

The Academic Climate of Women Faculty in Faith-Based Institutions of Higher Learning

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Abstract

The unequal status of women professors, compared to their male counterparts, is not staggering news. While women constitute approximately sixty percent of the undergraduate population and earn more than half the doctorates in the United States, women professors continue to number fewer than men. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) claims that although sex discrimination is becoming less blatant, these and other statistics clearly reveal patterns of discrimination.¹

A segment of the institutions of higher learning, faith-based institutions, demonstrate these same patterns of inequity. Although the women who are employed by these schools initially believe they will find themselves in a less biased environment, it is soon apparent that the dynamics are similar to other colleges and universities and at times magnified.

A qualitative study was undertaken to examine these dynamics. Focus groups were facilitated at five faith-based institutions of higher learning and findings were compared to the climates of other academic institutions. These findings will be articulated along with recommendations for the creation of a climate conducive to the recruitment and retention of women faculty.

Introduction

The unequal status of women professors, compared to their male counterparts, is not staggering news. While women constitute about 60 percent of the undergraduate population, and in 2001-2002, for the first time more women earned doctorates than men in the United States, women professors are still fewer in number than men.² Women make up only 38 percent of all faculty and 33 percent of faculty at doctoral-level institutions. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) claims that although sex discrimination is rarely blatant, statistics can clearly reveal patterns of discrimination.³

Statistics, for example, further reveal that women earn only 80% on average of what male professors do among full-time faculty at all ranks and in every type of institution.⁴ What is more,

1R. Wilson, "Where the elite teach, it's still a man's world," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 51, no. 15 (March 2004): A8-11.

2R. Wilson, "Where the elite teach, it's still a man's world," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 51, no. 15 (March 2004): A8-11.

3R. W. Bowen, "Gender inequality," *Academe* 9, no. 2 (2005, March/April): 128.

4G. Boulard, "Salary gap persists between women and men faculty, report finds," *Community College Week*, 17 January 2005, p. 17.

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this disparity in earnings has improved very little during the past 25 years.⁵ A survey by the AAUP in 2002-2003 concluded that male assistant professors at doctoral institutions earned \$5,687 more per year than women.⁶ Knapp et al.⁷ also found that during the 2001-2002 academic year, male professors with 9/10 month contracts earned an average salary of \$83,000 (or \$99,000 for 11/12 month contracts), while women earned an average salary of \$73,000 (or \$85,000).

Whereas the number of women faculty members is on the rise, only 27% of faculty awarded tenure at four-year institutions are women.⁸ Women are scarce in higher ranks (23% of all full professors), and more visible in lower ones (58% of instructorships, 54% of lectureships, and 51% of unranked positions). Women professors are more apt to teach at community colleges, where 50% of faculty are women.⁹ At community colleges, women enjoy a smaller pay differential, earning 93% of what men earn.¹⁰

Women's absence in the country's prominent research universities is most obvious.¹¹ Even as women are making progress in professions such as English and psychology, more than 70% of professors teaching at the country's top research institutions in 2001-2002 were male.

Another area of concern is the field of agriculture. Buttel and Goldberger examined data on scientists' educational background, academic appointment characteristics, research environments, and links with private industry from 1979 and 1996 and concluded that "significant aspects of gender inequality remain in the agricultural science at land-grant

5"Women faculty: Still training after all these years," *Black Issues in Higher Education* 21, no. 24 (January 2005): 14.

6R. Wilson, "Where the elite teach, it's still a man's world," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 51, no. 15 (March 2004): A8-11.

7L. Knapp et al., *Staff in postsecondary institutions, fall 2001, and salaries of full-time instructional faculty, 2001-02* (NCES-2004-159) (Washington, District of Columbia: Washington, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003).

8"Institutional discrimination—Is it real?" *Administrator* 24, no. 3 (March 2005): 8.

9R. W. Bowen, "Gender inequality," *Academe* 9, no. 2 (2005, March/April): 128.

10G. Boulard, "Salary gap persists between women and men faculty, report finds," *Community College Week*, 17 January 2005, p. 17.

11R. Wilson, "Where the elite teach, it's still a man's world," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 51, no. 15 (March 2004): A8-11.

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institutions” (p. 40).¹² For example, the gap between percentages of male and female scientists appointed as full professors is actually increasing. Further, female scientists have limited access to graduate student employees, fewer links with private industry, and lower rates of publication of books, bulletins, or reports. Significant gender differences, however, were not found in all areas of Buttel and Goldberger’s study.

Bentley and Adamson found evidence that women in academic careers in the areas of science and engineering are disadvantaged compared with men in similar careers. Women professors earn less, receive fewer promotions to senior academic ranks, and publish less frequently than their male counterparts.¹³

While Wilson concluded that universities are hiring female physicists as professors at approximately the same rate that women are earning Ph.D.’s in the field,¹⁴ this does not seem to be the case for other scientific disciplines, such as chemistry and biology.¹⁵ In physics, though, women are still the minority and continue to earn less than men.¹⁶

Even decades after the passage of Title IX, the law promising equal opportunity for women in all aspects of federally funded education programs; women are still a small minority on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics faculties, especially at higher professional rankings. Students receiving a Bachelor of Science degree may never have access to a woman faculty member in the field. The message according to Nelson is that women are not welcome.¹⁷

According to McBrier, women are slower to move from secondary to primary jobs in law

12F. H. Buttel, and J. R. Goldberger, “Gender and agricultural science: Evidence from two surveys of land-grant scientists,” *Rural Sociology* 67, no. 1 (2002): 24-45.

