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Advancing Women In Leadership

Reimagining our Academic Journeys through Spiritual Metaphor

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Those who warn you about becoming marginalized by joining the sister hood have lessons to learn about what the academy can be.

Four mid-life women examine their individual and collective pilgrimages through, near and around the academy. Our pilgrimages are spiritual, moral, social, and developmental in a variety of ways. Our scholarship reflects these perspectives with language, research frameworks, and metaphors for understanding. We offer women of, within, and about the academy the metaphors as lenses to understand our academic journeys. So much of our language about recent membership in the academy depicts being "other" and about exclusion and indifference, we felt compelled to take a proactive stance about our own journeys. The language of these spiritually-grounded metaphors are a beginning.

Perspectives/theoretical framework

Much of the research on women and higher education reflects the conflict that arises when the personal journey is stymied by the unforgiving academy. In

Subordination (Kinnear, 1995), Women of Academe (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988) Bitter Milk (Grumet, 1980), and other such works highlight the perennial exclusion of "the other" by the academy, specifically women. Cooper, Benham, Collay, Martinez-Aleman, and Scherr offered a different perspective in their shared work about how women found a home in the academy. In *A Famine of Stories*, (Cooper, et al., 1997) they look at how the academy shapes our understanding of ourselves as members of the academy, and the roles of our students, mentors, families, and colleagues in finding a home in the academy. This collaboration was inspired by that work.

1. Why do women continue to flock to the academy in greater numbers than men if it remains so inhospitable? 2. How does such a personal, mid-life journey take place in such a hierarchical, patriarchal context? As we continue to seek answers to these questions, we feel that relationship and destiny play special roles in the spiritual and intellectual development of women. If women within the academy can understand their development from multiple scholarly perspectives, they might find new, proactive, and women-friendly forms to frame their experiences. The languages of moral, spiritual, and social development offer us such forms.

Modes of inquiry

Narrative and dialogue play a vital role in human development as our intertwined stories portray. Four women from different research traditions such as anthropology, psychology, sociology, and spirituality offer stories of pilgrimage and process to each other and our readers for reflection and review. In *Stories Lives Tell*, editors Carol Witherell and Nel Noddings present three central themes that are evident throughout that work and which guide our reflections. They suggest that:

Story and narrative are primary tools in the work that educators and counselors do; that education means taking seriously both the quest for life's meaning and the call to care for persons; and that the use of narrative and dialogue can serve as a model for teaching and learning across the boundaries of disciplines, professions, and cultures. (1991, p. 2)

Each of us has stories to tell about our journey; each is on a quest for life's meaning and feels called to care; and each of us uses narrative and dialogue in our professional work with students and in our colleague and mentoring relationships. We have interviewed each other, taken courses from one another, co-taught courses, and written together. We have parented each other's children, helped deliver another's child, held each other's hand in times of pain, and offered solace when the challenges of the journey loomed large. In the numerous small steps of our academic and personal lives lies the magnitude of our intellectual development.

Our shared story

Language within our narratives comes from a variety of intellectual efforts: co-authored work such as course syllabi, research papers, and presentations; letters and E-mail exchanges, journal entries, essays, phone conversations, and anecdotal materials. We have made meaning of these pursuits because of our personal

convergence. Over many cups of coffee and conversations at the kitchen table, we strived to make sense of our place in the academy and our place with each other. Each individual has described a specific metaphor for our academic journey, and the four writers identify commonalities and differences in each metaphor and each journey. At the beginning of each author's description, her relationship to the other authors is sketched in italics.

The path converges . . .

Sandy is the link between the four panel members. Her story of re-entering the academy at mid-life is a poignant tale of a woman unsure of her intellectual capacity and fearful of being found a fraud. Through the completion of two master's degrees, one in education and one in spirituality, she is mentored and co-mentors three other women. Her story is about the convergence of our paths.

