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Strategies for Advocacy in Higher Education

Marie Byrd-Blake
Linda Wesson

The feminist phase theory (Tetreault, 1985) was used to examine the cultural patterns embedded in a department of a large, urban university, to classify how the faculty in the department perceived women, and to examine how our own behavior as two newly hired associate and assistant professors contributed or did not contribute to these patterns of behavior. Three years of field notes, anecdotal records, transcriptions of meetings, interviews, and student comments were categorized to develop experienced-derived strategies. These strategies encourage women in higher education to: (a) recognize their own enmeshment in patriarchal practices; (b) disrupt these practices through their own behavior; and (c) move to positions of advocacy and moral purpose in higher education.

As two newly hired associate and assistant professors in an urban university, we embarked on a journey that led us to examine the cultural patterns embedded in the department in which we were hired. With backgrounds in K-12 education, we have endured patriarchal practices in work environments and were aware of the dominance of males in many institutions of higher education. In this paper our thoughts about marginalization, our values, boundaries and the politics of difference (Nicholson, 1990; Young, 1990), and our individual differentiation (Yeatman, 1990, 1994) are examined. Previous research studies that investigated ways to identify/define "success" for women in academia were extended (Wesson & Carr, 2003; Wesson & Hauschildt, 1997a, 1997b, 1998).

Literature Review

Wenniger and Conroy's (2001) longitudinal data illustrated the past and present status of women in academe. In 1975, five percent of all presidents of colleges and universities were women. The percentage increased to 12% by 1992, 16.5% by 1995 and 19.3% by 1998. The largest percentage of women

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presidents were reported to lead private two-year colleges with 27% of all private two-year college presidents being women. Next, women represented 15% of all presidents of private four-year colleges, and represented 14% of all public university presidents. Women were reported to be presidents of smaller schools with 71% leading schools that have 3,000 or fewer students. Wenniger and Conroy (2001) maintained that women were more likely to be presidents of troubled schools that were considered to be at risk, colleges that were in need of an interim president where a free trial period is allowed, and at community colleges where teaching was more valued than research.

Wenniger and Conroy (2001) reported an increase of women in the ranks of provosts, vice presidents, deans, and department chairs. The number of women also increased in administrative jobs such as directors of programs and affirmative action offices in which they have little chance of affecting policy and procuring advancement (Wenniger & Conroy, 2001).

The gender of the faculty in higher academic ranks is predominantly male. Bellas' (2001) data (prepared for The Committee on the Status of

Women in the Academic Profession, a sector of The American Association of University Professors), illustrated the disparity of women faculty in the professoriate. Women were reported to account for 36% of faculty overall. The data confirm that more women faculty are in the non-tenured, lower paying positions in comparison to male faculty. Among tenured or tenure track faculty, Bellas (2001) reported that women were well-represented among assistant professors and least well-represented among full professors. Women made up 46% of assistant professors, 36% of associate professors, and 21% of full professors. Women were represented disproportionately among instructors and lecturers and in unranked positions holding 58% of instructorships, 55% of lectureships, and 48% of unranked positions. Data indicating the salary advantage held by male faculty were also reported. Across all ranks and institutional types, on average, women were reported to earn 91% of what men earn. Among the ten highest-paying public institutions, only one (College of William and Mary) reported higher average salaries for female full professors. During 1970-2000, in the professoriate, the gap between men's and women's salaries has grown wider (Mason & Goulden, 2002).

Discrepancies also exist when the standards for hiring and promotion for those in higher education are analyzed. According to Wenniger and Conroy (2001), from 1925 to 2000 the percentage of full-time female faculty in higher education increased by only 5% (from 19% to 24%). In the area of gaining tenure, 22% of tenured faculty were female in 1989. In 1998, that number increased to 26%. During 1980-2000, there was an increase of 1.5% in the rate of women gaining tenure, compared to an 8% increase for men. In the male-dominated higher education arena, "the real rules are unwritten and the good old boys are reluctant to let women join their game" (Wenniger & Conroy, 2001, p. 6).

Although women have gained status, they appear to have marginalized their personal lives. Mason and Goulden (2002) analyzed data from 1973 to 1999 of faculty with children. They reported that women who attained tenure across all disciplines were unlikely to have children in the household. Tenured women in science were twice as likely as tenured men to be single, and more tenured women remained single in the social sciences and humanities as well. Fifty-nine percent of the married women with children, who chose not to marginalize their personal lives, indicated they were considering leaving academia and cited balancing career and family as a high source of stress.