13J. T. Bentley, and R. Adamson, *Gender differences in the careers of academic scientists and engineers: A literature review (NSF-03-322)* (Princeton, New Jersey: National Science Foundation, 2003).

14R. Wilson, “Study finds no bias in hiring of female physicists by universities,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* 51, no. 26 (2005): A10.

15R. Wilson, “Women underrepresented in sciences at top research universities, study finds,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* 50, no. 20 (2004): A9.

16P. Cunninham, and P. Dufour, “US physics: Women increasing but slowly,” *Outlook on Science Policy* 27, no. 4 (April 2005): 44.

17D.J. Nelson, “Women, minorities rare on science, engineering faculties,” *Black Issues in Higher Education* 20, no. 26 (February 2004): 19.

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academia, and neither choice nor structure alone accounts for this finding.¹⁸ Exploring these gender differences in mobility and the types of obstacles that women face in competing with male professionals on equal footing can contribute to understanding the various barriers that growing numbers of professional women encounter.

Clearly, at least in the world of academia, the statistics of women and men professors are not comparable. Even women students are underrepresented in all leadership ranks at higher education institutions, while they surpass their male peers in enrollment.¹⁹ Seventeen percent of university presidents are women, but this status is most enjoyed at community colleges.²⁰

Why women are underrepresented can perhaps be answered by looking at various struggles that women face. According to a report by the Mapping Project at Pennsylvania State University, women are more likely than men to engage in “bias-avoidance” behaviors, with the goal of minimizing intrusions of family or the appearance of such intrusions. These include such behaviors as avoiding marriage and child rearing, improving work performance at the expense of family commitments, and hiding family commitments to enhance the appearance of being an ideal worker. Also, more than 25% of women faculty reported having fewer children than they wanted (versus 10% of men), and more than 30% of women avoided asking for a reduced teaching load when needed (versus 20% of men).²¹

This under-representation was also found at faith-based institutions of higher learning for many of the same reasons. There are, however, additional challenges found due to an added philosophical layer that encourages gender bias.²²

18D. B. McBrier, “Gender and career dynamics within a segmented professional labor market: The case of law academia,” *Social Forces* 81, no. 4 (2003): 1201-1266.

19Chliwniak L, “Higher education leadership: Analyzing the gender gap,” *Higher Education Reports* 25, no. 4 (1997): 1-97.

20J. Morgan, “How far have women scholars really come?,” *Black Issues in Higher Education* 16, no. 4 (1999): 20-21.

21“Workplace demands are tougher on women faculty,” *Academe* 90, no. 3 (2004 May/June): 12-13.

22P. Wittberg, “A Study of Theological Faculty,” *Review of Religious Research* 46, no. 1 (September 2004): 102-103.

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A study based on interviews with 30 mothers working in Christian academia concluded that these women expressed the need to integrate their different roles into their identities, the need to establish their own priorities, and the need for understanding and support.²³ These women had the expectation that their Christian institution would mirror their own family values. When this was not the case, they would leave or stay under distress. Hall et al. concluded, “Christian institutions are challenged to consider whether their policies, behavioral norms, and climate do in fact reflect their Christian commitments to family” (p. 58).²⁴

A challenge to Christian universities is analogous to the world portrayed in the Christian bible—a world that is patriarchal.²⁵ Patriarchy is defined as a type of social organization in which fathers hold ultimate authority in their families, clans, or tribes. In such an organization, women are expected to be submissive. As many Christian faculty and administrators accept this philosophy as applicable to present day, significant dilemmas can be faced by women faculty.

This study’s goal is to examine the factors that attract and retain women at universities, specifically faith-based universities utilizing a sample from Church of Christ-affiliated schools. Traditionally, the position of Churches of Christ on the role of women reflects the values of a patriarchal American South and a literal reading of biblical text.²⁶

Methodology

Qualitative methodology

The research study was qualitative in nature. Maione and Chenail site a number of

23M. E. L. Hall, T. L. Anderson, and M. M. Willingham, “Diapers, dissertations, and other holy things: The experiences of mothers working in Christian colleges and universities,” *Christian Higher Education* 3, no. 1 (2004): 41-60.

24Ibid.

25A. Trull, and J. Trull, *Putting women in their place: Moving beyond gender stereotypes in church and home* (Macon, Georgia: Smyth & Helwys, 2003).

26R. T. Hughes, *The churches of Christ* (student ed). (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2001).