Learning and Teaching as Pilgrimage - Sandy's story

In cultures where the sacred feminine is revered, that cycle is seen as central to a woman's biological life, her emotional development, and eventually, to her full spiritual unfolding. It is also regarded as a kind of wellspring for the entire community.... As a Western woman, I grew up without any inkling of what that sort of recognition might feel like, but I think the hunger for it guided me at crucial junctures. Carol Lee Flinders, 1998, p. 158

I never thought going to graduate school would evolve into a pilgrimage that would last for many years. It was not until I had graduated from Hamline University with a master's degree in education and began my sojourn as a seminary student that I began to put to my path. My vocation as an elementary teacher and later a facilitator of adult university students does not at first glance provoke that perspective of sustained yearning . . . yearning nudges one to become a seeker. Unlike attending school as a sightseer or as one traveling abroad, I experienced internal development throughout my learning that invited a different metaphor: pilgrimage. This path of pilgrimage offered new settings that revived me and sharpened my senses. This pilgrimage opened new spiritual dimensions, causing me to pay closer attention to what my life could be. I found that my teaching and learning pilgrimage is more than physical movement from my home to new surroundings. It was an inward journey as well as an outward journey, into the self as well as into new places. A pilgrimage is both a visit to a new place and awareness of an existing meditative quality within myself. I became attentive not only to my accomplishments but to the very process of the quest itself.

I invite readers to value the aspect of 'taking stock' that accompanies the inward journey and the outward pilgrimage. When I became aware that I was living my pilgrimage I found that constant reflection during this sojourn greatly enriched my lived experience, perhaps more than any detailed planning. Pilgrimages are not limited to the present but are shaped by the past world view. The expectations of the present provoke me to find new pathways toward my future. Pilgrims

continually enter new territory and must get their bearings along each new leg of the journey. Taking stock is also essential as one learns and goes forth in this world as a teacher and learner. The need for introspection may seem elemental to some, but the disciplined practice of reflection and meditation has not always been a component of my daily life. It is not always an easy and uneventful process. Questions arise and demand answers or focus attention of a different sort on previously hidden aspects of my life. Pilgrimage opens reality to significance.

In looking back over my experience, I have found that the basic mark of a pilgrimage is the quest for something important enough that I am compelled to devote myself to a committed search. I embarked on my first masters degree as a proposed trip that might yield what I yearned for: A graduate degree. What I found initially was all together different than I expected. In retrospect, I understand I was looking for something that was missing in my life. It turned out to be the movement and creativity I experienced through the process of earning my degree. Walking the path as a pilgrim was more satisfying than reaching the destination. I was confronted with the perception that something I formerly valued had disappeared from my thoughts or important relationships seemed to have faded. I was slowly moving away from the rest of the flock as so often happens during a pilgrimage. The events and succession of involvement in my learning led me away from a sense of safety and wholeness I once took for granted. New learning shattered my concept of self. This is often the very essence of any spiritual pilgrimage or any significant event that causes us to question our place in the world (Cooper, 1997).

A common definition of pilgrimage most often involves the identification of a tangible goal toward which the quest is directed. In teaching and learning, there does seem to be some mystical attraction pulling us toward the holy grail or a degree. There is also a sense of heightened awareness to the world around us. The site may not be located in one geographic location, just as the degree is not the only outcome. There is a desire for wholeness that draws one to a place of higher learning where the process of pilgrimage might be experienced. As a mid-life student my search was not so much for a place or a shrine but a search for legitimacy as a learner. Into mid-life, there was also an increased sensitivity to the passage of time. One wants to set out before it is too late.

Pilgrims need to move. In medieval times the pilgrim traveled to distant places and endured hardships. I view pilgrimage in modern times as a critical form of participation. One cannot merely spectate, this movement is not recreational. It has purpose and determination with something larger than the self. The journey really caused me to examine my vocational intentions and motivations. Teaching and learning are not something one can do at home in isolation, but are a shared quest. While teaching and learning are not always grueling, it is a journey that requires much forethought and planning for the unexpected. How often is the unexpected part of our daily teaching a side trip away from the syllabus that is handed out to the students? If we acknowledge that both students and teachers are on a learning pilgrimage, all learners would benefit from much more than a degree.

