DOMINANT DISCOURSES ON PEER SEXUAL HARASSMENT AMONG ADOLESCENTS: IMPACTS AND OUTCOMES OF EXISTING TRUTH REGIMES

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Abstract

Sexual Harassment among adolescents continues to be a serious concern and can be considered a step towards more aggressive and dangerous behavior. Despite the introduction of policies and procedures within many schools the problem continues to grow unabated. By analyzing the dominant discourses that permeate the literature from a Foucauldian perspective, it is clear that solutions to this problem cannot be easily achieved. Instead, the focus on increased surveillance, which is the underlying message behind the American Association of University Women’s report *Hostile Hallways*, can only lead to more actions and behaviors being classified as sexual harassment rather than a means of curbing the behavior in question. A more recently published report, *The Road to the Health*, adopts an oppressor/ oppressed model that while rooted in feminist discourse that generally works toward social change, is insufficiently progressive and offers only a divisive vision of gender relations for the future. The answer to this problem may lie in tapping the subjugated knowledge of those most closely involved with this problem.

Sexual Harassment Literature

Sexual harassment among adolescents contributes to an unwelcoming, hostile environment in school settings that has a significant impact on the victims of this behavior. Once dismissed as normal adolescent behavior, it is a long standing problem that only became a critical issue beginning in the 1980s. Following the naming of unwanted behaviors of a sexual nature in the workplace, sexual harassment was investigated in other institutional settings where males and females worked or studied in close proximity (Wetzel & Brown, 2000). However, the discussion of sexual harassment
among adolescents did not occur until researchers began to more closely exam the
patterns of interaction in different academic settings beginning with universities and
colleges. While initially sexual harassment was considered to be a “quid pro quo” -
superior/ subordinate occurrence it soon became apparent, as the review of the literature
reiterates, that sexual harassment was occurring among very young individuals and that
the perpetrators were not only teachers and administrators, but the very individuals with
whom young people shared classrooms and hallways- other students.

By the early 1980s sexual harassment was being discussed in a variety of
institutional settings. Universities in particular, were under scrutiny and researchers
began to explore the patterns of behavior between those in positions of authority and their
subordinates. Of particular concern was the role of male professors and female students
and the way in which sexual demands were being made in exchange for ‘favors’ or as a
form of coercion (Fields, 1979; Benson & Thomas, 1982; Maihoff & Forrest, 1983).

While initially the focus was on the rate of occurrence of such incidents, later
studies explored individual experiences of sexual harassment and the breadth of sexually
harassing behavior. McCormack (1985) outlines the range of incidents that female
student reported, which ranged from inappropriate comments and looks to explicit offers
of better grades. Reilly, Lott and Gallogly (1986), examined the reaction that women and
some men had in response to sexual harassment such as reporting and escalating concerns
or simply managing and tolerating this behavior. The manner in which complaints were
handled and the content of institutional responses was also an area of interest (Robertson,
Dyer & Campbell, 1988) as were the problems arising from definitional variations of
what actions actually constituted sexual harassment (Crocker, 1983; Fitzgerald,
Shullman, Bailey, Richards, Swecker, Gold, Ormerod & Weitzman, 1988). Others still (Malovich & Stake, 1990; Mazer & Percival, 1989) attended to the impact on individual self esteem in response to this behavior. In these studies it also became evident that sexual harassment in the academic world involved female students engaging in sexual activities with teachers in high school. Whether or not this constituted sexual harassment was raised as a relevant question.

As sexual harassment among younger individuals became an area of increased attention, the ongoing lack of a universally accepted definition of what types of behavior constituted sexual harassment continued to surface in the literature and became particularly significant as the majority of recommendations that followed from the research pointed to the need for clear and concise education programs (Reilly, Lott, Cladwell & Deluca, 1992; Roscoe, Strouse, & Goodwin, 1994).

Early researchers interested in sexual harassment among younger individuals also cite the difficulty in obtaining ethical approval to access younger researcher subjects given the sensitive nature of the topic. Houston and Hwang (1996), using retrospective reports completed by university women, investigated, not only the rate of sexual harassment experienced by women in high school, but the discrepancy between objectively defined harassment and subjective acceptance of sexual harassment incidents. These problems of identifying and naming what behaviors constitute harassment mirrors concerns by researchers investigating sexual harassment in universities almost a decade earlier (Crocker, 1983; Fitzgerald, Shullman, Bailey, Richards, Swecker, Gold, Ormerod & Weitzman, 1988). Wishnietsky (1991) meanwhile, solicited school superintendents to investigate how many administrators or teachers had been disciplined for sexually
harassing students. These studies conclude that sexual harassment between teachers and students was an ongoing problem but also pointed to evidence that sexual harassment among peers also represented a barrier to education for many students, especially young women.

The awareness of sexual harassment among younger adolescents coincided with the crisis in education that found that, girls in particular, while out performing boys academically in the early years, fall behind in key areas such as sciences and mathematics and measures of self esteem. The American Association of University Women (AAUW) (1992) cited sexual harassment as one of the top reasons for girls declining performance as they pass through to high school. Larkin (1994), urging for more investigation into the harassment of girls in school, argues that “…school is the nucleus of their adolescent lives: the place where they come to increase their life opportunities” As such, the harassment they encounter as students by their peers, sets up a precedent for harassment in other aspects of adult life. The need to investigate sexual harassment among school age children was gaining momentum.

In the United States, NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund (NOWLDEF) co-sponsored research administered through Seventeen magazine and published by Nan Stein and her colleges in 1992. In this widely read teen magazine an article discussing sexual harassment along with a brief 11 multiple choice and two open ended question survey was published. With over 4,000 responses, all from girls and young women, 2,002 were randomly selected and the results revealed the undeniable pervasiveness of sexually inappropriate behavior in many classrooms, hallways, and schoolyards. The data showed that 89% of girls had experienced some form of sexual comment, gesture, or
look, while 83% reported being touched, pinched or grabbed by their male peers. The most startling revelations from the survey indicated that while teachers or school employees were harassing a small number of individuals, the vast majority were being harassed by male peers. In addition, sexual harassment was not only a common experience of school life, but most often occurred in public, that is in plain view of others including teachers, and was understood to be common behavior and expected behavior (Stein, 1999).

While there are obvious limitations to a magazine study, the results prompted further investigation. In 1993, following the results of the AAUW study, *How School Short Change Girls* (1992), the Educational Foundation of the AAUW commissioned Louis Harris and Associates Inc., in partnership with Scholastics Inc., to conduct one of the largest and most extensive surveys to assess the extent of sexual harassment in schools. In 2001 the survey was repeated and expanded to include a look at the impact of sexually harassing behavior on students’ emotions and behavior as well as students’ understanding and awareness of sexual harassment and their experiences of it. The results of both AAUW surveys revealed a similar picture presented by *Seventeen* magazine with respects to the pervasiveness of sexual harassment and its public nature. In addition, the AAUW survey showed that boys as well as girls were often targets of unwanted sexual attention and that sexual harassment is not limited by race, ethnicity, or social class (Stein, 2000; Short 2006). The survey of 2001, with its focus on student’s experiences of sexual harassment highlighted the way in which this behavior impacted the well being and school performance of students and how difficult it is to obtain help to end the problem (AAUW, 2001).
The AAUW surveys were considered generalizable and boasted a 95% confidence level. The major findings continue to be cited by researchers, policy makers and others interested in highlighting the prevalence and impacts of sexual harassment (Stein, 1999; Wetzel & Brown, 2000; Dahinten, 1999; Short, 2006). Despite broad acceptance of the research findings the definition used by the AAUW surveys continues to generate controversy. In question, was the use of the term “unwelcomed” used in their definition of sexual harassment suggesting that perception was a key factor in determining whether harassment had actually occurred. In general, most definitions of sexual harassment concur only in that it is understood as inappropriate behavior that contains a sexual dimension to it. Variations persist based on the diverse perspective from which the topic is discussed. Legal, psychological, sociological and feminist perspectives all affect the way in which the term is understood (O’Donohue, Downs, & Yeater, 1999).

In more recent works, these various perspectives are noted. Larkin (1997) adopts a feminist approach in understanding sexual harassment among adolescents and defines it as “… an expression of sexism which reflects and reinforces the unequal power that exists between men and women in our patriarchal society. It’s part of male-female interaction in which men routinely express their dominance over women” (p. 21). From a sociological perspective, Trigg & Wiffenstrom (1996) conclude that sexual harassment is a cultural script that students learn and consequently much of behaviors that are defined as inappropriate are seen by young people as part of normal adolescent behaviors. Adopting a behavioral –psychological definition, McMasters, Connolly, Pepler, & Craig (2002) argue that sexual harassment can be understood as part of adolescent development and linked to pubertal maturation and participation in mixed gender groups. This
behavior, for some individuals, is understood to occur within the context of peer networks and can be seen as a means of testing sexual expression while for those outside a peer network it is a manifestation of aggression that is rooted in early development. Lacasse, Purdy & Mendelson (2003) echo similar finding in their study that peer networks composed of other-sex friends tended to experience more occurrences of sexually harassing behavior. They also note that while boys and girls experience and perpetrate harassment, boys tend to instigate this behavior more often while girls tend to suffer a higher rate of upset as a consequence.