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authors in explaining the philosophy behind qualitative research as follows:

“Qualitative research is a cover term for a group of methodologies dedicated to the description and interpretation of social phenomenon...In general, qualitative studies are discovery oriented (Mahrer, 1988). They are less concerned with quantification and instead ‘explore the meanings, variations and perceptual experiences of phenomena’ (Crabtree, & Miller, 1992, p. 6.). Qualitative research or naturalistic inquiry (Kuzel, 1986; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) has no prepackaged designs. Instead, qualitative researchers use a variety of methods, procedures, and analysis techniques ‘to create unique, question-specific designs that evolve throughout the research process’ (Crabtree & Miller, 1992, p. 5).”²⁷

Participants

The participants of this study were women faculty at five Church of Christ colleges and universities. A population within the Church of Christ denomination was chosen for a number of reasons. First, due to similar experience, the researcher was interested in the examining the experience of women in faith-based institutions of higher learning. Being employed at a Church of Christ university, the researcher had access to other institutions within the same denomination. Second, because of similar religious affiliation, immediate rapport was established between the researcher and participants. This was an important factor due to the sensitive nature of the topic of discussion. This connection also promoted the possibility of preconceived notions. As in all qualitative research, these biases were made overt and an attempt was made to remain aware of these biases. The goal was to facilitate rather than influence the direction of the discussion.²⁸ The women were interviewed in focus group format in groups that ranged from five to nine with a total sample size of thirty-six. Permission and support was sought from the provost or academic dean of six selected institutions. They were asked to contact women faculty and request their participation in a focus group. Confidentiality was ensured and help was offered in addressing

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the issues of attraction and retention of women faculty. All six schools agreed to participate. The women were required to be members of Churches of Christ and have a full-time faculty appointment. Some administrative duties were allowed when it was determined that two of the institutions did not have enough women to create a group if this allowance was not made. In order to gain a somewhat diverse population, schools were sought in various locations of the country. Although all the schools were somewhat religiously conservative in ideology, they demonstrated a variance within this orientation with two being more liberal, two moderate, and two more conservative in nature. One of the latter two institutions declined participation a month before the interview was to take place. No rationale was offered for their withdrawal.

Within the groups, there was a variance in terms of ethnicity, age, and experience. Ethnicity included women who were African American (six), Hispanic (two), and Caucasian (twenty-eight). Age and experience ranged from the youngest being twenty-two years with six months of experience to the age of sixty-eight with thirty years of experience. Disciplines included English, Psychology, Math, Chemistry, Biology, Business, Religion, Communication, and Library Science.

Procedure

One method of qualitative research is the utilization of group interviews or focus groups. Group interviews are phenomenological in nature. Boeree states that “phenomenology instructs us to allow the phenomenon to reveal itself in its fullness...it involves an intentionality to be

27P. V. Maione, and R. J. Chenail, “Qualitative Inquiry in Psychotherapy: Research on the Common Factors,” in *The heart and soul of change: The role of common factors in psychotherapy*, ed. M. A. Hubble, B. L. Duncan, & S. D. Miller (Washington, District of Columbia: American Psychological Association Press, 1999).

28C. George Boeree, “Qualitative Methods Workbook,” Shippensburg University, <http://www.ship.edu/%7Ecgboree/qualmethone.html> (accessed February 27, 2006).

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open to all aspects of a phenomenon.”²⁹ This modality is beneficial in that it allows the researcher to interview a number of individuals at the same time. In order to utilize it, however, one must demonstrate an openness and honesty in regards to the possible biases that the researcher brings to the process. If biases are not identified, the researcher may potentially influence the results. The facilitator must also have the skill necessary to keep the group from being dominated by one or two individuals and to engage all participants in the discussion.³⁰ The length of time of the focus groups for this study was one-and-a-half to two hours. Each group began with an opening script and the self-introduction of each participant. Control was maintained partially by the articulation of ground rules regarding equal participation and confidentiality. In order to avoid leading the discussion, interview questions initially are general in nature and gradually moved to more specific foci. Redundancy is said to be reached when various themes begin to be repeated and little new material is forthcoming. By the fourth group, redundancy on many of the themes had been reached.³¹

Research questions

As previously stated, the general nature of the initial question sought to allow the participants to respond in any direction they chose.

1. Discuss the dynamics of being a female faculty member at this Church of Christ institution.

The remaining questions were more specific in nature and were asked only if the material was not addressed after the first question. They were framed for the purpose of addressing the

29C. George Boeree, “Qualitative Methods Workbook,” Shippensburg University, <http://www.ship.edu/%7Ecgboree/qualmethone.html> (accessed February 27, 2006).

30Ibid.

31M.B. Miles, and A.M. Huberman, *An expanded sourcebook: Qualitative data analysis*, 2d ed. (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1994).

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following topics: integration of faith and learning (an integral issue at faith-based institutions of higher learning), challenges specific to women faculty, intrinsic and extrinsic resources available, perspective on the contribution they make as women, and perspective of identity within their role as faculty.

2. How do you integrate faith into your teaching? As a Christian? As a woman?
3. What are the greatest challenges you face as a woman faculty?
4. What has been most helpful to you in light of addressing the above challenges?
5. What do women faculty add that is unique to this institution?
6. Would you describe yourself as a teacher, scholar, and/or researcher?
7. Anything else?