As a student and as a teacher, I know that timing is critical. As with a spiritual pilgrimage, time is needed from the beginning to meditate on the odd moments throughout the days and to honor the impact of the pilgrimage while it is still underway. I found that questions I raised ran deeper than I could know. The importance of reflection, whether intellectual or spiritual, is central to making meaning of the journey. Reconciling outward movement and inner seeking requires time. Timeliness was also a factor in my learning and teaching pilgrimage. Without readiness and openness I would have never recognized the importance and value of the lessons and teachers I would meet along the way.

The interaction with fellow pilgrims, Michelle, Carol and Valerie, all who were my advisors and now my friends and colleagues, greatly enriched my pilgrimage as a graduate student. All played an invaluable role in my successful completion of degrees. I too entered their lives at timely intervals. We all converged as members focused on some ultimate goal. Michelle was a new program director at Hamline and I was one of the first students to complete her infant graduate program. Carol was new to the region and we found each other because I was the teacher of her second grade son. She mentored me while I investigated the complicated writings of Simone Weil for my thesis. Valerie was there for me as my advisor and spiritual director on my extended pilgrimage at the St. Paul Seminary. These three women met each other through me. I became the common denominator as our lives evolved. Behind each relationship is a story of shared experience that became a pilgrimage.

Within this sketch I discern both a celebration and caution when it comes to companionship, pilgrimage, and teaching and learning. Although community and having others there to share the excitement was most gratifying, there was a danger of depriving myself of the credit I deserved. I acknowledge my companions by saying, "I could not have done this without you." While this may be quite true, I did do something. I kept going, exploring and testing my new intellectual legitimacy. We all have. Medieval pilgrims were individuals who came together through a common quest, rather than a common history. Douglas Vest suggests in his book, *On Pilgrimage* (1998), that the traveler who must constantly refer to "back home" has not fully entered the process of true pilgrimage.

Pilgrims express awe about and reverence toward their journeys. I think of my work and the students I come in contact with and wonder what our world of education and life would be like if our intellectual pursuits were undertaken with the same conviction of those on pilgrimage. Truly then would our precious time here on earth reflect our journeys as pilgrims. Lastly, pilgrims, whoever or wherever we are, must be open to points of view that we have never known before. Annie Dillard (1982) portrays this place as where:

The deeps are violence and terror of which psychology has warned us. But if you ride these monsters deeper down, if you drop with them farther over the world's rim, you find what our sciences cannot locate or name, the substrate, the ocean or matrix or ether which buoys the rest, which gives goodness its power for good, and evil its power for evil, the unified field: our complex and inexplicable caring for each

other, and for our life together here. This is given, it is not learned. (pp. 94-95)

Carol was Sandy's thesis coach for her first graduate degree, and Sandy was Carol's son's second grade teacher. Carol had moved away from the institution where she was "all but dissertation" (ABD) and was a careful and supportive writing coach for Sandy. Michelle met Carol through Sandy and they became colleagues at the same university. Now the circle was more closely focused on the institutional journey, and Carol's lifetime of institution-watching became an asset to Michelle. Michelle encouraged Carol to stay with her goal of completing her own graduate degree and they shared their interests in mid-life women's development. Her story is about her experience as a doctoral student.

Walking the Labyrinth to Reclaim the Self - Carol's story

This reflection is undertaken with a certain dread and confusion: dread because I am unaccustomed to speaking publicly about personal issues, and confusion because these issues are now in process and the end is not in sight. This paper also begins in the unpopular passive voice. That, too, is appropriate, for this paper is about passivity and loss of voice in higher education. It is also about the intense hope of reclaiming the self at least partially through the use of the labyrinth as a process, with some suggestion that the metaphor could also support institutional reform. There are two goals for this description: first, to share information about how the labyrinth has been a tool for spiritual progress in the past and present; and second, to narrate my reflective experience using the labyrinth to understand my most recent journey in higher education.

