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Advancing Women In Leadership

## **Beyond Mentoring: Toward an Invitational Academe**

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"With care for the person, and an understanding to human development at the core of interaction, members of the academy need to respect and encourage authentic voice--that which is original and meaningful--rather than that which is produced in a relentless effort to please authority or to attain promotion or tenure."

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When Title VII of the civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed, it was applauded as a definitive step in controlling sexual discrimination. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 provided further protection for employees and students in educational institutions. These forms of legislation were milestones in the growing movement for women's rights in education and the workplace (Random, Strasburg, & Lipman-Blumen, 1982). Progress was being made. Women were entering fields that historically had been closed to them. Women also were enjoying greater choice in determining the directions their professional lives would take.

As the 60s and 70s came to a close, however, the political activism that had spurred the feminist movement waned with false complacency. As Susan Faludi (1992) described, the dawning of the 80s brought about a counter assault against women's rights: one third of all government budgetary cutbacks were from programs that served women, even though such programs represented only ten percent of the entire budget. Sexual discrimination charges filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission rose by twenty-five percent during the Reagan years, and women's general harassment complaints more than doubled (Faludi, 1992). At the end of the 80s, public opinion polls cited women's greatest concern still to be their lack of economic opportunity; their greatest cause for resentment and stress to be men's opposition to equality (Roper Organization, 1989, as cited in Faludi, 1992).

Without a buffer against the waves of societal influence, it is inevitable that individuals in classrooms, in graduate schools, and on faculties of the academy experience and contribute to the subtle discriminations against women which exist to this day. Today discrimination does not occur as blatantly as it once did;

nonetheless, women's success and advancement still are affected by gender issues. In the academy, women continue to be underrepresented in traditionally male professional schools, they continue to account for a smaller percentage of terminal graduate degrees, and they hold fewer senior faculty positions. We believe that higher education organizations have a responsibility to women as they enter and attempt to advance their careers in academia as faculty and graduate students. Heretofore, higher education organizations have promoted mentoring as a vehicle by which neophytes, whether they are junior faculty or graduate students, might become socialized to the culture and supported in their professional pursuits. Despite the fact that untold numbers of faculty members and graduate students have profited by mentoring in terms of career success and satisfaction (Perna, Lerner, & Yura, 1995), many have not. This may be because historically, mentoring has been characterized more by exclusion than inclusion. Only those with the most promise, connections, and the proper academic interests have been tapped for the mentoring process. Others, especially women, have been excluded. Hall and Sandler (1983) confirmed that, "in higher education, where senior faculty and administration are predominately white and male, women are frequently excluded from the long established informal systems through which senior persons socialize their successors" (p. 2).

Even though "clear definitions of mentoring in academic settings are difficult to establish" (Stalker, 1994, p. 362), some transference of the traditional thoughts about mentoring to higher education is possible. Unfortunately, and, regardless of the definition, the pattern of mentoring in higher education has come primarily from the male perspective that has reinforced the hierarchical relationship between a valued faculty member and "his" protégé. While the effect women faculty members have on other women academics and graduate students can be both positive and productive (Shapiro, et al., 1980) and can help to counteract that pattern, a problem still exists. On both a theoretical and a practical level women are not present in great enough numbers to endorse even the traditional mentoring model. Males outnumber females by two to one at the associate level, and five to one at the full professor level (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1997). This dynamic continues to affect the retention and promotion of women faculty members. Left on their own within the often inhospitable climate of academia (Hall & Sandler, 1983; Stalker, 1994; & Wunsch, 1994), women without support can easily develop uncomfortable feelings of isolation, disassociation, and alienation which could result in stunted career growth (Hill, et al., 1989; Parson, Sands, & Duane, 1991) or worse, the cessation of their professional pursuits altogether.

In addition to the lack of availability of women mentors, women have faced other barriers to building mentoring relationships on campus including the reluctance of some male faculty to mentor women and the discomfort some women feel about the mentor-protégé relationship (Hall & Sandler, 1983, Informal interviews, 1998). In terms of career success, female faculty do not seem to benefit from traditional mentoring as much as their male counterparts (Hill et al., 1989). Our experiences, as well as those who have shared their stories with us, would support this claim.

Consequently, the purpose of this essay is to suggest that mentoring as it traditionally has been experienced by women in the academy is insufficient. We will advocate for an academic organization that is characterized by a more inclusive and egalitarian academic culture - a culture where there is room for multiple voices and ways of knowing; where all members are recognized, validated, and appreciated; and, where each individual is enriched and energized as a result.