Data analysis

When utilizing a qualitative methodology of research, data analysis can be described in terms of three activities—data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification.³² Data reduction and display occurred in the present study as the transcripts of the interviews were read, reread, and compared across groups. As each interview was completed, it was initially examined for the purpose of identifying patterns and themes. These patterns and themes were then compared across interviews to determine similarities and differences. The final activity, conclusion drawing and verification, occurred with the analysis of the subsequent transcripts. By the second transcript, it was apparent that a few main categories had emerged. These were reinforced by the third transcript and redundancy was reached by the fourth. No new categories

³²M.B. Miles, and A.M. Huberman, *An expanded sourcebook: Qualitative data analysis*, 2d ed. (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1994).

emerged with the final transcript.³³

Results and discussion

Four categories emerged through the analysis of the transcripts. They were (1) challenges, (2) benefits, (3) recommended solutions, and (4) unique contributions. The term “challenges” refers to the dissatisfactions experienced by the women faculty. The emotion that accompanied this information varied from despair expressed with weeping to laughter at the ludicrous nature of the situation to anger at the injustice experienced by one or others. “Benefits” refers to the perceived advantages to their situations. “Unique contributions” refers to the value that the faculty articulated regarding their contribution to the university based on characteristics of their gender. Finally, “recommended solutions” is defined as the ideas offered by the women faculty to address the challenges. As these emerged, the participants appeared eager to share their solutions with each other.

Challenges

Women in the academic arena face many challenges. The results that surfaced from the focus groups were consistent with the challenges found in other institutions. Although women faculty face difficulties common to all faculty, the themes most prevalent in this and other studies dealt with gender bias.³⁴ For example, in a study at the Caltech Institute of Technology more than half the women said they have encountered gender bias, and 30% recalled having an unpleasant interaction with their chair over gender issues.³⁵

³³Ibid.

³⁴E.P. Gerdes, “Do it your way: Advice from senior academic women,” *Innovative Higher Education* 27, no. 4 (2003): 253-275.

³⁵A Lawler, “Caltech aims for big jump in women faculty,” *Science* 294, no. 5549 (December 2001): 2066-7.

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In the present study, in addition to the prevalence across colleges and universities, the emergence of gender issues may have been due to the chosen participants and topic of the groups. Simply the process of having focus groups of women faculty examining gender dynamics implies a focus on gender issues. In a related study, Gerdes interviewed female academicians in upper administrative roles. She asked them to articulate advice for young women beginning careers in higher education. Gender issues again emerged as the primary category as “coping with gender disadvantages.” Over half of the discussion focused on this topic as the senior faculty attempted to guide the freshmen.³⁶

Lack of awareness

The data analysis with the chosen faith-based institutions revealed five primary themes under the category of “challenges.” The first and most repeated theme was a lack of awareness of challenges and biases by male colleagues and administration. The women believed that not only did they experience bias, but they felt stymied in their ability to address the bias because of the perceived unintentional aim of the offenders. They felt this lack of intentionality made it difficult to directly address the problem. Rather than cause dissension, they felt pressure to ignore the difficulty. One woman spoke of pressure placed on her by the dean of the college as she dealt with abuse from a male colleague. She said “He wanted me to be a good little soldier and put up with the abuse because he did not think the man would change.”

Variance in expectations

The second theme under the category of “challenges” relates to a perception of variance

³⁶E.P. Gerdes, “Do it your way: Advice from senior academic women,” *Innovative Higher Education* 27, no. 4 (2003): 253-275.

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in expectations. In order to be viewed as equal to their male counterparts, they felt they must work harder and achieve more. They were expected to sit on more committees as the schools attempted to diversify and felt the need to multi-task. One manner in which this theme was manifested was in the area of balancing work and family life. The woman's role as a mother can come in conflict with her role as a professor. According to a survey of social work faculty members conducted by Young and Wright, many of the women studied found the roles of both mother and professor as complex, plagued with competing demands.³⁷ Handling the responsibilities of one's profession and children is exhausting. Women may experience guilt for lack of time spent with their children and fear for being seen as incompetent to handle their position as professor. While one may argue that this can be the case for men or women, Curtis, the AAUP's director of research, maintains, "It is still the case that for most women there is a greater expectation that they will be involved in taking care of a family member, whether it is a young child or an elderly parent" (p.17).³⁸

According to Fogg,³⁹ anecdotal evidence suggests that many women professors cannot find the time and flexibility needed for other priorities, such as raising children, caring for aging parents, and accommodating a spouse's job. Even when the coveted tenure position is obtained, women may decide to give it up, after having devoted years to obtain this prominent goal. This choice can be due to the fact that at most schools, faculty who want to take off more than a month or two must take leave without pay, sometimes without benefits, and cannot reduce hours to less than full-time without sacrificing benefits, tenure-track, eligibility for committee

37D. S. Young, and E. M. Wright, "Mothers making tenure.," *Journal of Social Work Education* 37, no. 3 (2001): 555-568.

38G. Boulard, "Salary gap persists between women and men faculty, report finds.," *Community College Week*, 17 January 2005, p. 17.

39P Fogg, "Family time," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 49, no. 40 (June 2003): A10-12.