The consequences or outcomes of sexual harassment continue to be an area of interest in recent literature following the attention devoted to this issue in both AAUW surveys. Dahinten (1999) points to the potential for both the direct and indirect threat to girls and young women’s heath and well-being. Directly, individuals report lower self esteem, feelings of fear, confusion, and stress. Indirectly, loss of educational opportunities increase as individuals avoid certain classes or school altogether which in turn can negatively affect career and income potential- factors that correlate with poor health. These same concerns drew the attention of Duffy, Wareham & Walsh (2004) whose research concluded that sexual harassment does not produce a homogenous set of consequences, but rather it is the type of harassing behavior (i.e. being called gay or lesbian versus being leered at) that affects a wide range of outcomes which include embarrassment, low self esteem, avoidance behavior and lower grades.

The range of outcomes appears to be largely predicated on perception as the previous controversy over the AAUW (1993; 2001) definition outlined. Terrance, Logan and Peters (2004), following the work of Bursik (1992) and Loredo, Reid & Deaux
(1995), argue that what students perceive as sexually harassing behavior is based on the nature of the behavior itself, and the way in which individual characteristics such as levels of self esteem and traditional versus non-traditional attitudes play out. This issue is further complicated, according to Totten & Quigley (2005), when attempts to address the problem are frustrated when perception of students vary so widely from that of parents or teachers. The question they raise is how parents or teachers address the issue if students do not perceive harassment to be occurring even though it is, according to definitions outlined in policies. The problem of perception, which further compounds the concerns over the definition of sexual harassment, brings into question the efficacy of prevention programs. Lacasse & Mendelson (2006) conclude that intent on the part of the perpetrator coupled with the target’s level of self esteem and their combined relationship are what determine whether sexually inappropriate behavior has indeed occurred. The manner in which context has become significant can be one reason why programs that are based on descriptive and prescriptive resolutions have had no impact.

Recent reports continue to highlight the pervasive nature of sexual harassment among adolescents. The widely anticipated and publicized report, The Road to Health: A Final Report on School Safety (2008) completed in Toronto following the death of 15 year old Jordan Manners in his high school hallway, exams all levels of violence and inappropriate behavior. The prevalence of sexual harassment and gender based violence received specific attention and highlights how, despite decades of attention and programs within the school, the problem persists and actually shows evidence of escalating violence. It is clear that a different approach is needed to address this concern among young people today.
In general, the literature presents peer sexual harassment among young people as a widespread concern however the approach is largely descriptive and prescriptive. There are very few cases where a theoretical perspective analyzing the problem is presented or even a range of possible remedies. To take a discursive analytical view of any part of the sexual harassment literature is indeed timely and can offer an opportunity to step outside the traditional vantage points to instead offer new and insightful views that can help to generate productive and meaningful solutions.

Theory and Method: Discourse and Foucault

In as much as sexual harassment among adolescents is a real and troubling phenomenon, it also occupies a particular discursive domain within academic literature, educational institutions, in the media and in our every day parlance. It is a term that is full of assumptions, presumptions, and expectations. With this reality in mind we must consider that our ability to fully grasp the nature of this problem and to work towards fruitful solutions may be partially or even fully obscured by these conditions. As such, to approach this problem from a discourse analysis perspective allows us to ask specific ontological and epistemological questions. It allows us to gain a different perspective about a particular problem, the conditions behind a particular problem and to perhaps uncover hidden motivations embedded in the way it is discussed.

First and foremost discourse is a social product. Words and language are not simply descriptors and a means to communicate them. In its broadest sense the words we use and the meaning that we attribute to them depends on the how and when in which such statements are made. More refined and varied views can see discourse beyond just
words but also in text and in other cultural artifacts such as music and art. Discursive regimes, in whatever manifestations, create our social world and are not simply a reflection of what we presume to be already there (Wodak & Meyer, 2001; Wood & Kruger, 2000). This is not to suggest that sexual harassment, for example, exists only as a discursive formation, but rather how we come to understand the behaviors that we define as sexual harassment and the way in which we approach ways of dealing with this problem are constituted through a discursive system. As Stuart Hall (2001) notes, “the concept of discourse is not about whether things exist but about where meaning comes from” (p. 73).

Discourse analysis is a broad approach to understanding text. Discourse informs our thoughts and actions therefore discourse analysis examines both texts and practices. There are as many definitions of discourse as there are theories of discourse analysis due to its multidisciplinary application and the broad range of intellectual possibilities that this approach engenders (Schiffrin, 1994). Discourse analysis is not simply a methodological approach, “…it is an alternative to the perspectives in which those methodologies are embedded” (Wood & Kruger, 2000, p.3). Selecting a particular method of discourse analysis is therefore informed by a particular theoretical perspective. The objective of this writing is, as stated, to ask certain ontological and epistemological questions; to interrogate and question issues related to sexual harassment among adolescents and in so doing eschew any claims towards a ‘truth’ about this phenomenon while at the same time examining the truth that is made regarding sexual harassment. This particular approach holds a post-structuralist position and in particular is informed by a Foucauldian perspective that holds to the premise that one cannot simply substitute
one truth for another and recognizes that there can be no universal truths or absolute ethical positions; that in the end there is no definitive account (Graham, 2005). Specifically, Foucault’s theorization holds that particular discursive formations or orders of discourse, work to make speech possible and not only produce meaning, but objects of knowledge, and productive powers that inform our social world (Danaher, Schirato & Webb, 2000). In other words, language and discourse operates not only to convey meaning, but operate through heterogeneous ensembles such as language, institutions and laws to produce specific objects and subjects through which specific power relations are realized (Filmer et al., 2004; Graham 2005). Simply put, “discourse, is something which produces something else…rather than something that exists in and of itself and which can be analyzed in isolation” (Mills, 1997).

While Foucault’s interest was specifically in the larger disciplines of human sciences, the applicability of his views to other forms of knowledge such as sexual harassment among adolescents is useful. Foucault was particularly interested in the way in which the epistemic contexts of bodies of knowledge became intelligible and authoritative. He states, “…it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together (Foucault, 1990). All the knowledge that we have on any topic is the result of a struggle for power. This power is relational and not necessarily a single, imposed power. Power circulates through society rather than being owned by any one group or person (Mills, 1997). Knowledge and power are made manifest through discourses and discourses, Foucault stated, are made up of statements. The relationship between these statements produce specific contexts and while statements may disappear and be replaced it is the ongoing repetition of certain statements that constitute discourse (Danaher,
Schirato & Webb, 2000). Foucault cautions however that not all statements are created equal and therefore not all constitute inclusion into a discursive formation. He is not concerned with the ‘proposition’ used by logicians or ‘sentences’ of grammarians which some discourse analysts may refer to as ‘speech acts’ (Foucault, 1972). Rather, he is concerned with what is often termed the ‘serious’ statement or the ‘serious speech act’ (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983). Foucault’s focus on discourse is not in language, but in systems of representation through which the ‘serious speech act’ statement is key (Hall, 2001).

These kinds of statements are rare however they are often referred to again and again. These statements act as an event or function where words and actions become vested with power and act to interpellate events (Graham, 2005) so that one can “…recognize and isolate an act of formulation” (Foucault, 1972; p. 93). An example of a serious statement can be seen in the field of law and occurred during the confirmation hearings for Clarence Thomas’ appointment to the United States Supreme Court. When Anita Hill claimed that she had been sexually harassed, she was admonished for not having raised her concerns during the time she actually worked for Thomas. Her answer was that sexual harassment simply did not exist (in a legal sense) at the time. In legal discourse similar discursive realities such as rape in marriage or child abuse are only recently recognized as discursive realities (Danaher, Shirato, & Webb, 2000). Once such actions become statements that are uttered, who can speak them and the methods involved in making them credible catapults them into a field of knowledge that Foucault termed discursive formations (Rouse, 2003).
This was indeed evidenced upon the release of the AAUW studies that set a precedent in the way in which the issue of peer sexual harassment among adolescents was to be understood and studied. This problem came to be viewed as an epidemic that required action on the part of schools, parents, and administrators. Policies, procedures, and programs needed to be set in place. Indeed, there needed to be a way to manage this type of behavior. In so doing, sexual harassment among adolescents became much like the populations in Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*, whereby previously inconspicuous individuals suddenly become more “audible as well as visible” (Rouse, 2003, p. 99).

Through the practice of intense research that surveyed students and the documentation of their “confessions,” the practice of monitoring behavior through school polices made sexual harassment more thoroughly knowable.

*The obligation to confess is now relayed through so many different points, is so deeply ingrained in us, that we no longer perceive it as the effects of a power that constrains us; on the contrary, it seems to us that truth, lodged in our most secret nature, ‘demands’ only to surface.* (Foucault, 1990, p 60)

Thus, these new forms of knowledge about adolescent behavior also require new forms of constraint and “which makes people’s actions visible and constrains them to speak” (Rouse, 2003, p. 99). It is in this sense primarily that Foucault spoke of “power/knowledge” (Rouse, 2003). It is in the creation of a ‘sexual harassment among adolescent discourse’ that the power and knowledge of this phenomenon come together.