The labyrinth and contemporary spirituality

The labyrinth played an important role in medieval mysticism, and its mystical qualities still speak to seekers today. Walking the labyrinth then and now has been described as a mystical process consisting of three stages or a "Three-Fold Path" to union with God: Purgation, Illumination, and Union. In Purgation, the seeker attempts to rid herself of whatever is blocking her relationship with God. It is the elimination of internal and external distraction for the sake of silence, peace, and preparation for the center where Illumination occurs. In the center, one finds clarity concerning issues, challenges, and the meaning of one's life. The center is a place for prayer and contemplation. Sometimes images and insights appear whose meanings become apparent weeks or months later. The final stage, Union, means communing with God while walking the same route in reverse-- exiting the labyrinth and reentering the world with one's inner resources unified within the person and with the Transcendent. Some walkers report feeling energized or empowered as they exit.

The labyrinth as transformation

My relationship with the labyrinth began in a strictly intellectual way. I was searching for a suitable extension of the pilgrimage metaphor with which to reflect on higher education, especially its reform. I was already aware of the growing interest in labyrinths and had walked one, but I hadn't connected it to this

conversation until the labyrinth connected itself to me. It simply appeared in my consciousness with great certainty. Since then, the labyrinth has been a powerful tool for my own professional and personal transformation, though the journey is far from over.

As I stated earlier, the labyrinth describes a threefold mystical process of Purgation, Illumination, and Union. Because I am currently uncomfortable with a description of my journey as mystical (though it may well turn out to be so in the end), I have chosen to rename these stages as Separation, Vision, and Reintegration. You will remember that the goal of the labyrinths entry route is the elimination of distraction, a "clearing of the decks" to prepare for clarity of vision in the center. I now believe that this first stage of Separation is nothing less than a powerful psycho-dynamic effort to fully identify and consciously withdraw to separate--from people and processes which are destructive but in which we are nevertheless deeply invested. I now believe that the key to personal as well as institutional reform is to fully understand what it is that we wish to abandon and why we have been deeply invested in harmful traditions. Stated differently, we can easily identify what we don't like. What we usually do not understand is why we endure and perhaps enable such traditions to continue. Artress (1995) states that we all have an acute spiritual hunger for "healing, co-creation, and self-knowledge" (p.35) where self-knowledge includes knowing, in Jungian terms, our shadow side. The shadow side is everything about our personalities that we have rejected and concealed in the shadows of consciousness. As these elements remain pre-conscious, they gain in power and eventually erupt in destructive ways. These Jungian insights are not new; if anything at all is new, it is their application to the psychosocial dynamics of higher education. Transformation will be incomplete personally and institutionally until what is in the shadows is brought into the light and named. As dysfunctional as our academic communities often are, their very dysfunction performs significant emotional service for us. Until we understand our own complicity in this service, reform will remain quite literally "shadow-boxing."

My own journey is illustrative. Most of my adult life has alternated between student and professional roles, and I often speak with alternating voices. I have had four major life shifts: In my twenties I attended graduate school without any clear professional goals and completed an M.A. in philosophy. I then embarked on a 15-year period of significant professional accomplishment as a college teacher and administrator. While these were years of genuine professional achievement and although I gained important experience, inwardly I did not recognize it as such. What seemed to matter most was the satisfaction I gained from pleasing people, especially quasi-parental figures. Gumpert (1997) writes of her own struggle for legitimacy and approval, of its influence on her choice of research, and its continuing impact on her writing efforts.