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memberships, or promotions.⁴⁰

This challenge may be viewed as a choice that women faculty have made, to be able to handle career goals and family obligations.⁴¹ But as the previous studies have shown, this is the precisely the point. Whether the choice is involuntary or not, it is based on the perception that handling tenure and children is not possible while male colleagues are not expected to be the caregivers of their children.

Lack of respect

The third challenge that emerged across the five focus groups was that of “lack of respect.” Anecdotal evidence suggests that overt disrespect is more acceptable at faith-based colleges and universities. The risk of censor is not as apparent in institutions that accept a patriarchal view of the family and church leadership.⁴² The participants of the study discussed their experience with a lack of respect from three populations--students, colleagues and administration.

Students expected more nurturance from their female professors and would express anger or disappointment when high standards were expected for academic assignments. They would refer to the women professor as “Mrs.” or by their first name while consistently calling the male professors “Dr.” whether they had this degree or not. Both female and male students acted disrespectfully, but more conversation revolved around the obstinacy of the male students. This disrespect was in the form of talking back, ignoring, and disrupting class. One participant spoke of a student who repeatedly challenged her understanding of the material in class. She spoke to

⁴⁰Hall, Anderson and Willingham, Diapers, dissertations, and other holy things: The experiences of mothers working in Christian colleges and universities,” 41-60.

⁴¹J. W. Curtis, “Balancing work and family for faculty,” *Academe* 90, no. 6 (2004): 21-23.

⁴²Trull and Trull, Putting women in their place: Moving beyond gender stereotypes in church and home.

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him on numerous occasions, but it was not until he understood that his grade would be lowered that he changed his behavior. In talking with her colleagues, the professor found a pattern in his behaving respectfully with males and disrespectfully with females. In addition, the focus group participants said that when they address issues of gender bias in a public manner, both female and male students became defensive.

Colleagues also demonstrated a lack of respect in numerous ways. The women endured both covert and overt bias. Overt bias was shown through tongue-lashings, ignoring professional titles (i.e., Mrs. rather than Dr.), and by aggressive behavior when the topic of gender arose. It also included behaviors such as eye-rolling, ignoring the woman as she spoke, or the application of demeaning labels such as “femi-nazi.” Several women mentioned that they had to leave their present institution, receive recognition in a teaching appointment at another school, and then return in order to gain the respect of their peers. Others who had husbands on faculty or in positions of administration perceived that they were viewed as wives rather than colleagues or as additions who would not have a job if their husband was not an employee.

Finally, lack of respect was demonstrated by administration in a number of ways. The most obvious manner was the discrepancy in pay and benefits. Women faculty were aware of being paid lower than colleagues who had the same credentials and experience. Discussion on reasons for this variance portrayed an understanding that part of the problem was an inability to negotiate. Carli stated that women faculty often have difficulty exerting influence, particularly influence that conveys competence and authority.⁴³ However, the commonality of the

43L. Carli, “Gender, interpersonal power, and social influence,” *Journal of Social Issues* 55, no. 1 (1999): 81-99.

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phenomenon of compensation inequity as mentioned in multiple studies demonstrated reasons beyond the difficulty of negotiation skills.^{44 45 46}

Another manner in which lack of respect was shown by administrators was through various ways of categorizing the women faculty. At times they were placed in the same category as the administrators' wives and at other times were simply known as "women" rather than colleagues. They felt pressure to represent their gender whether or not they were interested in doing so. Several did not accept requests to speak on the topic of gender in order to avoid this categorization. The women in the focus group at one college said they were not given a choice, but were required to lead a discussion with their male colleagues. This was an attempt by the administration to address a difficult situation in which some of the male faculty were openly opposed to having women as colleagues. There were very few women faculty at this institution, so they felt the hostility increased as they were required to facilitate this conversation.

Scarcity of women

The fourth challenge that emerged in the focus groups, consistent with the literature,^{47 48} was that of the scarcity of numbers of women in academia. Due to the limited number of women in administration in their schools, there was little mentoring and few role models. The women felt that they could not advance beyond a certain point due to a "glass ceiling," or as one participant stated, "cement ceiling."

44"Women faculty: Still training after all these years," 14.

45G. Boulard, "Salary gap persists between women and men faculty, report finds.," Community College Week, 17 January 2005, p. 17.

46L. Knapp et al., Staff in postsecondary institutions, fall 2001, and salaries of full-time instructional faculty, 2001-02 (NCES-2004-159) (Washington, District of Columbia: Washington, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003).

47Bowen, Gender inequality," 128.

48Wilson, Women underrepresented in sciences at top research universities, study finds," A9.