Since the publication of the AAUW report, numerous studies have followed that attempt to confirm the AAUW findings particularly with respect to the prevalence, the scope of harassment, and its impacts (Mazer & Percival, 1989; Larkin, 1994; Dahinten, 1999; Duffy, Wareham & Walsh, 2004; Houston Hwang, N, 1996; Murmen & Smolak, 2000). The plethora of studies echoes Rouse’s (2003) assessment that in the discursive
formation of power/knowledge about many social situations the more extensive the knowledge becomes the more “…it enables a more continuous and pervasive control of what people do, which in turn offers further possibilities for more intrusive inquiry and disclosure” (p.99). For example, a new area of investigation with respect to sexual harassment now focuses on individual emotional stability and the way in which sexually harassing behavior is perceived to determine whether low self esteem is an indicator for increased feelings of victimization (Duffy, Wareham & Walsh, 2004; Terrance, Logan, and Peters, 2004; Totten & Quigley, 2005). The way in which power/knowledge related to this behavior becomes intensified is what Foucault referred to as a” swarming” of disciplinary mechanism (quoted in Rouse, 2003, 9. 100). The outcome of these practices, according to Foucault, is that what we think we know about a certain phenomenon will impact how we decide to regulate and control it. This knowledge operates within institutions and practices to produce certain concepts of the behavior in question and the individuals involved. Subjects, from a Foucauldian perspective are produced within discourse. “Subjects may produce texts, but they are operate within the limits of the episteme, the discursive formation, the regime of truth, of a particular period and culture” (Hall, 2001, p.79; emphasis in the original). This has a real effect on how we perceive, say for example, the perpetrator of harassing behavior and the victims. In this sense, discursive formations produce a certain form of truth. Truth, not in an absolute sense, but as a particular type of truth or a ‘regime of truth’ (Hall, 2001). Foucault states:

Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has it regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth: that is the type of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanism and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded
value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true (1980, p. 131).

In the end the practices that surround sexual harassment among adolescents produce not only a form of knowledge about this topic and ‘truths’ that are linked to it, but also produced are powers that regulate and control it as well as new forms of human subjects and new objects to know (Hall, 2001). As such, analyzing this topic through a Foucauldian analysis can provide a useful view of understanding a phenomenon to open up new ways of looking at this situation. As Foucault states:

Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it, any more than silences are. We must make allowances for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it (1990, p. 100-101).

It is therefore my intention to review several of the key documents that have been produced in the area of sexual harassment among adolescents with an eye to raise question and concerns regarding this important topic and to examine how sexual harassment discourse in these documents produce some of the underlying weaknesses in the way this topic has come to be understood.

**DISCUSSION**

To assist in this inquiry, that is, to interrogate and to ask specific epistemological and ontological questions using a Foucauldian approach to discourse, I wish to start by looking at the AAUW reports and the ways in which the subsequent literature has interpreted the key findings. Following this analysis, I wish to examine a more recent document, The Falconer Report (2008), which also addresses this issue of peer sexual
harassment. While Foucault never outlined a particular methodology for a discursive critique, many of his adherents have outlined guidelines that are useful. In keeping with Stuart Hall’s (2003) assessment of Foucauldian discourse analysis, I wish to consider certain statements made about sexual harassment and how they have promoted a particular type of knowledge about this topic. Here, it is important to consider not only what is stated but also what is excluded which in turn creates certain rules about what can and cannot be spoken about this phenomenon. I also wish to examine the way in which subjects of sexual harassment are created and what impact this has and how the practices within institutions for dealing with sexual harassment informs what can be known about this topic.

A statement is “neither an utterance nor a proposition, neither a psychological nor a logical entity, neither an even nor an ideal type” (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982, p. 45). Rather as Foucault states, a statement must be considered through “…the preservation of its identity and through the unique events of the enunciation, its duplication through the identity of the forms is constituted by the functioning of the field of use in which it is placed” (1972, 117). In this way, the major findings of the AAUW studies, the first conducted in 1993 the second in 2001, acted as important statements in the discursive formation of sexual harassment among adolescents.

The important statements contained in the AAUW study Hostile Hallways (1993, 2001) can be considered an interpellative event in the discursive formation of this phenomenon. While many other events occurring throughout Canada and the United States have contributed to the increased awareness of peer sexual harassment, the publication of these studies sparked a flurry of attention to this problem. In 1988, the
Board of Directors for the AAUW Educational Foundation began a 10-year research program to examine the impact of the current school system on the education of girls\textsuperscript{ii}. The first two studies found that the self-esteem of girls was suffering due to the widespread and unchecked prevalence of sexual harassment that was occurring in American schools. Another major study was launched to investigate this problem. The first survey, conducted in 1993, found that 81\% of students (girls 85\%, 76\% boys) had been sexually harassed (AAUW, 1993; Bryant, 1993). The release of the report sparked a maelstrom of media attention. On many popular news programs such as The Today Show, NBC Nightly News, CNN, Nightline, CBS Evening News, The Oprah Winfrey Show, and Good Morning American, findings from the study were being discussed. The most startling revelation, beyond the prevalence of sexual harassment in general, was that while a small number of perpetrators were teachers and school employees, the vast majority of harassers were the students themselves (Short, 2006). Thus the release of the AAUW report was unique in its enunciation.

Peer to peer sexual harassment had of course existed prior to this study and researchers and feminists such as Nan Stein (1991) have been concerned for many years about this problem. Stein’s research and advocacy in the areas was largely responsible for Seventeen magazine conducting its own (unscientific and therefore deemed unreliable) survey prior to the AAUW survey. Her work could be considered the ‘truth spoken in a void’ (quoted in Mills 1997). Although her work made similar claims, relative to the prevalence of the problem in particular, it was not ratified as knowledge to the same degree in which Hostile Hallways was. The AAUW report, considered to be the first generalizable, nationally representative study, was also the first to survey students of
both sexes (Short, 2006). The AAUW, particularly in the findings of the 2001 publications, outlined what behaviors constituted sexual harassment, documented personal experiences, and caste individuals as victims and perpetrators. In effect the AAUW raised the public profile of this situation to an unprecedented height and the number of research articles devoted to this phenomenon also increased exponentially (Short, 2006).

Foucault cautions that a statement must not be treated as an event that occurs within a particular time and place, however he also heeds that the repeatable materiality of statements occurs with status and “…enters networks and various fields of use, is subjected to transferences or modifications, is integrated into operations and strategies in which its identity is maintained and effaced” (1972, p. 118). The degree to which the statements made within the AAUW are repeated and modified is evidenced in the way in which this information is treated within the academic literature. Since the first report, published in 1993, this author has only located four academic journal articles devoted to sexual harassment among adolescents that do not cite the AAUW’s findings (Roscoe, Strouse & Goodwin, 1994; Larkin, 1994; Murnen & Smolak 2000; Lacasse, Purdy & Mendelson, 2003). Conversely, fourteen articles cited in the literature review reference either the 1993 or the 2001 report (Loredo, Reid & Deaux, 1995; Lee, Groninger, Linn & Chen, 1996; Houston & Hwang, 1996; Trigg & Wiffenstrom, 1996; Daninten, 1999; McMaster, Connolly Pepler & Graig, 2002; Timmerman, 2003; Terrance, Logan & Peters, 2004; Duffy Wareham & Walsh 2004; Totten & Quigley, 2005; Witkowska & Kjellberg, 2005; Lacasse & Mendelson, 2006; Short, 2006). These articles appear in journals that cover several fields such as psychology, sociology, nursing, and education.
In these articles, the findings of the study are not in dispute. Further, definitions used in the AAUW report are repeated, and the impact of these so-defined behaviors on the students are consistently underscored. Researchers use the AAUW statistics regarding the prevalence of peer-to-peer sexual harassment to validate the need for their own research and well as to further explore various facets of this phenomenon such as the short and long term consequences on the victims. In effect, with each successive citing, a system of supports which regulates the ordering and production of the main statements made in the study is being produced. Within this system that which does not fit into what can be known or understood about this problem is also being demarcated (Mills, 1997). In effect what comes to be accepted as ‘truths’ about this topic are produced rather that discovered.

As the literature review outlines, the discussion of sexual harassment between adolescents as a phenomenon of interests follows an exploration of this practice among younger and younger individuals. In many ways this process mirrors the narrowing focus on the discourse of sexuality discussed by Foucault’s (1990) during the eighteenth century. As more stringent controls were placed on discourses about sex, this inevitably leads to the increased scrutiny of sexual behavior among children. Prior to this time children were not regarded as sexual beings however the proliferation of sexual discourses heightened the need for regulating this behavior in increasingly younger children. Foucault notes that the power/knowledge exercised in relation to children was linked to a larger discursive frame that, in the end, had more to do with increasing the proliferation of sexuality discourse that with any attempt to repress it as had been previously theorized. In effect, what was previously understood to be virtually non-
existent became realized through discursive practices that attempted to evoke some measure of control which eventually intensified the discourse on sex overall. This more intense discourse however, employed appropriate terminology, authority to regulate and more control over the subjects in question. In the same manner the boundary around sexual harassment has been extended from an organizational problem for adults about adult behavior to institutionalized polices regarding youths in schools. As will be discussed, the sexual harassment among adolescent discourse not only casts a broader net over subjects but has only produced a more ardent analytical focus.