The third major shift back into student life came in my 40's as I returned to graduate school to earn a doctorate. I was completely unprepared for the feelings of alienation and detachment that would engulf me. I no longer had a professional identity. These feelings were probably intensified by the fact that I was that rare bird, a full-time non-traditional student. But they were significantly increased by a

highly traditional pedagogical setting in which Lockean attitudes about learning and students were alive and well (in fact, they still are today). I was struck by the absence of any material pertaining to us as students--there seemed to be no place in student development theory for any of the students in the class, not to mention in any of the services that they would eventually render. Nor was there any effort to acknowledge or include the substantial professional expertise that was present.

During those four years of doctoral work, I now know that I participated in an odd symbiotic relationship: my peers and I became professional nonentities so that academe's most cherished notions and controls could remain intact. We permitted ourselves to be silenced in exchange for degrees. The most ironic twist of all is that far too many of us have not completed our dissertations to finally earn those doctorates: to write, one must have a voice.

In a tentative way, I have returned to the professorial life. There is a historian of ideas within me who is watching and awaiting the death of rationalism---there are some promising signs---but for the most part it is alive, well, and fully controlling academe. It is powerful because the shadow side of our professional life has yet to be identified and known for what it is. For example, we have yet to face our inordinate desire to control students and their learning. We have yet to recognize the arrogance that creates class warfare within our profession and silences professionals learning on our campuses. And we have yet to admit that we are just as susceptible to deceit, treachery, revenge, and infidelity as were the ancient Greeks.

Once we have undertaken Separation from these powerfully destructive notions and relationships, however, we will be available in the existential sense for Vision, and perhaps that Vision will somehow involve the satisfaction of our spiritual hunger for healing, for CO-creation in a productive community, and for further self-knowledge, as Artress suggested. Scholars such as Anna Neumann (1997) are making a start by turning their considerable research skills on the academic community of which they are a part. Many more of us need to join in the effort if greater numbers of us are to become fully functioning professionals.

As a consequence of preparing this paper, I now know that, although my entry into the labyrinth seems recent, I have been walking it for a very long time. What is new is my conscious reflection upon the labyrinth as a process of transformation and my awareness of the power of this reflection to shape my understanding of myself and academe and to free me for action within it.

Michelle was the program director of Sandy's first graduate program, and met her just as she was scheduling her thesis defense. She found in Sandy first a mentee, then a friend, then colleague, then doula. Sandy held her hand in the doctor's office during a D & C that followed a miscarriage, and attended the birth of her first child. The shared path of co-mentorship and rebirth offers another metaphor for women in the academy.

Gestation, Birth, and Rebirth - Michelle's story

If death is the boundary situation that brings into stark relief the fears implicit in circumstance, conflict, suffering, and grief, then birth stands parallel to it, forcing us to think through the fearful but essential aspects of love, accord, joy, and contribution. (Ochs, 1983, pp. 103-104)

I tell friends and colleagues that my intellectual and reproductive life converged in mid-life. After turning 40, I finally published my dissertation on its ten-year anniversary, published my first book as lead author, and had a baby. The obvious parallel of birthing the book was mentioned by several people, yet one year later I just begin to make sense of the parallels. While I often muse about starting my 40's with the above-mentioned experiences and wonder why I didn't do these things in my 20's, I remind myself that few academic women follow a linear path. Rather, they move in circular patterns through cycles of life, tucking their personal, spiritual and psychic development between intellectual pursuits, and completing intellectual endeavors before children are born, after they go to bed at night, and amid the grief they feel as adult children leave home. Sometimes, women take up intellectual and spiritual pursuits in conflict with the wishes of their families. Within a circle of family are the joys and pains relationships bring . . . within the circle of colleagues in the academy, relationships bring their own rewards and despair. The circles are sometimes proximate, at other times they overlap. Once in awhile, they are completely congruent.