## **Nontraditional Thoughts about Mentoring: Where do the Problems Lie?**

Earlier studies of the organization centered on the analysis of relationships between and among males of the organization; yet, in the late seventies women themselves were beginning to investigate their roles and places in the organization (Hennig & Jardim, 1977; Kanter, 1977). Female theorists believed that the organization should assume some responsibility for a woman's professional success. Though Kanter (1977) felt a woman's background, social class, and outside connections coupled with her sense of drive,

ambition, and inherent ability were the best predictors of her professional success, she also suggested organizational activities that would encourage a woman's professional development. Kanter (1977) recommended clustering women rather than dispersing them throughout an organization, establishing task related networking for the recruitment and orientation of women, and creating a flexible organizational culture that would be more permeable to and less insulated against women and minorities. Others, such as Bolton (1980), charged organizations with developing networks for females in occupations where male/female representation was disproportionate.

At the same time in late 70s and early 80s the mentoring relationship and its traditional definitions were being challenged and transformed by feminist theory and research. As more women became involved in the mentoring process both as participants and observers, their experiences helped to illuminate weaknesses and deficiencies in the model itself. Shapiro et al. (1978) proposed that the traditional models of mentoring were paternalistic, hierarchical, and exclusionary. They cited that within and during the traditional mentoring relationship, the mentor is always the mentor and the protégé always the protégé, contributing to the superior-inferior nature of the relationship and setting up a hierarchical disadvantage. Further criticism of the historically male model resulted in Walkins' (1980) proposal of a new collegial model with room for diversity, experience, and cross-generational involvement. Similarly, additional feminist critical analysis resulted in Haring-Hidore's (1987) recommendation that mentoring relationships should be part of career development programs, without the selectivity factor, offering an egalitarian opportunity for all women.

## **Toward a Re-encultured Organization**

The impact of the organization as instrumental in determining women's professional success has been documented by several theorists. Even though Kanter, as early as 1977, advocated a permeable organizational culture through which women and minorities might pass more readily, attitudes and behaviors have not changed easily. Attempts toward openness and inclusion continue to meet resistance, though perhaps more subtly than in earlier decades. Furthermore, mentoring, as organizations traditionally have practiced it, has bred an egocentricity, an essentialist notion of "the ways things are," often suffocating new and alternative views and behaviors. Even today, the mentor, often in a superior position to the less experienced protégé, typically perpetuates the organizational history and the existing culture by enforcing traditional parameters of thinking, valuing, and behaving as Hennig and Jardim (1977) suggested years ago.

## **Recognizing Women's Struggles**

To overcome some of these barriers, Hall and Sandler (1983) recommended specific alternative practices in support of women's advancement in higher education: working with multiple mentors; creating formal and informal networks; using "paper mentors" (i.e., publications) (p. 5); utilizing peer mentors, courses, workshops, and small groups; and connecting with professional organizations. Yet, women beginning their careers in the academy have continued to experience what Clark and Corcoran (1986) have termed an "accumulative disadvantage" (p. 24). Women still struggle with questions about how they will fit in; how they will accommodate to the patriarchal institution and become part of it, or resist and risk "anonymity and marginality" (Stalker, 1994, p. 366). They find it difficult to break into collegial networks from which they might receive advice, advocacy, and patronage. Sorted by the bureaucratic, rationalistic structure of mentoring, their performance judged by the dominant inner circle of male senior colleagues, women new to academe often find the atmosphere in the academy at best inhospitable (Hill, Bahniuk, Dobos, & Rouner, 1989; informal interviews, 1998).

Though females have found it easier, of late, to secure an academic appointment, they are discovering that

gaining acceptance, promotion, and tenure are more of a struggle (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1997). Unfortunately, traditional male biased professional development and promotion standards and a preponderance of often unwritten and culturally reinforced rules complicate women's navigation through promotion and tenure proceedings and dictate faculty members' work efforts. Our conversations with women faculty and graduate students have revealed stories of women walking political tightropes, feeling silenced (or at least quieted) by senior male faculty, and learning very quickly the power of prevailing ideas. Women junior faculty and graduate students experience confrontations over, and resistance toward, rethinking old ideas and accepting and valuing different ways of knowing. They often are rebuffed by expressions of territorial rights and of witnessing their male counterparts experience more affirmation, encouragement, and collegiality. Women often describe losing much of the sense of authority they brought to academe, often having their ideas discounted or dismissed and feeling their presence diminished. Moreover, they are often burdened with quasi-clerical tasks and other "programmatic" responsibilities, their time consumed by non-tenure, non-academically related tasks. Women experience these conditions just at the time when, being new to academe and in pursuit of a line of scholarship and inquiry, they need the support of senior faculty. All of these conditions can contribute to overwhelming sentiments of disillusionment, potential failure, and despondency.

The prevailing culture of the academy, then, can not be ignored for the powerful force it has on a woman's sense of professional self and her ability to succeed in the organization, or as Andrews (1984) would describe it, her performance-self-esteem. When performance-self-esteem is high, Andrews found that an individual is likely to emerge as a leader. Moreover, the stronger the individual in terms of self-confidence and performance-self-esteem, the more she is able to become an influential part of the organizational culture. These considerations can help explain the psychological stress many women feel in male dominated cultures when they are not always held in the highest regard. When self concept levels are adversely affected by such an environment, their self-esteem suffers, their performance expectations drop, and their performance-self-esteem, which is critical for success, diminishes.