This intense focus on adolescent sexual harassment is brought into stark relief by the dominant discourse that have emerged and the impact that such statements have had. In the major findings of the AAUW (1993, 2001) studies, there are several important statements made about sexual harassment among adolescents that highlights the way in which a “will to knowledge” about this subject in a particular context is being created (Foucault, 1990). This will to knowledge creates certain practices in an economy of discourse that highlights the way in which power is being exercised. The first and most widely quoted statement concerns the pervasive nature of this topic; “eight in 10 students (81 percent) experience some form of sexual harassment in their school lives: six in 10 (59 percent) often or occasionally and one-quarter (27 percent) often. These levels have not changed since 1993” (2001, p. 4). The impact of this statement is profound particularly given the generalizability of the studies findings to all schools. The implications of the high percentage of harassment points to a climate of hostility that permeates the classrooms and hallways of most schools. This alarming statistic opens up the actions of the students to further scrutiny (Foucault, 1990). It becomes increasingly
important to understand student behavior in every detail and to carefully classify every manifestation of sexual harassment and to understand the short and long term consequences of this behavior (Duffy, Warehouse & Walsh, 2004; Lacasse & Mendelson, 2006; Witkowska & Kjellberg 2005; Terrance, Logan & Peters 2004; Dahinten, 1999). Indeed this “will to knowledge” about sexual harassment among adolescents extends not only the field of sexual harassment to a previously unexamined age group but it also extends the will to knowledge codifying adolescents development and sexuality (McMaster, Connolly, Pepler & Craig, 2002) and the field of gender relations in general (Wilson & Thompson, 2001).

In the meantime, particularly in the United States, concern regarding litigation against school boards was increasing. The widely publicized case of Franklin v Gwinett County School Board (1992) that went before the Supreme Court found that school districts could be found liable in cases of sexual harassment by teachers and school employees. The concern was that peer sexual harassment cases would soon follow (Short, 2006). In Canada the work of June Larkin (1994, 1997) in particular was drawing attention to the way in which certain behavior in schools was impacting the education of young women. Equal opportunity initiatives used to encourage girls to increase their interests in mathematics and science were of little use unless something could be done to improve the hostile climate they encountered. Larkin posited that sexual harassment that girls experienced in school was simply an extension of “patterns of male-female interaction in which men routinely express their dominance over women” (1997, p. 21). Larkin had long argued that schools as patriarchal institutions worked to reproduce, rather than to challenge the normative power balance of males over females and the
failure to recognize and act against these actions simply speaks to the manner in which such practices are ingrained within the school system (1994). Larkin’s work, in conjunction with the AAUW (1993) findings, sparked the Ontario Government and the Ontario Secondary School Teacher’s Federation (OSSTF) to conduct their own study. In 1994 they published *The Jokes Over*, a study of 350 high schools in Ontario. Their findings mirror those of the AAUW surveys; of the girls who reported being harassed 80 percent have been subject to unwanted sexual comments or gestures and 80 percent had been touched grabbed or pinched in a sexual way (*Jokes Over: Survey Summary*, 1996). Yet, the OSSTF’s study does not seem to generate the same credibility in Canada and even Ontario as the AAUW survey had in the United States. For example, the recently released press information of the Center of Addiction and Mental Health soon to be published study (2008) on peer sexual harassment in Northern Ontario schools also cites the AAUW studies rather than the more local OSSTF findings. The reason for the veracity of the AAUW reports may be found in what it does not say. Unlike the OSSTF which follows a feminist theoretical perspectives as outlined by Larkin (1994, 1997), the AAUW report does not claim to understand the cause of this behavior. When they summarize who the harassers are they indicate that while girls suffer the brunt of harassing behavior, boys also suffer harassment. Girls also harass other girls and this accounts for 13 percent of the harassment that girls experience (2001). The reason given by respondents as to why they harass, form other important statements found within this report that have far reaching and long lasting repercussions. The students state; “It’s just part of school life/ a lot of people do it / its no big deal” (p. 42). While the reasons behind such comments can be interpreted in many different ways, the studies authors
imply, through the absence of any theoretical grounding, that sexual harassment is part of school life and the reasons behind it warrant more intense investigation.

This tendency to bypass any theoretical explanation is evident in the literature subsequent to the publication of the AAUW reports. In the vast array of journal articles concerning adolescent sexual harassment there are few that address the probable causes of the problem. Larkin (1994, 1997) as indicated, argues that sexual harassment is part of patterned male behavior that some men use to maintain control and domination over women. “Each incident of sexual harassment is a tacit reminder that women are infringing on male territory” (1997, p. 22). McMaster et al. (2002) adopt a developmental contextual model to their work to suggest that these inappropriate actions are part of the pubertal development phase coupled with interaction across gender groups. Meanwhile, Lee et al. (1996) using the data from the 1993 AAUW report, argues that school culture is responsible and that given a proper ethical and moral agenda within schools this problem would likely be reduced. In any event, these perspectives are not often considered when school policies are put in place.

This raises the question; what can be gained by reducing the spectrum of causality and how does this impact what can be known about peer sexual harassment? The recently released report in Ontario, *The Road to Health: A Final Report on School Safety* (2008) is critical of the gender neutrality of how this problem is presented and how, all too often, administrators prefer to deal with the broader concept of “bullying” which may obscure some of the underlying motivation in certain situations. Authors of this report argue that program funding is more often allocated to broad-based gender neutral anti-bullying campaigns that focus on “bullying” so as to avoid discussions of gender and
race. Gender neutrality also allows for issues of sexual orientation, an often cited target in sexual harassment cases, to be side-stepped and may make avoidance of this topic in general easier for some administrators. The report authors also assert that the role that racism and sexism play in acts of violence and harassment are missing from programs that fall back on the generic term “bullying.” Similarly, Short (2006), following her analysis of reforms in the United States, argues that while schools are eager to embrace reforms and adopt new policies they tend to do so based on neutral values such as fair treatment and productive learning environments.

The failure to address these concerns, or more pointedly, the decision to avoid discussion of sexism, heterosexism, racism, and homophobia as probable causes of this problematic behavior constitutes a discursive practice that informs the type of knowledge we can have about this situation. The AAUW reports remains conspicuously neutral as to the cause of this problem. By not adopting any theoretical position the findings of the study seem to follow a form of simple empiricism. “Without some perspective or, at the very least, a set of animating questions, there is nothing to report. Contrary to crude empiricist, who would deny the relevance of theory to research, the facts never speak for themselves” (Silverman, 2004, p.50). Attempting to allow the “facts” of the study to stand on their or merits, sexual harassment becomes a problem of school life that requires a particular approach to addressing it.

This supposed value neutral approach obscures the power arrangements that have made the isolation of this problem and its attributes possible. Foucault (1977) asserts that within the scope of investigating human actions within the social sciences, certain disciplinary technologies are evoked so as to approximate human sciences to
natural sciences. In this way the “facts” about adolescent sexual harassment are never in doubt. Dreyfus & Rabinow (1982) add;

_The human sciences constantly try to copy the natural sciences’ successful exclusion from their theories of any background. Their practitioners hope that by seeking a shared agreement on what is relevant and by developing shared skills of observation, the background practices of the social scientist can be taken for granted and ignored the way the natural scientist background is ignored._ (p. 163)

It is possible then, by avoiding the politically and ideologically charged arena of sexism, heterosexism, racism, and homophobia that a value free agenda can be more readily promoted among schools and the method of investigating this problem, as will be discussed, can be developed.

Despite the lack of causal factors associated with peer sexual harassment, the AAUW concludes its report by offering several general recommendations. These recommendations include changing the “culture” of harassment and by this they mean the culture of silence. Victims are encouraged to discuss incidents of harassment with adults, be they teachers, parents, or other school administrators. Adults in turn are encouraged to be aware of sexual harassment policies and to be aware of what behaviors constitute sexual harassment offenses. These seemingly innocuous recommendations are problematic on two fronts.

First, Foucault argued that an important element in the exercise of power is the practices that gradually develop as a means of exercising surveillance (Rouse, 2003). This action, or these actions, coupled with the increased vigilance of teachers and administrators works to normalize the exercise of power. Foucault wrote about the exercise of power;

_It was also organized and multiple, automatic and anonymous power, for although surveillance rests on individuals, its functioning is that of a network of relations from top to bottom, but also to a certain extent from bottom to top and laterally; this network_
Surveillance, Foucault argues, is the key to disciplinary technologies “In this space of domination, disciplinary power manifests its potency, essentially, by arranging objects. The examination is, as it were, the ceremony of this objectification” (1977, p. 187). In this way it is not power itself that is rendered visible but the objects of this power are made the most obvious. Specific behaviors and subject positions for experts, victims, and perpetrators including a host of personality characteristics accruing to each. It is through this process by which increased knowledge about sexual harassment is obtained. This knowledge is used to create and perpetuate ‘truths’ about the phenomenon and these ‘truths’ become the system of power that not only produces it, but sustains it and gives rise to the possibilities of practices which then become embedded in school cultures in a quest to gain some measure of control of this problem while continuing to produce more knowledge about the problem. The knowledge that circulates within schools is that sexual harassment is rampant, has no basis of causality, and requires the constant surveillance and intervention of adults who are experts.