The dissertation and the book each had a gestation and birth, just like our infant George Yvon. Yes, there are parallels and differences as the two processes converge and diverge! Both intellectual activity and physical birth have due dates

. . . but one can procrastinate over intellectual tasks. The baby comes when it is ready to be born. The preparation can be all-consuming . . . one's mind is filled day and night with possibilities of what is to be in print or in flesh, but reflection about writing leaves one with some sense of control. Waiting for the baby to be born is fraught with fear, anticipation, and hope, and all sense of control is lost. We read and consult as we write, and read and consult about pregnancy . . . in neither case was it very reassuring.

I find it interesting that physical birth has a much more defined cycle than an intellectual activity like authorship. The tiny sac contains a living, then breathing fetus that develops along a completely predestined course. My writing feels much more random and happenstance, although in retrospect, perhaps the course was more defined than was evident in the early stages of gestation. During the dark hours of early morning, the baby begins to make itself known to me through movement . . . and during those same hours, I begin to make sense of my random thoughts and try hard the next writing session to capture them on the screen. The inexorable movement toward birth has far fewer moments which compare to seeing text emerge from my fingers . . . perhaps the swish-swish of the heartbeat heard through the monitor, or the visual image of the fetus on the sonogram come close. The moment of birth, however, is very definite, a life-changing event which no publication can touch. Perhaps that is the lesson to be learned.

Why do I invite academic women to embrace the metaphor of birth and renewal? I offer this time-honored and perennial metaphor to women as they make their way in the academy as a reminder. Many of us know about the physical act of birth firsthand, others from their experiences as sisters, aunts, and friends. This sacred event offers us language, emotion, and a tangible laying on of hands as we accompany another in our labor. Too often, we have been forced to divide our loyalties, to take up the intellectual journey at the expense of our relationships, families, and psyches. Finally, we lose access to critical ways of knowing which are firmly rooted in the feminine, and such ways have too often been casualties of the institutional shackles we have come to accept as the price of admission. The feminine experience offers many ways of knowing which can transform how we see ourselves in the academy. Och's (1993) "love, accord, joy, and contribution" are traits not often associated with the academy. Perhaps by adopting the language of birth, we can change the nature of the academy and the relationships within it. We have much to learn and more to teach ourselves and others, especially those we perceive as „mainstream“ academics. We must make the experience our own and tell our stories.

When Sandy moved on to the seminary for her next degree, her mentor was Valerie, the fourth author of this article. Sandy invited Michelle to attend Valerie's course at the seminary, and the three shared an intellectual chapter together. Valerie took a position in London, so the friendship moved into a new mode of email letters and twice-yearly visits. As she plans her return to the U.S., her story of migration is especially timely.

Perpetual Migration - Valerie's story

There is yet another wonderful metaphor for the experience of being within ourselves and within the academy. Many women academics and students come to the academy seeking transformation, and our students' needs often become a mirror of our own. Rather than casting our experiences within the academy as linear and hierarchical, we suggest that Marge Piercy's description of "perpetual migration" offers a more feminist and comprehensive image of our pilgrimage.

Piercy (1989) presents this powerful image in a poem by sketching wonderful pictures and linking them to several interesting metaphors. The first one I want to use is "We think in ebbing circles a rock makes on the water . . ." (p. 114) This is a feminist image . . . my older women students can relate closely to moving around in a circle which grows larger. These adult students are seeking an opportunity to open the circles of their inner world and see those circles reflected in their outer world.

Higher education "spare-time" students find the academy a place where they can make such a transition. It used to be that adult learners could make those changes in a therapist's office or a church. Now people who come to the academy are seeking some kind of containment, or safe place to find self-knowledge and knowledge of the world, to reconcile how their inner constellation and their outer constellation

can become more harmonious. I believe that a master's degree that is accessible provides a place for this spiritual transformation. I call it that, but others might say, I'm in a liminal space, that is, being on the threshold, in-between. Then they realize the liminality is perpetual, and they are in perpetual migration.

