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1991

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# The Feminization of Academia\*

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In a recent issue of *To Improve the Academy*, van der Bogert, Brinko, Atkins, and Arnold (1990) call for an approach to faculty development that integrates both feminine and masculine modes. They suggest that the traditional academic climate has been masculine in its hierarchical organization and its emphases on a) individual competition and accomplishment, b) research over teaching, c) sacrifice of personal to professional lives, and d) the development of expertise, specialization, and efficiency. Citing key literature on gender differences in thinking and personality (Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986), they describe the feminine style as cooperative rather than competitive; connected rather than autonomous; nurturing; interdependent; and as using networks rather than vertical organization to communicate, make decisions, and evaluate.

Because distinguishing between masculine and feminine styles sometimes leads to confusion, a few prefatory remarks about these dimensions may help clarify their use in this article. Both masculine and feminine styles refer to general characteristics of groups of women and men, rather than to dichotomous characteristics which separate men from women. Clearly, many women value expertise and competition, and many men value cooperation and sharing. Furthermore, there are many women who also value competition over cooperation, just as there are many men who also value sharing over expertise. But, in general, more women are focused on creating connection and involvement while avoiding isolation; and more men are focused on achieving status and accomplishment while avoiding dependence (Tannen,

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\*The author would like to thank Susan Palmer of the Sociology Department at Whitman College and Richard Lewis of the Psychology Department at Pomona College for their insightful comments on an earlier draft of this manuscript, and for so helpfully modeling the feminist values discussed here.

1990). One final point. Throughout this article I will be using the words “feminine” and “feminist” interchangeably, both referring to traits, values, and concerns that are more generally associated with women than men.

## Faculty Development as a Feminist Activity

In their study, van der Borgert et al. point out that the most effective faculty development programs integrate both masculine and feminine modes, just as Carl Jung (1953) pointed out many decades ago that the most fully functioning individuals integrate *anima* (feminine characteristics) with *animus* (masculine characteristics). Nevertheless, institutions of higher education are traditionally male-dominated organizations where specialized expertise, individual autonomy, rigorous evaluation, and competition for resources characterize many activities and endeavors (Sanford, 1980).

Further, van der Bogert et al. state that much faculty development work historically has been undertaken to support the masculine values of higher education, by emphasizing skill development and expertise: examples include “orientation programs, sabbaticals, exchanges, grants workshops, and curricular and instructional development programs” (p. 93). Even those programs concerned with feminist issues have been undertaken with a masculine orientation: for example, strategies for “increasing awareness about discrimination, monitoring campus climate, and providing support for those who have been victims of inappropriate behavior” (p. 93). Such programs show an emphasis on rules and rights, a traditionally masculine concern (Gilligan, 1982).

Suggesting ways of more explicitly integrating the feminine modes within the masculine institution, van der Bogert et al. conclude by calling for programs which more formally address feminist values of connection, community, and relationship. When these characteristics are combined with a masculine emphasis on skills and logic, they are termed “transformational” techniques. In listing the various types of transformational activities, the authors show a clear focus on cooperative modes of working, including “collaborative learning, teaching, and research; providing support groups; empowering subordinates and sharing decisions; encouraging faculty interdependence in the department/college/institution” (pp. 94-95).

Van der Bogert et al. have provided a valuable way of conceptualizing faculty development work using gender dimensions. My purpose here is to explore further the feminist basis of faculty development and suggest that the survival of faculty development will not only be dependent upon the continued manifestation of feminist values, but also will depend on the feminization of higher education itself, a trend that is already observable.

While generally supporting the thinking of van der Bogert and her colleagues, I wish to depart from their work by suggesting that faculty development is *already* quite a feminist enterprise. Many of those activities which van der Bogert et al. call for form the basic value structure on which faculty developers work. For example, those of us who have participated in The Professional and Organizational Development Network in Higher Education (POD) will recognize the emphasis on horizontal rather than vertical organization, illustrated when new members are quickly assimilated, and when the central committee is run with a consensus model. Even the very concept of “help” is a feminine value, because asking for and receiving it threatens the ostensible autonomy and independence of the receiver. Research suggests that females are more likely to give and request help than males (Tannen, 1990). Effective help on professional and teaching practices requires caring, support, and mutual sharing.

## **The Marginalization of Faculty Development**

In fact, I would argue that faculty development practices at most institutions have been marginalized in the same way and for the same reasons that women are often marginalized in male-dominated institutions. Both run counter to the prevailing dominant norms of autonomy, expertise, and independence. Women and faculty development both threaten the existing patriarchal order, and in so doing, are often subtly and not so subtly patronized and diminished. This thesis would explain the following observations, which are my own, but I believe are widely shared:

- Faculty developers have frequently felt undervalued by the power structure at their institutions. They have had to continually scramble for funding and resources, even for recognition. However, traditionally male endeavors such as research and evaluation procedures for promotion and tenure receive much more attention, energy, and time.
- Teaching has been undervalued relative to research. Faculty development, like women, has often shown more concern for teaching. As Caryn McTighe Musil (1990) recently argued at an AAHE meeting, teaching is institutionally like domestic work: it is the women who stay home and take care of the children. The men travel outside the institution doing “real” work—that is, research.
- Relative to other administrative positions, faculty developers are more often women.