Second, encouraging victims to come forward, while a seemingly important step in addressing this concern, has its own set of repercussions. Incidents, once made audible and documented become the resources for future examination and constraint upon the individual student as well as the larger student body. Each incident becomes a case to be known and understood. These cases become documented evidence that is an essential component in the growth of power. More evidence leads to more knowledge and more knowledge leads to more specification. As school amass information about individuals as victims, others as perpetrators, as well as the details of the behavior in question, this
accumulation of information and its systematic ordering leads to, as Foucault notes, the “... constitution of the individual as a describable, analyzable object...under the gaze of a permanent corpus of knowledge...” (1977, p. 190). Further, this call for more surveillance and documentation creates, what Dreyfus and Rabinow (1982) refer to as a “fixed web of objective codification” (159). This allows those in authority to make possible “...the measurement of overall phenomena, the description of groups, the characterization of collective facts, the calculation of gaps between individuals, their distribution in a given population” (quoted in Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982, p. 159).

In Canada and the United States, sexual harassment, at any level, is a human rights violation and therefore brings upon it, the weight of juridical power. The fear of liability further drives the need to document incidents and to demonstrate that experts have effectively managed these incidents. In 2004 the AAUW Sexual Harassment Task Force, as a follow up to the two surveys they had conducted, published a guide for students, parents and teachers entitled Harassment Free Hallways: How to Stop Sexual Harassment in School (2004). This guide encourages students to document their experiences in the form of a journal and to record as much detail as possible. In addition a Model Teen Safety Plan is provided. This form, originally completed for the Massachusetts Department of Education, by the county district attorney, is to be used to protect students after an incident of harassment has occurred and, they suggest, can be used with or without a restraining order. This plan, while intended to provide a safe environment for alleged victims, has the individual’s daily schedule outlined including recommended routes taken to and from classes, lunch location, locker and school arrival
and departure. An administrative staff member is responsible for regularly assessing the efficacy of the plan.

This hyper surveillance is troubling. Short (2006) argues that much in the same way in which work-place administrators adopted internal complaint and resolution procedures to avoid legal issues that saw them insert more and more of their managerial prerogatives into the interpretation of the law, school administrators are eager to adopt a similar cross fertilization between legal and organizational prerogatives. As such, the opportunities to go beyond what might be considered legally necessary to address the problem of peer sexual harassment could lead to excessive monitoring of adolescent behavior which, in the end, does little to combat the overall problem particularly when the way to resolve the problem is so heavily couched in the discourse of surveillance.

Other statements made within the report constitute what can be known about adolescent sexual harassment and promote the need for increased focus on adolescent behavior. As Foucault notes, knowledge is “also the field of coordination and subordination of statements in which concepts appear, and are defined, applied and transformed” (1972, 201). As such, what follows the pronouncement of the prevalence of sexual harassment in the AAUW study (2001) is the definition of behavior that constitutes the issue in question. Sexual harassment is defined as “unwanted and unwelcome sexual behavior that interferes with your life. Sexual harassment is not behavior that you like or want (for example wanted kissing, touching or flirting)” (original emphasis p.2). This definition, which is still quoted in the most recent of studies (Wolfe & Chiodo, 2008) is very broad and allows for more and more actions to fall under the scrutiny of experts monitoring harassing behavior. It allows for that which is still
undefined but perhaps inappropriate, from an individual perception, to become reconstituted as harassment. Further, this definition allows for what becomes known as sexually harassing behavior to become a technical form of discourses that allows behavior to further be studied, classified, and analyzed. This form of specialized understanding further sanctions the way in which the behavior can be discussed, whose behavior can be discussed, and who can discuss it.

While this broad definition invites a considerable range of behaviors to be included as harassment, the AAUW (1993, 2001) survey included 14 examples of harassment that allowed responders to consider behaviors they might not have thought of as harassment to be redefined as such. The examples they provide are;

- Made sexual comments, jokes, gestures or looks
- Showed, gave or left you sexual pictures, photographs, illustrations, messages, or notes
- Wrote sexual messages/graffiti about you on bathroom walls, in locker rooms etc.
- Spread sexual rumors about you were gay or lesbian
- Spied on you as you dressed or showered at school
- Flashed or “mooned” you
- Touched, grabbed or pinched you in a sexual way
- Intentionally brushed up against you in a sexual way
- Pulled off or down your clothing
- Blocked your way or cornered you in a sexual way
- Forced you to kiss him/her
- Forced you to do something sexual other than kissing

(2001, p. 2)

What makes a joke, a gesture, a look, a picture, a message, or a rumor sexual? This was never made clear in the analysis. According to the authors of the AAUW report as well as many of the respondents, actions were considered sexual harassment if they were “unwelcomed, unwanted, or unreciprocated” (p. 9). Pressed further, others indicated that sexual harassment is when “someone invades your personal body space or privacy (eight
grade girl),” or “Someone makes advance towards me and saying things that make me feel very uncomfortable (eighth grade boy)” (p.9). Equally as ambiguous were such responses as “When a guy continues to make you feel awkward in a sexual way (10th grade girl)” or “Sexual harassment is when a person ‘either sex’ makes comments on sexuality or about having sex in a way that offends or makes you uncomfortable (10th grade girl) (p.10). Sexual harassment then becomes transformed into a subjective experience that relies on the effect it has on the alleged victim who then makes claims or is encouraged to, that the actions constitute harassment.

While at first blush this seems like an important and relevant strategy to adopt in the face of this growing problem, it has the potential to develop particular types of subject positions within the scope of power/knowledge that can detract from possible ways to effectively deal with this issue. From a Foucauldian perspective, the will to knowledge and the discursive practices associated with this knowledge produce particular subjects. Foucault argues that the subject is produced within discourse. These subjects bear the attributes as described by the particular discourse that produces them and they personify the particular type of knowledge within that discourse such as the insane individual within the discourse of psychiatry or the deviant in the discourse of criminology. Discourse also produces a location for which the specific knowledge most makes sense such as the doctor versus the patient or the judge versus the criminal (Hall, 2001).

Through power regimes manifested in discourse the subject is located. Foucault states;

*This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him (sic) by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others much recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects (1983, p. 212).*
Butler (1999), for example outlines how problematic the production of subject positions can become. Foucault, she notes, outlines how the power system of justice produces the very subjects it is required to represent. “But the subjects regulated by such structures are, by virtue of being subjected to them, formed defined, and reproduced in accordance with the requirements of those structures” (p. 4). Women, and feminists in particular, Butler notes, are discursively constituted through the very system that it suppose to be responsible for their emancipation, yet the juridical system is regulated by limitations prohibitions, regulations and controls. Therefore the very system that is relied upon for freedom produces fixed subject positions that limit the kind of actions and behaviors of those who take up the subject position such as the subject position of ‘victim’ of sexual harassment.

As such, the alleged victim as subject in the discursive formation of peer sexual harassment in equally constituted, negatively, through a system that only knows the types of negative actions that form victims such as those demarcated by the definition of behaviors that come to be known as harassment. This has led researchers to focus on the victims and a particular personality profile that identifies them. Lacasse & Mendelson (2006) focus on personal characteristics that make certain behavior more or less upsetting. They conclude that girls with low self-esteem who experience potentially offensive sexual behavior by a perpetrator who is not within the girl’s circle of relationships are more likely to be offended by behavior defined as sexual harassment. Houston & Hwang (1996) argue that certain types of girls are a greater risk for victimization. They identified girls with overprotective mothers who observe few positive interactions between their parents and have experienced some form of unwanted
sexual contact in their childhood as being of greater risk. Loredo, Reid & Deaux (1995) indicate that individuals in their study are more likely to see certain behavior as intrusive if the perpetrator is in some way of a higher status. While this means that inappropriate actions by teachers are consistently viewed as offensive, it becomes a matter of status among peers that defines whether certain actions are acceptable or not.

While none of these studies suggest that the victim is to blame, or that the burden need fall upon them, there is a call for an increase in surveillance and vigilance on the part of the school administration (Houston & Hwang 1996) and more education towards understanding what sexual harassment is (Loredo, Reid & Deaux, 1995). These recommendations bring about the repetition of the original recommendations made within the AAUW reports to increase the focus on adolescent behavior. These continued calls for more surveillance coupled with the calls for what Foucault calls ‘confessions’, as stated earlier, and the ongoing documentation that both of these activities engender serves only to create one particular discourse regarding sexual harassment knowledge and in so doing encourages continuing and expanding possibilities for more intrusive inquiry and disclosure (Rouse, 2003).

While the discourse within academic literature of alleged victims of sexual harassment is troubling, the approach taken towards perpetrators is equally as disconcerting. The AAUW (2001), while it does not address matters of race from a theoretical perspective, attends to race as a causal reality in perpetrator behavior. The statements made here include;

*White boys are more likely than Hispanic and black boys to call someone gay or lesbian (40 percent white vs. 33 percent Hispanic and 16 percent black). Black boys are more likely than Hispanics and white boys to touch, grab, or pinch someone in a sexual way (35 percent black vs. 24 percent Hispanic and 28 percent white).*
white) or intentionally brush up against someone in a sexual way (34 percent black vs. 19 percent Hispanic and 26 percent white) (p.40).

Here again actions are treated as facts and these particular facts stand alone without any consideration or analysis as to the role that race or sexual orientation, if any, plays in this behavior. Further, it singles out particular groups for closer surveillance in relation to specific behaviors of sexual harassment.