Purpose

This study examined ways to disrupt patterns in behavior that keep women in roles of victimization and move them away from positions of advocacy for themselves and their authentic life's work. Strategies are recommended for women in higher education to: (a) recognize their own enmeshment in these patriarchal practices, and (b) disrupt these practices through their own behavior. Because patriarchal systems are so entrenched in western cultures (Tarnas, 1991; Weedon, 1987), the rules of the day-to-day patriarchal games occur within complex layers of acts and responses, some more conscious or unconscious than others.

Feminist Phase Theory

The feminist phase theory is a "classification schema of the evolution in thought during the past 15 years and the incorporation of women's traditions, history, and experiences into selected disciplines" of thought (Tetreault, 1985, p. 364). The disciplines Tetreault examined were anthropology, history, literature, and psychology. She drew her conclusions based on examples of questions commonly asked about women in each discipline in each phase.

The five phases of the feminist phase theory (Tetreault, 1985) are: male scholarship, compensatory scholarship, bifocal scholarship, feminist scholarship and multifocal or relational scholarship. Each phase represents an evolutionary shift about what is "possible and appropriate" (Tetreault, 1985, p. 366) for that discipline to include about women.

Tetreault described each phase in this way:

1. In the male scholarship phase, the male experience is viewed as universal in that it is representative of humanity and is the basis for generalizing about all human beings. If this perspective is present, all thought has the derivative of the male perspective. There is no awareness that the existence of women as a group requires expansion of that knowledge.
2. In the second phase, compensatory scholarship, there is a consciousness that women are missing. However, males are still perceived as the norm and representative of all thought. In this phase, a few outstanding women emerge, but they fit the male norm of excellence.
3. In phase three, bifocal scholarship, the following factors are represented: first, there is an emphasis on the differences between

women and men; second, there is a focus on the oppression of women and the means that men have used to advance their authority and to assert female inferiority; third, there is attention to women's efforts to overcome that oppression, specifically through women's organizations and networks.

4. Phase four, feminist scholarship, emphasizes women's activities as the most valued. In this phase, there is a more pluralistic conceptualization of women. There is a realization that generalizing about a group as vast and diverse as women leads to inaccuracies.
5. In the final phase, multifocal or relational scholarship, how women and men relate to and complement one another is analyzed. There is a search for the common points where women and men's experiences intersect. The pluralistic conception of women from the feminist phase is now applied to all humans. There is a shift from a male-centered point of view to one placing women at the center of their own knowledge.

For the purposes of this paper, these five evolutionary phases and the questions that accompanied each phase were used as a framework to determine which of the five phases served as a representative of the perspectives of faculty in the department of a large urban university. The department consisted of seven faculty, three of whom were women. The feminist phase theory was used to classify how the faculty in the department perceived women and how our own behavior, as two of the female faculty, contributed or did not contribute to these perspectives.

Methodology

Using field notes, anecdotal records, transcriptions of meetings, interviews, and student comments, a case study was developed to evaluate which of the common stages of thinking about women was most representative of departmental faculty of a large urban university during a two-year period. The perceptions of four males and three females in the department were classified. Although there were differences at various times among the faculty, there was enough evidence to support the notion that the phase that was most applicable to the behavior in the department was phase two, compensatory scholarship. In this phase, the female viewpoint is recognized as being separate from males, but the traditional patriarchal, male perspective dominates all aspects of the experience. In this phase, women are perceived to be different and at times inferior. The data indicate that this perceived difference and inferiority was expressed by males as well as females.

As two female academics with previous experiences in K-12 administrative settings, we have often found ourselves in patriarchal work environments where these kinds of perceptions exist. As we examined our careers, particularly teaching, research, and leadership, it was evident that we were able to move out of a phase two environment and establish a professional life that was not in keeping with the perceptions of those around us. Our teaching, research, and leadership did not conform to the expectations of the environment.

In the last portion of the study we identified strategies we used to move out of the expectations in phase two, compensatory phase, and how we established careers that, in many ways, exemplify the fifth phase, the relational phase.

Experiential-Derived Strategies for Moving Out of a Phase-Two Environment

These strategies emerged as we researched our work in the department (Wesson & Carr, 2003). They are the strategies that helped us disrupt patterns in our own behavior that kept us in roles that moved us away from positions of advocacy for our authentic life's work. Although these strategies were difficult to categorize, they appear to center on self-development and centering life's work around things that were congruous with our values (Wesson & Hauschildt, 1997a). The strategies speak to the need to take complete responsibility for oneself and one's actions.