One of the tensions which arises for our students and ourselves is that sometimes the academy doesn't want a larger circle, it wants smaller and more detailed circles. So as we collaborate on learning which responds to the stone dropped in the water, whatever life event that stone represents, we might find the academy is not ready for those lapping circles. The events that provoke our choice to move into the academy, for instance, are often personal life events, not scholarly whims. Later in the poem, Piercy (1989) describes the inner and outer map followed by a migrating bird:

"The brightness, the angle, the sighting of the stars shines in the brain luring till inner constellation matches outer" (p. 115). I think that's what creates the migration . . . also how our inner work on ourselves is reflected by the institution in which we do the work. We don't always know how we can imagine the migration in the outer constellation, because the nature of the academy can appear so unforgiving, so limiting. We become perpetual migrators because we can't reconcile the inner journey with the outer world of the academy. For instance, there is a tension that exists for me about the value of and the place for education in the United States. In England, even though there is a rigorous system of education, I felt that education was much more a cultural event, that it enhanced the culture. Here in the U. S., we talk about delivery systems. There is the sense that learning is a product, rather than something in which we immerse ourselves. Our language here is focused on product and outcomes, and betrays what education is about. I find that difficult to reconcile, especially because higher education should be a place in which issues of social justice and transformation are paramount.

In parts of the academy, however, there are people who are interested in the role of the institution in promoting or supporting social justice. In a recent interview, the faculty wanted to hear about my views on spirituality and social transformation. I chose the topic of Tieneman Square, ten years after the student uprising changed the face of the Chinese political landscape. There is a statue of a woman there, a goddess of freedom. Even in the face of oppression, she represented the goals of many Chinese. I'm reminded of a phrase at the end of the Piercy (1989) poem, "Navigating by chart and chance and passion, I will know the shape of the mountains of freedom, I will know" (p. 115.) Like the students in China, some faculty and students in the US continue to seek freedom within themselves and within the academy. This is where the role of the academic as teacher is so important.

What I have experienced within my teaching is coming to really know myself. Teachers in any setting must know what we can offer. I'm thinking more and more that the teacher's role is like a shape-shifter. We can provide the space for our students to experience "A chance to choose, a chance to grow, the power to say no and yes, pretties and dignity, an occasional jolt of truth" (p. 114). As academics, we

must reconcile our inner and outer constellations. As teachers, we can't offer our students the freedom to choose, the chance to grow until we ourselves have experienced that jolt of truth. One might think the academy would support us in finding our truth, in receiving that jolt, yet the opposite is true. The eccentrics on my faculty have been homogenized, so they aren't allowed to be eccentric. And the young faculty never get to know their inner constellation because they get caught up in the outer constellation most apparent to them--the hierarchy, the bureaucracy, the criticism of colleague to colleague which is a tradition of the academy.

These traditions which many women find repelling present the paradox we've been thinking about. Mid-life women seek a place for personal and professional transformation, a place to experience spiritual growth. Yet, their new identities or newly-exposed identities, like a newborn child, need protection. For women liken their intellectual journey to the whole notion of birth, to creating something within, and will consider the risk of placing it without. But no mother would willingly place a child into a hostile environment. They will choose a community where there's support, not danger. The youngest among us deserve a special form of protection, and the adult students and mid-career women returning to the academy on pilgrimage deserve the same.

There are many important reasons we, as women academics and feminists, must not sell out to the perceived outer constellation of the academy. For ourselves, we must remain true to our spiritual journeys, our perpetual migrations. For if we are seduced by the surface status of the academic life, we will abandon the commitment to our own learning and spiritual growth. For our students, we are more than dispensers of information. We don't serve part-time students piecing together a few courses for a credential, we serve "spare-time" students. They are becoming educated in their spare time, after they have worked all day long. They need more than assigned readings and critiqued papers from us, they need a vision of what could be, of what the journey, the pilgrimage, a walk through the labyrinth, a safe place to give birth can bring them. We must hold steady on our path, live a life which is in harmony, inner with outer, and offer these metaphors to think differently about their roles. Through our sisterhood, we offer an image of a community which can support them and ourselves on academic pilgrimage.