Of interest is that while the AAUW reports both indicate boys and girls are responsible for harassment. The breakdown, based on race, is not provided for girls. Instead, the report qualifies the gendered breakdown by indicating that while both boys and girls are responsible for harassing behavior, it is “boys [that are] more likely than girls to be perpetrators, whether often, occasionally or rarely (57 percent vs. 50 percent) or often or occasionally (33 percent vs. 21 percent)” (p.40). Of equal interest, is the lack of research into what makes individuals harass, especially considering the attention paid to victim profiling among victimized teens, as indicated above. While adolescent perpetrators seem to be excluded from serious research, psychologist John Pryor, in 1987, developed a scale to assess the propensity of adult men to sexually harass. His “likelihood-to-sexually-harass” (LSH) scale has been used on adult males and there are claims that this instrument is useful in measuring the readiness of “certain individuals to use social power for sexually exploitative purposes. This suggests that social dominance and male sexuality may be closely aligned concepts in the minds of high-LSH men” (quoted in Beiner, 2007). This research is supported by Mitchell et al. (2004) who attempted to create a laboratory analogue for the study of peer sexual harassment among adults. That the literature remains silent as to causality among teens, with the exception of Stein (1991) Larkin (1997), and McMaster et al. (2002), suggest that the discursive
domain established by the AAUW reports that precludes any discussion of a theoretical interpretation of causality is well entrenched. What might be the rational for this?

Modern institutions, Foucault (1990) notes, are very interested in the formation of sexual identities and the institution of education especially is concerned with applying normative prescriptions of appropriate or moral behavior. In *History of Sexuality* (1990) Foucault states that we are dealing less with a discourse of sex than with a multiplicity of discourses produced by a whole series of mechanisms operating in different institutions. As such the discourse on sexual harassment among adolescents can also be understood to form one such mechanism. Looked at from a broader perspective, while racism and sexism still need to be considered as possible motivating factors, is it also possible, in considering relevant epistemological questions, to consider that sexual harassment might represents the pathologizing of adolescent sexuality. While many schools teach sex education, the discursive regime is of biology and reproduction. There is little in the way of discussion regarding expression of ones desires other than discourse about what is immoral or inappropriate. Sex education discourse along with school policy on sexual harassment is felt to provide the necessary apparatus to limit this type of behavior. The discursive field found within the literature, school policies, and the media permits only a discussion of the pathological. Through the practice of defining, detailing, and outlining the types of actions that fall into this pathology, there is no room left to develop a discourse that includes positive expressions of adolescent sexuality. In this way, discussion of causality need not be openly discussed or addressed.

Foucault notes that knowledge of any kind follows a predictable pattern that is not always based on truth, for example he outlines how “the knowledge of psychiatry in the
nineteenth century is not sum of what was thought to be true, but the whole set of practices, singularities, and deviations of which one could speak in psychiatric discourse” (1972, p. 201). The knowledge constructed around adolescent sexual harassment follows a similar pattern in which the finding of one major study, the AAUW study of 1993 which was repeated again in 2001, continue to form a particular type of understanding about this phenomenon. The “will to knowledge” which has been produced by the ensuing discourse allows peer sexual harassment to develop its own type of knowledge, and this knowledge evokes a particular power that is called upon to address it. The ‘will to knowledge’ has produced subject positions for experts, victims, and harassers. The knowledge that is created is that of a type of negative, widespread, adolescent behavior that requires monitoring of adolescents themselves as well as by school officials and administrators. This behavior is rampant, has no known verifiable cause, and if left unchecked, can have damaging effects on individuals as well as the school as a whole. What is most disconcerting is that policies on sexual harassment, despite their long-standing introduction, have not managed to reduce incidents. While students might be able to tell you what constitutes sexual harassment much more readily than a decade ago, the problem still permeates many schools and the impact this has on victims continues to be a real concern. Individuals who suffer sexual harassment in schools experience long lasting and often traumatic affects that should not be trivialized. This problem is once again echoed in the recently published report *The Road to Health: A Final Report on School Safety (2008)* also referred to as *The Falconer Report*.

The publication of the Falconer Report follows an investigation carried out by a team lead by lawyer Julian Falconer following the shooting death of a male student in the
hallway of his high school in 2007. The report examined all issues of violence within C.W. Jefferys Collegiate Institute and a neighboring school, Westview Centennial Secondary School. Since their investigation uncovered an unresolved incident of sexual assault at C. W. Jefferys Collegiate, the panel devoted a section of their report to the various dimensions of gender based violence in these two institutions. While this report does not represent a generalizable study of school violence or peer sexual harassment it is an important document as it highlights the very real way in which sexual harassment is addressed in a typical Canadian school. This document also received extensive media coverage, particularly in the area of sexual harassment, and its findings and recommendations for the entire Toronto District School Board (TDSB) can have a significant impact on the way this issue is understood and addressed in the future. More pointedly however, this document represents a shift in the knowledge of peer sexual harassment which signals, as Hall (2001) notes, a necessary step in the study of any discourse. Hall states that within any discourse there is a need for an “acknowledgement that a different discourse or episteme will arise… supplanting the existing one, opening up a new discursive formation and producing in its turn, new concepts…” (p. 74). In effect the Falconer Report (2008) problematizes the truth claims that have followed in the wake of AAUW reports, however the claims made in this document need to be interrogated as closely as those made by the AAUW reports and others that have resonated in its path.

The Falconer Report, like the AAUW report also acknowledges the pervasive nature of the problem of sexual harassment among adolescents. They indicate that their “survey work demonstrates that sexual assaults and sexual harassment are occurring at
high levels in some Toronto schools” (p. 372). While they did not indicate the type of data gathering that they conducted at the schools in question they do state that “A recent survey of 4,200 girls between nine and 19 years of age, revealed that 80 percent had experienced sexual harassment in some form and half reported encountering it daily” (emphasis added) (p. 375-375). Investigation as to the source of this survey indicates that these results are taken from the Alliance of Five Research Centers on Violence report entitled *Violence Prevention and the Girl Child: Phase One Report* (1999). In this report, the statistics they quote come from the Seventeen Magazine surveys which Nan Stein documented in her publication in 1993. As mentioned earlier, this report was a magazine survey and was widely criticized for its lack of scientific rigor, as it relied on readers of this magazine to submit information and only included girls.

That the Falconer Report panel chose to take up the work of Stein as well as other feminists including Yasmin Jiwani and Helene Berman (2002) and to put aside data and findings from the AAUW reports is telling. The work of Jiwani and Berman fails to appear in the academic literature on peer sexual harassment among adolescents and in the prevention policies that schools follow. This is possibly due to their feminist stance on the issue of violence or perhaps likely to do general focus on violence and not necessarily on sexual harassment specifically. In this case however, the Falconer panel is critical of the neutral approach taken in the past and opines that funding issues are better served when politics and ideology are seemingly put aside. The approach they take is that peer sexual harassment is simply one of many forms of violence experienced by girls in schools. Quoting directly from Berman (2002) they add:

*lying at one end of the continuum of violent behaviors directed towards girls and young women, sexual harassment may be constructed as the first and most vital entry point into training males to dominate and violate females and females to submit to this domination*
The authors of The Falconer Report (2008) state that many forms of sexual harassment are socially sanctioned forms of violence. What girls and young women experience in the classrooms and hallways of schools is a reflection of the larger social order that exists outside school grounds. They state “…society sanctions the idea that there are ‘acceptable degrees of violence’ when it comes to women” (p.377). Adding to this, girls with disabilities, or those that are poor, visible minorities, Aboriginal girls or the transgendered are at even greater risk for violence. Particularly vulnerable are those who are recent immigrants to Canada due to language barriers, isolation, and difficulty adapting to new cultural practices. The problem, the panel indicates, is further compounded when girls and young women are reluctant to report incidents, not only of sexual harassment but of sexual assault due to humiliation or fear of re-victimization in the reporting and legal process. For young women of color these concerns are magnified due to experiences of racism. They indicate that some individuals reported having their experiences minimized or trivialized.

The Falconer panel’s most pointed criticism with regards to sexual harassment policies within schools is, as previously outlined, the gender neutral nature of these documents. The panel points out that, within the TDSB policy, *Consequences of Inappropriate Student Behavior*, sexual harassment while mentioned as a form of harassment is not defined nor is there any reference to gender or other intersecting forms of discrimination that might promote violence. Another policy, the *Abuse and Neglect of Students* policy, contains provisions for what is termed “sexual misconduct” and is
applied to cases of what typically would be termed “sexual assault.” The panel contends that by applying gender neutral descriptions, the root causes of violence are obscured “…and leaves the underlying gender related dynamics unnamed and invisible. Instead, structured and systemic social problems appear as random, unpatterned, and individualized” (p. 391).

The random, unpatterned, and individualized appearance of this type of behavior does indeed make it more difficult to counter. Approaching the problem from a stated theoretical perspective would allow for strategies and solutions to be more readily at hand. A more insidious problem here however is that any theoretical approach is still part of what Foucault argues is a discursive formation that produces a regime of ‘truth’ (Hall, 2001). In this way, the discourse of this perspective will form a particular ‘will to knowledge’ that perpetuates certain claims to truth in the same way that that the gender neutral approach does with its emphasis on adolescent surveillance. Here however, what changes is the particular statement made, or ways of talking about the topic including what is not said, and the ways in which particular subjects are created (Hall, 2001).