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The lack of numbers also contributed to a sense of marginalization. They were not accepted into men's groups, but in addition felt excluded from relations with non-academic women due to a lack of similar interests. This tended to result in a sense of isolation. In addition to the above-mentioned, they found it difficult to find the energy to network with other women faculty due to their busy schedules. When they did find the time, the expected bond was not always there. The expectation that they would be close to others due to their similar gender did not always come to fruition as they found female colleagues tended to be competitive in their thinking and/or perceived them as a threat. Funk referred to a phenomenon called "horizontal violence." That is, women may lash out at their peers (other women), rather than their oppressors (men). This negative, demeaning, even hostile behavior of some women was viewed as occurring against colleagues as well as women in leadership roles.⁴⁹

Marginalization also occurred as women believed themselves to be excluded from the covert politics of the university because they did not have access to the conversations of their male colleagues in informal settings. This is demonstrated by the experience of one participant who said she got fed up with this situation and during a break followed her colleagues to the restroom and stood outside the door. When they began speaking of the matters of the meeting, she joined in the conversation.

Religious doctrine

The final challenge stated by the focus groups is that of the religious layer found in these faith-based institutions. Some women found themselves in a double bind. As stated previously, the more conservative of the colleges tended to have a patriarchal view and believed that women

⁴⁹Funk C, Cutting down the tall poppies: Horizontal violence (Huntsville, Texas: Sam Houston State University, 2002).

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were not to be in positions of authority.⁵⁰ This belief maintains that they are not to teach men in terms of issues of faith. Although expected to integrate faith into their material, they struggled with the contradiction as they sought to teach their male students. They experienced pressure to stay under the radar screen by avoiding any overt demonstrations of faith instruction. When challenged by students or parents, they did not always receive the support of the administration. In addition to this pressure, many honestly did not want to offend their students. Even though encouraged to integrate faith and learning, the women grappled with the desire to omit faith from their teaching because it was the safest route.

Benefits

The second primary category that emerged from the data reduction and analysis was that of benefits. As stated previously, “benefits” refers to the perceived advantages to their situations. Despite the frustrations experienced in their positions as faculty, all the participants were committed to staying with their institutions. They appeared to enjoy the opportunity to vent, but also stated enjoyment in the chance to express their pleasure in their vocations.

Christian environment

The primary benefit stated by the women was that of having the opportunity to work in a Christian environment. Although they at times were disappointed in their colleagues, they appreciated the focus on Christ and the Christian nature of those with whom they worked. They felt that for the most part, they were treated well. They enjoyed the acceptance of their colleagues and administration. Many of the women paralleled their stories of disrespect with

⁵⁰Trull and Trull, Putting women in their place: Moving beyond gender stereotypes in church and home.

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multiple stories of respect and mentoring by male colleagues. In addition, possibly due to the few women in upper administration, most of the women had mentors who were male. These colleagues played an important role in their professional development. It was repeatedly stated that had it not been for these mentors, they would not have achieved their academic rank. It was also stated that if given the choice, many would have preferred a male in the mentor role.

Collegiality with women

Another benefit stated was the natural collegiality with many other women faculty and administrators. They made deliberate efforts to offer support to each other. One experienced department chair made it a practice to offer her services as a mentor for a year to women who were new department chairs. Another said she felt an immediate closeness to other female colleagues when she met them on campus. Some were intentional in meeting together or setting up women's forums and lunches. Although all were familiar with the sometimes competitive nature of the female relationships, they seemed to have experienced more collegiality rather than problem relationships.

High-quality students

The high-quality students were also viewed as a reason to remain with an institution. Story after story was relayed about students who made their vocation a joyous enterprise. It was apparent in all the focus groups that these women attached a high level of meaning to their profession. They believed it their responsibility to shape the lives of students. They attributed much of the positive student attributes to the Christian faith and expressed fulfillment in guiding them in their faith development. Despite the challenges, this sense of meaning and the response of the students were credited with making their jobs worthwhile.

Unique contributions

The third category that emerged from the study was that of “unique contributions.” One aspect of the sense of meaning the women experienced in their occupation was their belief that they were playing a vital role in the institution—a role that could not be filled by their male colleagues. They recognized that they had unique offerings to contribute because they were women.

Varied perspective

The first unique contribution that was suggested was that women offered a varied perspective—a feminine lens. This afforded the students a more holistic perspective. Discipline content was portrayed through different lenses by male and female colleagues. The participants believed that if women faculty were not present, the students would miss an important aspect of learning. A biologist stated that her priorities of discovery and that of her female colleagues were different from that of their male peers. Lively recognized the essential nature of gender diversity in her study of women in the position of provost. She believed that the more varied the life experiences brought to any program, the better the outcome will be for learning. She cautioned that the importance of having women at the university level could not be underestimated.⁵¹

It was also emphasized by the participants, that in their role of teaching at a faith-based institution, they were able to offer the students a more balanced picture of God. The students were able to gain understanding into both the feminine and masculine characteristics of God when they had both genders as role models.

51K. Lively, “Women in charge: More elite universities hire female provosts, creating a new pool for presidential openings,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (June 2000): A33.