Strategies

Maintain Your Moral Purpose

Fullan (1999) defined moral purpose in an educational context as twofold: on a local level, moral purpose entails your ability to make a difference in the lives of the students with whom you interact and on a broader level, moral purpose is educating others with the intention of making a contribution to the betterment of society as a whole. We entered education with that moral purpose in mind, but found that being enmeshed in phase two environments caused difficulty in staying committed to this kind of moral purpose. Specific strategies we use to sustain our moral purpose in higher education are:

- Craft your practice of teaching, research, and leadership based on your lived-experiences and the moral purpose defined by Fullan (1999).

- Spend time with your students and colleagues to build authentic relations.
- Develop strategies that call for experiential and participatory learning.
- Implement practices of transformative learning.
- Be a student, learner, and wisdom-keeper.
- Attend workshops, network with other, read, read, read, and use the internet to connect with ideas and people who also promote this kind of moral purpose in education.

Maintain the Principle of Nonresistance

Millman (1994) in *The Warrior Athlete: Body, Mind, and Spirit* maintained that there are four paths you can take to respond to the forces of life: surrender to them, ignore them, resist and create turmoil, or use the forces of life to your advantage. He termed the last option nonresistance. As nonresisters, we use challenges and oppositions as lessons. In higher education, this principle translates to moving out of the role of victim and taking responsibility for your own behavior so that your behavior works toward your goals. From every situation, a life-learning experience can be extracted. Specific strategies are:

- Craft a reflective life.
- Know that you are 100% responsible for yourself.
- Gain control over your own life and give up the need to control others.
- Define and redefine success for yourself.
- Accept necessary losses as gifts to help you re-define “success.”
- Be an active listener but practice non-attachment.
- Don’t engage in another person’s drama.
- Be the peace you seek.
- Carry yourself with you wherever you go.
- Face and step into your fears.
- Step out of your own emotionality and compulsive behavior.
- Seek out mentors and role models.
- Be aware of rules of the “games.”
- Keep an eye on the bigger picture.

Create a Sense of Community

In a phase-two environment, the atmosphere seems to be very much like the traditional environment found in higher education. There is an individualistic culture where achieving goals for the self is the top priority. Many would say

that in this environment the *I* takes precedence over the *we*, initiative and achievement are highly prized, individual goals are the most important goals, relationships are often adversarial and become win-lose conflicts, and friendships seem to be made only for specific purposes (Wenniger, 1995). This kind of environment ignores the needs that many women bring to the work environment; i.e., the need to create a sense of community where support, trust, belonging, and long-term friendships are prized. For many women, when there is a culture of connection rather than separation, understanding and acceptance rather than assessment, and collaboration rather than debate, success seems to come more easily (Wenniger, 1995). The following strategies for creating this sense of community are suggested:

- Seek relationships with faculty, administrators, researchers, writers, students, and colleagues who value collaboration.
- Participate in conferences, workshops, retreats, study groups and book clubs that invite conversation about collaborative approaches to problem solving.
- Role model collaboration and co-creativity in classrooms, meetings, and other university activities.

Maintain Interdependence Between Personal and Professional Life

Women in higher education often feel challenged to give equal time to the demands of their personal life especially in a phase-two environment. The internal conflict resulting from such turmoil ultimately results in a lack of substance in both areas. So that a healthy perspective and emotional well-being is maintained, we must learn to allow lessons learned from the workplace to enhance our personal lives and vice versa. Life's lessons are not restricted to any one area. True harmony is achieved when interdependence is maintained through self reflection and allowing all of our lived-learning to enhance all aspects of our life. Specific strategies are:

- Keep your spiritual life as the center of your life and spend time there in contemplation.
- Critically examine values and meanings that emerge in your academic environment and self-construct values and meanings that emerge out of your own values and lived-experiences (Mezirow, 1978).
- Critically examine how your own emotionality contributes to your behavior, particularly to the unconscious role playing behavior of hero and/or victim (Wesson & Carr, 2003).

- Focus on personal growth as well as skill mastery.
- Understand and reflect on the importance of a “value-full,” instead of a “value-free” environment. (Duerr, Zajonc, & Dana, 2003).

Concluding Thoughts

The identified strategies created a working environment for us that differed from the traditional higher education environment that is replete with behaviors that have traditionally been termed as male: aggression, selfishness in time allocation (that translates to more focus on personal career agendas rather than students and teaching), extreme competitiveness, linear thinking, and a tendency to overlook the overall moral purpose of higher education. By using the feminist phase theory to validate and contextualize our personal experiences in the department (Gardiner, Enomoto, & Grogan, 2000), we were able to also value our lived experiences and categorize experience-derived strategies that have emerged out of these lived-experiences and have helped us work against “an imbalanced male biased perspective” (Gardiner et al., 2000). We hope that these strategies provide talking-points for others who are also striving for positions of advocacy and moral purpose in higher education.

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