If these notions are valid, then stronger, more pervasive support of women in the academy could result in higher rates of retention, increased productivity, faculty cohesiveness, and greater commitment to the organization (Hall & Sandler, 1983). Women supported and affirmed would be in a position of strength to influence the organization toward a more egalitarian culture marked with feelings of community. Their feelings of performance-self-esteem would be enhanced, their sense of efficacy would be affirmed, and their voices would be heard as a force for change in the academy. If women are afforded the opportunity to develop leadership abilities and enjoy professional success, they are more likely to have an impact on the organization of which they are a part. Their leadership has the potential of reinforcing inclusion in the organization by strengthening and appreciating alternative ideas, voices and behaviors. More importantly, they will help to overcome what Tompkins (1992) has referred to as the isolation, loneliness, and disconnection of life in the academy.

We believe in an alternative to mentoring as it has been known. For the successful socialization and advancement of women within the academy, the higher education community must prioritize the replacement of conditions that may be dissuading and discouraging to women with those which result in an ethos where women are equally represented in the number of degrees earned, faculty positions obtained, and senior rankings achieved. This would be a culture where multiple perspectives are validated and different ways of knowing are respected. As Wunsch (1994) proclaimed, "only when individuals and institutional values and goals converge will individual growth and a sense of community evolve" (p. 10).

## **Collective Effort**

If women are to stand on equal professional footing in predominately male professions, a new



organizational paradigm must emerge. Alternative voices, experiences, backgrounds, and histories must be acknowledged as valid. Each and every individual must be considered valuable to the organization. Compassion, respect, generosity, and connectedness must be the norm.

It is, of course, the legal responsibility of the institution to address directly those formal structures which are prohibiting a more egalitarian approach to promotion and success of women in the academy. However, if the existing socialization approach (the paternalistic mentoring of a select few) is unacceptable, then women and concerned male colleagues within the academy must accept the moral responsibility to combine their efforts toward the establishment of an altruistic and collaborative culture where relationships, diversity, and the development of minds and spirits become paramount. Because the individual graduate student or junior faculty member, herself, is at-risk professionally to attempt to effect change, it becomes the charge of faculty as a whole to begin to stimulate a professional conscience to impact disparity and exclusivity within the organization. Those in more secure positions need to disassociate themselves from the prevailing paternalistic culture, and begin speaking out, acting out, and encouraging new ways of engaging in the business of the academy. Modeling collaboration, offering career and intellectual guidance, building friendships, diffusing power, and disseminating information among all members of the academy must be their mission.

Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) referred to such an educational culture as one based on connectedness among participants, where alienation, repression, and division are replaced with community, shared power, and inclusion, where both minds and spirits are developed. To make this a reality, individuals in the academy need to listen, accept, and appreciate the contributions of each other. With care for the person, and an understanding of human development at the core of interaction, members of the academy need to respect and encourage authentic voice--that which is original and meaningful--rather than that which is produced in a relentless effort to please authority or to attain promotion or tenure.

Moreover, in support of themselves, women must take on a dichotomous "oppositional consciousness" (Moglen, 1983, p. 131) where they oppose the very same culture that they are within. Women can effect change in the culture by establishing coalitions among themselves and trusted others, and by capitalizing on their increasing conspicuousness. Together, women faculty members need to heed the advice of a woman academic quoted in Aisenberg and Harrington (1988): "Be loud and make waves and do what you want and be free" (p. 18).

## Conclusions

Perhaps then, mentoring, as it traditionally has been described, is a thing of the past. Perhaps it is an antiquated concept, incompatible with an organizational model that advocates inclusion, egalitarianism, and the exploration and encouragement of new ideas. Perhaps it is incompatible with a professional environment where differences are not measured vertically, but horizontally, without implying superiority or inferiority. If so, women in academe, along with committed, caring others, must influence the culture of higher education to acknowledge the competency, autonomy, and self-worth of women faculty and students. The ideal academic community is one in which collaboration displaces competition, where community displaces isolation, where respect displaces distrust, and where there is room for all voices, both traditional and alternative. By these conditions all might be accepted, appreciated, and recognized for contributions brought to the organization. The organization, and each individual within it, could only be enriched and energized as a result. The academy itself, mobilized by a committed, caring faculty is capable of eradicating practices which have resulted in women's marginalization and inequality. Inclusionary practices, such as the support and sponsorship of all who have passed by the academic gatekeepers, would contribute to a more egalitarian, genuinely meritocratic culture (Clark & Corcoran,

1986). The campus, as community, would foster mutually supportive, facilitative educational relationships. If higher education culture were to change in this manner, no longer would there be a need for mentoring in the traditional sense. These changes need to occur in educational organizations so that women might feel the acceptance and success white males have known for generations. Support, encouragement, and collaboration are those seeds which, when sowed, will reap a harvest of greater professional and academic success in a climate of caring, collegiality, and community.

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