Relational style

Another addition mentioned by the group interviews was that of a relational style of interaction. This style was repeatedly referenced as the women spoke of the contacts with students in which they evidenced a nurturing and collaborative style of interaction. Although it was acknowledged that their male colleagues at times operated in a similar fashion, the participants believed that in general, there was a dichotomy. They expressed that the style was not necessarily better than a more removed, hierarchical manner of interacting—it was simply different. Again, they thought it offered the student a more rounded experience of education. This difference is frequently expressed in evangelical Christian circles. Crabb, a prominent Christian psychologist, expressed this belief in stating that women tend to value giving themselves in order to nourish relationships and deepen attachments. He expressed that their focus is centered on “entering a relational network” (p. 161).⁵²

Others express a similar dichotomy. Philpott stated that women more so than men, are socialized to utilize communication to provide understanding and support, give praise, validate others, and share intimate experiences. He stated that women seem to have a higher sensitivity to others and are less task-focused and more relationship-focused.⁵³

At times the participants found that the expectation to be nurturing was frustrating in that they were perceived as less professional. They had to repeatedly address the attempts of students to take advantage of their perceived weakness. However, for the most part, the participants expressed satisfaction with this role. They found that they were able to get to know their students on a more intimate level than their male colleagues. They offered permission for the students to

⁵²L. Crabb, *Men and women: Enjoying the difference* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1991).

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express emotion in their presence and were able to encourage increased sensitivity. Several of the women spoke of the importance of this role, particularly with their male students. In their experience, some of these students were unable to express emotions with their male professors, but could share their struggles with them—possibly because of this relational style.

Collaborative style of leadership

Finally, the women believed their collaborative style of leadership to be an important addition to their institutions. In the abovementioned study with women provosts, Lively observed that women are typically collaborative problem-solvers.⁵⁴ These leaders sought the input of those on their staff as a source of information for making decisions. This was as opposed to a more traditional model that would disseminate information in a downward fashion.

The participants stated that many of their male colleagues were appreciative of a collaborative style of leadership. They believed that this style was being utilized by an increasing number of peers, both male and female, as they recognized its capacity to empower those in a subordinate position. This finding coincides with the corporate world. According to Helgesen, a collaborative style is becoming increasingly popular in businesses as it enhances productivity of employees. Although initially utilized primarily by women, the practice is becoming more widespread.⁵⁵

53C. L. Philpot, "Socialization of gender roles," in Handbook of family development and intervention, ed. W. C. Nichols, M. A. Pace-Nichols, D. S. Becvar, & A. Y. Napier (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2000).

54K. Lively, "Women in charge: More elite universities hire female provosts, creating a new pool for presidential openings," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (June 2000):A33.

55B. Helgesen, *The Female advantage: Women's ways of leadership* (New York, New York: Double Day, Currency, 1990).

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Role model

Finally, the women faculty believed they made a contribution in the way of offering a female role model to others. As stated above, they at times were able to be a role model to their male colleagues in terms of having a collaborative style of leadership or in their manner of relating to the students in a more nurturing manner.

A deliberate mentoring role with other women faculty was viewed as valuable. About half of the participants had not had a female mentor due to the scarcity of women in academia. Although they value the male mentors, they thought it important to offer themselves as female mentors for younger women faculty. Those participants who were young expressed their appreciation at having women available in the institution who had more experience. They believed they had help in terms of navigating some of unique challenges faced by women faculty.

They also believed their role to be vital in mentoring both female and male students. Due to their inclusion in the academic life of the student, they believed the students received a more holistic education. As previously mentioned, the subject material from their discipline was taught through a variety of lenses and students were exposed to a diversity of styles of interaction.

Recommended solutions

The final category that emerged from the data analysis of the focus groups was that of recommended solutions. The solutions that emerged were logical to the challenges expressed by the women. Through experience, the participants had learned ways to cope with the challenges. As in the study with senior academic women,⁵⁶ the women faculty appeared eager to pass this information on to colleagues both at the same institutions and to others through the research. It is

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interesting to note that much of the previous discussion was directed to the researcher. As the participants moved into the topic of solutions, they generally addressed each other directly.

Faith

It is not surprising that faculty at faith-based institutions of higher learning would articulate “faith” as a manner with which to cope with the challenges they face. An often-expressed solution was to “trust in the Lord.” The participants encouraged each other to pray and to commit themselves to keeping God as a primary factor in their academic and personal lives. This was viewed as exponentially more important than any other solution.

Education

It was also suggested that a primary method of resolution was to educate others on the issues faced by women faculty. This directly addressed the challenge of “lack of awareness” with which so many of them had experience. They offered varied ways to offer this education ranging from gaining the ability to “get in their faces” to pursuing conversation in a more collaborative manner. When unintentional bias was demonstrated, it was suggested that women take the initiative to address the bias rather than to allow it to continue unchecked. An example was suggested regards to direct involvement of women faculty in meetings. An administrator had mentioned that women were able to give input through their male colleagues. He suggested that this was as adequate as being present during the policy-making process. In response, the participants of the focus group said this type of scenario was best addressed by meeting with that administrator and explaining the difference in voice. The goal was to encourage empathy by

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helping the administrator gain an understanding of their perspective.

This optimistic solution is in contrast with findings from other studies. Despite increased attention to gender discrimination, its rate of decline is slow. The American Association of University Professors states that although discrimination is rarely overt, statistics portray the continued ignorance of these issues.⁵⁷ Gerdes poses a question in reaction to these facts by stating the following. “Examining the statistics and literature, it is difficult to know whether to think that equity for women in higher education is just a matter of time or to believe that fundamental barriers will continue to prevent women from achieving parity.” (p. 254)⁵⁸ The change is not an easy one.