The truth claims being put forth within the Falconer report advance a particular view of gender that can be equally as problematic as their criticism of gender neutrality. Here, the ontological status of gender is not questioned. Instead the female student is presented as a victim by sheer virtue of being female regardless of how individuals acted in relation to oppressive actions. Subordination, oppression, and victimization become synonymous with the female gender. What room, if any, exists for the female student as active agent as refusing the subject position of victim simultaneously acknowledging that one has been victimized?
Concomitantly, males are unquestioningly presented as perpetrators of all manners of violence. While rightfully dismissing the “culturalization of violence” theory that stereotypes such oppressive traditions as “honor killing” and “arranged marriages,” the Falconer Report authors argue that this view “fails to understand how young men are raised and the underlying factors that make them perpetrate violence….it [is] clear that something is not working in the way in which we are raising young men, regardless of the group from whom they come” (p.381). These totalizing generalizations regarding all adolescent males serve only to entrench a false dichotomy regarding gender but also efface other interlocking differences that make a difference including the role of poverty, racialization, and sexual orientation.

Finally, while the Falconer panel is critical of the lack of definition within existing polices regarding what behavior constitutes sexual harassment they fail to provide definitions that would be considered adequate or even in keeping with the Ontario Human Rights Commission (2008). In surveying students at one school, they simply defined sexual harassment as “making unwanted sexual comments that upset the student or made them feel uncomfortable” (p. 376). This definition seems to exclude other actions such as touching or gestures, for example that can produce the same feelings and are often generally considered harassing actions. More pointed still, they completely overlook the aspects of sexual harassment that target, gay, lesbian or transgendered students which can include comments that are not necessarily sexual comments but comments that stereotype gender in general yet are considered, under human rights legislation, as acts of sexual harassment (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2008).
Utilizing a feminist approach to the problem of peer sexual harassment is not at issue here. Indeed, feminism is an emancipatory political movement that is committed to social change and while there are a variety of feminist positions, most do agree that the issue of women’s subordination is the primary focus of this movement (McLaren, 2002). My concern is that the Falconer team has adopted an antiquated feminist model that presents several problems. Bordo’s (1999) Foucauldian reconceptualisation of normalization and resistance argues that to approach issues that confront girls and women from the position of the oppressor/oppressed model where men possess and wield power over women, who in turn are regarded as mere victims, does not give us a complete account of the issues that are at stake in this situation. By adopting the oppressor/oppressed model how are we to understand how boys and young men, most often considered the perpetrators of sexual harassment within schools, become implicated in practices that they as individuals did not create, do not necessarily control, and in many situations may themselves become the victims of? By adopting the oppressor/oppressed model how are we to understand the ways in which girls and young women can and do contribute to acts of sexism, racism, homophobia, classism and ableism all of which intersect with gender? We can also ask how is it possible, from within this framework, for young people to move towards a discourse of mutual respect that will create a “will to knowledge” of equality if we can only conceptualize power and domination flowing from the top down?

At first glance, conceptualizing the flow of power outside the oppressor/oppressed model might suggest that sexual harassment might otherwise only occur as “random, unpatterned, and individualized.” Following how power/knowledge, as theorized by
Foucault, informs how peer to peer sexual harassment work in schools, helps us to understand that there are dominant discourses circulating at a given time in given society. Dominant discourses produce subject positions and the associated discursive practices. Power is not a thing owned, it is power/knowledge embodied in an action or series of actions. While not necessarily acted out in predicted ways by everyone, this does not mean that all the human subjects caught within the frame of a dominant discursive practice are equally empowered to act. “It [power/knowledge] is held by no one: but people are positioned differently within it. No one may control the rules of the game. But not all players on the field are equal” (Bordo, 1999, p. 253). There are no power relations without a field of knowledge or any knowledge that, at the same time, does not constitute some form of power relations. This symbiotic relationship encompasses not only the ways of talking about the subject but also the very actions and practices that go along with it (McNay, 1992).

To better understand the way in which power operates according to Foucault, it is useful to refer to his example in the *History of Sexuality Volume One* (1990). He notes that in the nineteenth century various institutions such as the medical profession, psychiatry, the church, and the law seemingly worked to mark peripheral sexualities as deviant. While these institutions all seemed to collaborate to this end it was not the work of any one person or any one group to achieve this aim. Many individuals may have participated towards this end however power/knowledge operates in ways that are beyond our control. Individuals may participate unwittingly in sustaining power relations. “Thus power is non-subjective, in part because it always supersedes any person or group of persons, but more importantly, because it is relational, existing only between and among
persons, institutions, discourses, practices and objects” (McLaren, 2002, p. 38). In understanding the ways in which peer sexual harassment may act as a form of male domination it might be more useful to consider two points.

First, the question that could be asked is what everyday acts, norms or habits work to sustain a sense of domination or privilege of one group over another? Identifying these factors and considering and encouraging those that work to sustain a sense of fairness and equality would prove more beneficial than merely adopting an oppressor/oppressed paradigm that limits the potential for change at the local level. Second, in understanding relations of power it is important to consider forms of resistance for the two go hand in hand. Foucault notes that repression produces its own resistance: “there are no relations of power without resistance; the latter are all the more real and effective because they are formed right at the point where relations of power are exercised; resistance to power does not have to come from elsewhere to be real…” (1980, p. 142).

Indeed, following the release of the Falconer Report a local newspaper, the Toronto Star, interviewed a group of young women at the local YWCA Girl’s Centre who spoke candidly about the issue of sexual harassment at their respective schools (not the schools associated with the investigations led by the Falconer team). While they talked about sexual harassment being so common that it seems ‘normal,’ they also acknowledged that it is a topic that should be discussed during sex education and/or part of the school safety discussion where the subject of guns and bullying dominates the assembly. More pointedly however they indicate that to combat the culture of complacency is to be informed, to speak out, and share their experiences with others. In this way, they gain an understanding of what sexual harassment is and how to deal with
it. The Falconer panel later acknowledged that the YWCA program, and others like it, can be a crucial step in preventing sexual harassment (Brown, 2008).

Subsequent to the release of the Falconer Report, the TDSB formed a Leadership Action Team to review the issues and recommendations of the report and to initiate action plans for each of the six major themes that emerged from the report. Under the heading, Gender based harassment and violence, the recommendations listed were; “Review and revise the Abuse and Neglect of Student policy. Train all staff in new procedures dealing with peer sexual harassment, and information prepared for students, parents, and volunteers” (quoted in Doolittle, 2008, p.A8). How the position taken by the Falconer panel will eventually translate into everyday practices still remains to be seen. The finalization of plans and their interpretation as well as ongoing funding issues may preclude many of the reports recommendations for being fully realized.

In the meantime, other voices are also taking up the cause. A group of university women in Ontario have been lobbying the provincial government to set up a women’s studies course as part of the high school curriculum. The Education Minister acknowledged, in the media, that an optional course is being developed with the intention of making schools safer (Brown, 2008). Others in the school system also recognize that there needs to be changes made in the way children are educated about sexuality and self expression (Rushowy, 2008).

In general, the recommendations that follow the Falconer report urge for the equality rights of girls and young women to a safe learning environment. Sexual harassment, however, does happen to males by other males and also by females towards males and other females. While it is important to recognize that gender plays a role, their
recommendations have excluded the very areas of diversity that they so strongly underscore in their criticism of current policies. Harassment of a sexual nature may be a tool, but not always the motive, by which others choose to display dominance or aggression and their recommendations tend to confound this distinction.

Overall sexual harassment in schools is only one of the many forms of violence that students, teachers, and administrators must contend with. Racialized violence, gang violence, and more recently cyber violence are part of the everyday life of those involved in the education system. Each situation requires its own protocol in order to appropriately address the issues and involve parents, police, social workers, and counselors. This however should not diminish the need to find workable solutions to this pervasive and damaging problem of peer sexual harassment. It may be too early to tell what the impact of the Falconer report will be, but as the pendulum of casualty has swung in the direction of the male oppressor without a detailed gender analysis, it seems unlikely that workable solutions can emerge.

**Limitations of a Foucauldian Approach**

In the world of modernist theories, the work of Michel Foucault has been criticized for failing to define normative standards, that is, those norms and values that characterize modern thought such as liberty, justice, truth and freedom (Heckman, 1996). Foucault has also been cited for failing to provide a framework for the individual subject as an agent capable of having an impact on his or her environment due to the fragmented subjective position that his deconstructionist position outlines (McNay, 1992). These major criticisms suggest that, in the context of this writing, that there can be no universal
truth regarding sexual harassment given that it is constituted and reconstituted as a product of discursive fields that create the power/knowledge of the topic within a specific social and political relations. Further, if in fact sexual harassment is somehow a product of women’s subjugation in society, how can a theory that first rejects universal truths such as emancipation and fairness be of any value in a world where the subject is incapable of having an influence in his or her social word?

Responses to these criticisms are varied. Some may recognize the critical and evaluative aspects of his work and, at the very least, see Foucault’s efforts as paradoxical (McLaren, 2002). Many, feminists in particular, reject Foucault outright (Marxist, standpoint theorists and radical feminists to name a few) as they believe that poststructuralist and postmodernist views in general are at odds with progressive politics that are the cornerstone of a progressive movement. Others still (for example, Hekman, 1996, McNay, 1992, McLaren, 2002, Bordo 1999, & Butler 2004) have found value in Foucault’s writing and have interpreted his work in ways that demonstrate how his theories can provide the necessary connections between subjectivity and institutional norms as crucial components for social change. McLaren (2002), for example, points out that while Foucault does reject ahistorical universal norms, he invokes the normative notions of critique and freedom that provides not only an avenue for social change, but demonstrates his advocacy for it.