Sisterhood - our shared story

This last metaphor came to us after we had worked together and apart, sharing our stories from afar, and refining our stories when near. We four sisters have had very separate journeys in some ways, and very similar pilgrimages in other ways. The tremendous wealth of poetry, music, and other artistry has broadened our thinking beyond the more stoic academy as we embraced this poem by Nancy Wood. Her vivid imagery and inclusive view of the four directions captures our hopes for our relationships within and beyond the academy:

The Four Sisters of Everlasting Beauty

The Four Sisters of Everlasting Beauty danced on a mountain top

In order to summon fire from deep within the earth. They danced until flames poured from within veins in the rock,

cleansing them of selfishness and blame. The First Sister

Was the Dancing Woman of Mirth, whose direction was East. She wore yellow, the color of awakening moments. She brought laughter,

the first necessity in a world of sadness. The First Sister said:

The spirit of laughter is the same as wind or water. It soothes

The troubled earth and makes hard edges disappear, even in the face of sorrow.

The Second Sister was the Woman of Long Experience,

Whose direction was South. She wore blue, the color of memory,

She brought the imprint of fossils, also a collection of bones, the

Second necessity in a world filled with self-importance and envy. The

Second Sister said: The spirit of fossils and bones is the same as long memory. A connection to the ancestors, It reminds the sick of health

And to the healthy gives warning of their mortality. The Third Sister

was the Woman of Unfulfilled Dreams, whose direction was West.

She wore red, the color of purpose and daring. She brought tears,

the third necessity in times when cleansing is required. The Third Sister

Said: „The Spirit of weeping is nothing more than human rain, shed for loss as well as love, and for children we never had. The unfulfilled dreams of warriors and women, of birds taken from the nest, and of animals denied their place in life, justify my gift of tears.“

The Fourth Sister was the Retreating Woman of Consciousness, whose direction was North. She wore white

the color of beginning anew. She brought awareness, the fourth necessity

in a world of schemes and invention. The fourth Sister said:

Honor yourself before all else and you will embrace all life. All direction. All stars. All light.

And the other Three Sisters agreed. (pp. 43-45, 1996, Wood)

Sometimes those we perceive as being "less than" in the eyes of the institution (or anywhere else in our world) have the most to offer us. We must first honor ourselves and embrace all life. We encourage those of you who are fortunate enough to share your journey with other women to acknowledge them. For those who have been isolated or have chosen isolation from your sisters, re-engage. It is never a risk to affiliate with a community of like-minded souls. Those who warn you about becoming marginalized by joining the sisterhood have lessons to learn about what the academy can be.

Conclusion

Five metaphors for meaning-making of academic journeys are presented. In a movement away from the language of exclusion or otherness evident in many feminist academic works, we offer alternative metaphors such as pilgrimage, journey through the labyrinth, birth and motherhood, perpetual migration, and sisterhood. The poems chosen offer additional language we might use to make deeper meaning of our singular and collective journeys.

Each of us is a survivor of and within the academy. But we are more than just survivors--we are pilgrims on a pilgrimage. Rather than accept the masculine version of "right of passage, climbing the ladder," or even "stage development" which advanced degrees can represent, we have searched for and found new and re-considered language for our own use. These metaphors and research frameworks challenge us not to teach as we were taught or research as we were researched. We call upon ourselves and our sisters to imagine more. Our imaginations are piqued by invention and invitation. We offer and are offered alternative images of ourselves and our movement within the academy. We have ways of being in relationship that transcend the hierarchy. Personal and academic meaning-making become central to our membership, rather than the perennial struggle to maintain our wits in an unrelenting society we have not claimed as our own.

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