of women in the national policy discussion, I extend Kezar’s statement. If legislators, policy makers, higher education leaders and the public are only exposed to dominant perspectives, then they will lack alternative perspectives. If alternative perspectives are not considered, then policy makers will have limited information with which to employ critical social change that addresses the current and persisting inequities in education.

As Wackwitz and Rakow (2004) note, women are too often denied access to communicative forums—interpersonal, group, organizational, and mediated—or admitted to them only to have their ideas dismissed out of hand as deviant or irrelevant. To have voice is to possess both the opportunity to speak and the respect to be heard (9).

This research study supports the findings from Wackwitz and Rakow and expands our knowledge about the complexities of gender in national education policy discussions. The findings encourage a revision of communication processes and an exploration of content offered by women in these conversations. Contrary to some participants in this conference series wanting to be “comfortable” (Courtney’s word) in these types of settings, I believe this *process* of discussing the *content* of change as connected to educational inequity across gender, race, and class *is* going to be uncomfortable. An inclusive communication process is vital as we attempt to

interrupt the current status quo and implement change strategies toward educational equity and social justice.

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