McLaren (2002) argues that while Foucault is highly critical of many Enlightenment principles, he does endorse the critical impulse of this era and this is evident in his very insistence that we question norms in the first place. His critical stance is well evidenced in both of his works, *Discipline and Punishment* and *The History of*
Sexuality Volume One as both “…challenge the unity of theoretical, historical, or scientific knowledge” (p. 30). These challenges work because Foucault’s focus is on knowledge that has been excluded or disqualified. Foucault states, “Let us give the term genealogy to this union of erudite knowledge and local memories [popular knowledge] which allows us to establish a historical knowledge of struggle and to make us aware of this knowledge tactically today” (quoted in McLaren, 2002, p. 31). This form of knowledge, that is knowledge that occurs at the local level, the knowledge of experience, subjugated knowledge, is the type of knowledge that has been responsible for progressive changes in society. It is the knowledge of groups advocating at the grass roots level that have been responsible for the changes that have occurred in the last century with regards to race relations, gender rights, changes for same sex couples, and increased access to those with disabilities. Therefore, in his failure to appeal to meta-narratives and universal norms, Foucault’s work is indeed capable of providing a framework for change.

The second charge made by Foucault’s critics concerns the subject’s ability to act upon his or her environment because individuals are at the mercy of power/knowledge outside of their control. As previously outlined, Foucault’s view on power does not suggest that individual freedoms are impossible. Power, while functioning in all human interactions does not necessarily imply that it is equal or that it is negative. Foucault states;

[Power] is a set of actions on possible actions; it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult...Perhaps the equivocal nature of the term ‘conduct’ is one of the best ayes for coming to terms with the specificity of power relations. To ‘conduct’ is at the same time to ‘lead’ others...and a way of behaving within a more or less open field of possibilities. (1982, p. 220-221).

In this way, power is both positive and negative. It limits, but at the same time creates possibilities. This means also that while states of domination may occur there are always
opportunities for resistance. Moreover, if we are to follow the argument that sexual harassment is one way in which women are subjugated in society then it follows that this is due, not to the existence of a centralized oppressors, but rather through the self–normalization of most humans within a specific culture to everyday habits and comportments that comprise our understanding of masculinity and femininity (Bordo, 1999). These ways of being are perpetuated by both women and men, female and male youths through everyday practices of dress, beauty techniques, and exercise and are enforced through various forms of media in everyday culture as well as laws and institutional practices, family life and religion.

The oppressor/oppressed view makes no allowances for the way in which both men and women derive satisfaction and pleasure from these practices without falling into the trap of women as hapless victims, unaware of their condition, with neither the will or the power to recognize and act against their oppression. Foucault’s view of power allows for a theoretical movement with far reaching implications for policy and practice that goes well beyond this state of a discursive regime that produces gendered subject positions like that of ‘victim’ and ‘ harasser.’

CONCLUSION

By applying a Foucauldian analysis to the discourse surrounding peer sexual harassment among adolescents one is able to ask certain epistemological and ontological questions concerning the various truth claims that have been put forth by parties interested in this phenomenon. It is also evident that these particular discursive fields have lead to different approaches to this problem. The AAUW reports operate from a discourse of gender, racial and sexual orientation neutrality while producing a need for
increased surveillance of the student body. This vain attempt to locate and identify actions, isolate and individualize, can only result in the creation of a larger inventory of words, gestures, or action that can be defined as harassment without an analysis of what the underlying factors may be. The Falconer report, which adopts an oppressor/oppressed model, might well acknowledge the issue of women’s subordinations, but the approach here is so rigid that, in the end, a more divisive atmosphere within the school environment could be the result. Further this approach fails to acknowledge the way in which males are also victims of harassment and the way in which this behavior can also occur among females.

The study of peer sexual harassment should of course continue with an emphasis on what Foucault would call “subjugated knowledge” or knowledge that might be excluded or disqualified to inform this topic (McLaren, 2002). Allowing student’s voices to be heard can inform the type of knowledge that is created and further allows for the voice of those subjected to discursive regimes implicated in sexual harassment to be understood in not only creating knowledge, but in finding ways to address the problem. Further research that incorporates a full participatory action approach that is committed to challenging the status quo, validating the voice of experience and moving towards social change can be a useful approach to the problem of peer sexual harassment (Morris, 2002). In this way we can move from the positions of perpetrators, hapless victims, and ‘experts’ as those who define them, to a wide plane of action for multiple active agents of change.
References


Notes

1 Seventeen Magazine was first published in 1944 and has a circulation of 1.8 million. This highly popular magazine targets middle class adolescent girls. In its editorial profile the magazine is described as a “young women’s first fashion and beauty magazine. Tailored for young women in their teens and early twenties, Seventeen covers fashion, beauty, health, fitness, food, cars, college, careers, talent, entertainment, fiction, pubs crucial personal and global issues” (quoted in Schlenker, Caron & Halteman, 1998). While highly popular among young women for its focus on beauty and relationships it is often criticized for its stereotypical portrayal of women and its failure to address the level of accomplishment that young women are capable of today (Currie, 1999; Schlenker, Caron & Haltman, 1998, Kaplan & Cole, 2003).

ii The AAUW is an organization established in 1881 by women in universities that dedicated itself to advancing opportunities for girls and women in education. The AAUW considers itself pioneers in research and education that focuses in these areas. In 1885 for example it conducted a study to help dispel the myth promulgated by a Boston physician that stated that higher education was bad for women’s health. They have since published many other influential studies such as How Schools Short Change Girls (1992), Hostile Hallways (1993, 2001), School Girls: Young Women, Self-Esteem and the Confidence Gap (1994), Tech-Savvy: Educating Girls in the New Computer Age (2000), Si, Se Puede! Yes We Can: Latinas in School (2001), Women at Work (2003), and Under the Microscope: A Decade of Gender Equity Projects in the Sciences (2004). The AAUW also has a legal advocacy fund that provides funding for women seeking legal redress in sex discrimination cases and harassment of campuses nationwide. They are actively involved in all public policy that involves education, civil rights, reproductive rights and economic security. The boast a nation-wide membership, an active lobby corps, and numerous public policy programs (www.aaug.org).

iii The Road to Health: A Final Report on School Safety was published in 2008 following an investigation into the death of 15 year old high school student Jordan Manners who was shot to death in the hallway of his school, C. W. Jefferys Collegiate Institute in Toronto Ontario on May 23, 2007. Manner’s death shocked many and raised the question about the safety of schools. In response to this incident, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) appointed a panel to investigate all issues of school safety. The panel was headed by Julian Falconer. Julian Falconer is a lawyer whose practice involved civil, administrative and criminal cases many of which involve cases dealing with public interest, race relations and the constitution. Most notably, Falconer acted on behalf of legal council for Maher Arar in resolving his litigation which made Canadian legal history as the largest human rights settlement allotted to an individual plaintiff/family. Co-chairs of the panel included Linda MacKinnon retired teacher, administrator and Superintendent of Education in The Brantford, Kingston and Timmins Ontario Area and Peggy Edwards, a long time volunteer and worker in the public sector. The panel was supported by twenty three other individuals. The academic team was comprised of Ph. D. candidates and Master student in criminology from the University of Toronto. The research and writing team was comprised of other litigators from various law firms in the city.

The purpose of the report was to examine all issues of school safety. As it happens, C. W. Jefferys Collegiate was under investigation following the sexual assault of a female student in 2006. At that time several students raised concerns about boys singling out girls of a particular ethnic background as the feeling was that there cultural background would preclude them from reporting the assault. Further, the school administration felt that the girls would suffer abuse from her parents if they were to become aware of the incidents. No action was taken until the panel began its investigation. As a result, issues around peers sexual harassment become an area of focus (Road to Health, 2008).
While the report released by the panel does not represent a complete or generalizable study on the safety of schools, it does capture the way in which administrators, students, and others in the community understand the issues of violence in school and the issue of peer sexual harassment in schools.

Yasmin Jiwani and Helene Berman edited a report compiled by the Alliance of Five Research Centres on Violence. In the late 1990’s, with funding from Status of Women Canada, this organization a research project to look at a national action plan on violence prevention for girls. The issues that they examined include: poverty, homelessness, lack of knowledge about human rights, prostitution and trafficking, eating disorders, depression, suicide, self-harm, date-rate, the impact of witness violence, physical abuse, sexual abuse, gangs and girl-on-girl violence, media violence, sexual harassment in schools, teen pregnancies, hate crimes, racism, homophobia, and cultural exclusion and insensitivity. Initially their research focused on extensive literature reviews, an inventory of programs and services, and focus groups conducted with service providers and, wherever possible girls. The results of this research are published in phase I of their report. Phase II, published in 2002, examines the prevalence of violence in the lives of girls and how they are socialized to expect violence. The report also details how social policies and legislations can either alleviate or promote violence. Another component of this report looks at the intersection of gender and race in all areas of violence in the lives of girls.