- Relative to other administrative positions, faculty developers, male and female, show more feminine personality characteristics: e.g., caring, nurturing, and interpersonal sharing.
- A common misunderstanding about faculty development is that it is for remedial purposes (hence, the equation of “help” with “weak”).

These observations are no surprise to faculty development practitioners, who might not call themselves feminists, but who nonetheless express many feminist values. It may or may not be reassuring to recognize that the marginalization of faculty development may be as much due to the fact that faculty development symbolizes feminist values in a masculine institution as any other personal or even institutional features of faculty development programs.

While van der Bogert et al. call for the strengthening of faculty development through more emphasis on the feminine modes, the above analysis would suggest otherwise. Increasing the salience of feminine values in a masculine system is unlikely to redress the undervaluation of faculty development programs by traditionally masculine administrators and faculty. However, there are other ways to bring faculty development to a more central, mainstream position within the academy.

## The Feminization of Academia

Fortunately, the academy itself is showing signs of becoming increasingly feminized: more collaborative, more personal, more interpersonal. While the language of feminism has not been used to describe current trends in higher education, most recent discussions would agree on the following emerging themes:

1. The importance of teaching over research is being highlighted. Major commissions and associations of higher education (Carnegie Commission; American Association of Universities; American Association for Higher Education) and even major research universities (Stanford, Harvard) are calling for the return to the original purpose of the university: teaching (Miller, 1990). While faculty developers might like to take some credit for this awakening, I believe there are much larger demographic factors to be credited: e.g., the increasingly high cost of higher education for the smaller subset of 18-21 year olds. As institutions must increasingly scramble for students, the recognition that opportunities for better student learning may be more important in choice of college than research prestige, has forced administrators to take another look at classroom teaching and its institutional importance.

2. Related to the above concern, the increasing emphasis on active learning and collaborative learning models has signaled a new concern for the role of the learner (AAC Report, Vol. I, 1991; Schon, 1987; Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1986). Whereas traditional masculine models of teaching have posed the professor as the expert who delivers the facts to the uninformed student, active learning suggests a different definition of both knowledge and student. Much more in line with the feminist view of knowledge as a shared intellectual event, the social construction of knowledge allows the student to share a more equal role with the facilitator, rather than the expert. In newer teaching models, student and professor work together addressing complex problems. Team teaching and team learning are emphasized. The typical classroom changes from the expert pontificating to the naive, to small work groups addressing a problem, with the professor roaming from group to group to act as consultant. Such practices are much more congruent with feminist modes of intellectual practice.

3. The increasing emphasis on connections and meaning across the curriculum will demand new roles for the professoriate. Recent attacks on the undergraduate curriculum (Boyer & Levine 1981; AAC Report 1985; AAC Task Group, 1988) have converged on the fragmentation characterizing the undergraduate curriculum. Requirements based much more on political considerations than sound intellectual merit have delivered an incoherent smorgasbord of specialized courses as an excuse for undergraduate liberal education. Attempts to build a more coherent and defensible baccalaureate experience will encourage faculty to engage in much more team teaching, interdisciplinary curriculum design, and integrative course experiences. These features will again require faculty to step out of their narrow bands of specialization and work together collaboratively, learning from each other and mutually considering problems of complex nature. As a recent participant in a collaboratively taught interdisciplinary general studies course, I can attest to the potent form of faculty development that it delivers: learning new skills in intellectual and pedagogical realms is a continuous and intense experience when one works as a team with other colleagues in different disciplines.

## **Faculty Development as a Feminist Agenda**

The trends in higher education described above are taking place whether or not faculty developers explicitly recognize them or call them feminist in nature. I would argue that as faculty developers we can enhance our effectiveness by considering ways in which we can help faculty function more effectively in the changed contexts within which they will be asked to

perform. We must continue to emphasize the feminist values on teaching, active learning, and coherent curriculum design.

Should we call ourselves “feminists” as we do so? There may be some good arguments for dispensing with that language: many would claim that it is incendiary; that it invites defensiveness; that it carries unintended connotations. Use of feminist language is often misunderstood to categorically define differences between all men and all women, leaving the many who recognize both sets of traits in themselves alienated from a framework based on gender differences. Such terms can also perpetuate stereotypes and perpetuate the separation of the genders, making it harder rather than easier to encourage integration of both masculine and feminine modes.

In spite of these risks, however, I would like to conclude this article by suggesting that casting the work of both faculty development and the direction of higher education in feminist terms has several important advantages that should not be dismissed quickly.

First, feminism offers a structural explanation for why many of the values of faculty development work have been undermined at our institutions. Structural explanations can help us to take our disappointments less personally, and to forgive colleagues who may have been part of those disappointments.

Second, and perhaps more important, feminism offers an historical explanation for why academia is headed in the direction it is. Is it simply a coincidence that both the emergence of faculty development, as well as these changing values in higher education, are occurring when large numbers of women have entered the academy and are beginning to work in powerful positions? I suggest that the increase in numbers of women students, faculty, and administrators has impacted the zeitgeist of academia so strongly that a feminine agenda becomes as legitimate as the masculine agenda.

Finally, feminism can be an empowering concept that offers encouragement for the natural abilities and values of many faculty developers. As successful players in masculinized institutions, most faculty developers have had to tuck away many natural impulses toward cooperation, sharing, intuition, and emotions. Articulating the feminist agenda may help us all, as men and women, to feel freer to act upon these values, model them, and lead our institutions toward the transformation which van der Bogert et al. so effectively describe.

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