Directly addressing issues of respect

A theme that emerged in dealing with lack of respect was that the faculty must deal with it in a direct manner rather than utilizing avoidance or less confrontive techniques. The women encouraged each other to immediately deal with challenges to authority. A misperception of a collaborative style of leadership is the belief that the leader is easily manipulated.⁵⁹ It is essential that women portray confidence in themselves as leaders and have the ability to deal directly with challenges to their authority.⁶⁰ The participants said that because the students were for the most part Christians, it was beneficial to appeal to a higher standard of behavior based on their faith.

In terms of dealing with the disrespect from colleagues and administration, solutions were varied. Women were encouraged to maintain a high level of performance. Although this solution did not address the problem of variance of expectations, it did help them excel in their

⁵⁷“Women faculty: Still training after all these years,” 14.

⁵⁸Gerdes, Do it your way: Advice from senior academic women,” 253-275.

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occupation. The negative aspect to this solution is that it tended to foster an increased level of stress. Hart found that teaching loads, students, publishing and research demands, review and promotion processes, and committee work all place greater stress on women than on men.⁶¹ If a balance is not achieved, the taxing environment can lead to absenteeism, depression, and lack of productivity.⁶²

Another suggestion in addressing an absence of respect was to solicit support from administration. Support in a tangible manner was to be solicited for equity in pay and compensation. Administrators were encouraged to foster an open environment for the discussion of gender bias. They were also to be called on for advocacy and affirmation. The idea was suggested that many needed to be given specific suggestions for the manner in which they could offer aid.

One specific way top-level academic administrators can help is to make the campus aware of shifting family demographics and how the presence of more women professors calls for adjustments of processes like the tenure track and parental leave.⁶³ Chairs perhaps have the greatest role of knowing policies, applying them fairly, and educating their faculty about their use.

Harvard University is making strong endeavors to provide equal opportunities for the recruitment and retention of female faculty members.⁶⁴ The university is attempting to deal with all aspects of gender and minority issues, from the safety of women working late at night to the

59Philpot, Handbook of family development and intervention.

60Helgesen, The Female advantage: Women's ways of leadership.

61J. Hart, "Study finds women faculty experience more stress than men in higher education," Black Issues in Higher Education 22, no. 3 (March 2005): 12.

62Ibid.

63K. Ward, and L. (2004) Wolf-Wendel, "Fear factor," Academe 90, no. 6: 28-31.

64P. Fogg, and R. Wilson, "Harvard committee suggests steps to help women," Chronicle of Higher Education 51, no. 38 (May 2005): A8-9.

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need for a strong advocate in the Harvard administration.⁶⁵ Advocacy also emerged with the present sample as a solution in addressing their challenges. It was viewed as helpful for the faculty to at times have a buffer between her and students, faculty, and staff. If confronted, the women hoped to have someone in the administrative circles that would stand with them.

In addressing the challenge of disrespect in the form of a lack of parity in pay, the women also had suggestions. They recommended that faculty solicit support of the administration. They said women should be proactive in creating an open environment through example and by continuing to directly bring needs before the university leadership.

Increase number of women in upper administration

Finally, a solution offered to address the challenges that women faculty face is to increase the number of women in both administrative and faculty roles. This advice was offered frequently in the literature. Harvard has pledged \$50 million in order to address the gender gap.⁶⁶ Wilson also believes this important and suggested it as a key to producing a successful climate for women. It was recommended that universities to install both women and men at the top who make it evident that the institution is interested in hiring women. This strategy has taken place at the University of Michigan and so far it is working.⁶⁷

In order to adhere to this solution to increase the number of administrators who are female, it was suggested that leadership training and mentoring be made available. Scanlon advocates the use of mentors for women at different levels in their career. In order to break

⁶⁵N. Lawler, "Harvard pledges to fix gender gap," *Science Now* 1 (20005).

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Wilson, "Where the elite teach, it's still a man's world.," A8-11.

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through the “glass ceiling,” women need to be encouraged to step into positions of leadership. Having a mentor can be extremely valuable in attaining one’s goals.⁶⁸

As women gained entry into upper administration, they provide a natural means of advocacy for other women. Faculty cannot automatically assume that a woman administrator will offer advocacy, but due to common experiences with issues of gender discrimination it is more likely that advocacy will take place.⁶⁹

Increase number of women faculty

As numbers of women faculty increase, women were encouraged to be proactive about establishing a network. Due to the busy nature of the academic climate, a network does not often occur automatically. One study with tenure track mothers in universities encouraged the establishment of support groups. This not only addressed the problem of isolation, but also created a network of resources as the women offered both physical and emotional assistance to each other.⁷⁰

In the Gerdes study, there was some overlap in primary areas of advice and the recommended solutions of the present study. The senior academic women offered the following advice in response to gender disadvantages “(1) find mentors, (2) network, (3) don’t dwell on gender discrimination, (4) don’t be too feminist/masculine or identified too exclusively as a woman, (5) adapt to your current situation, and (6) stand up for yourself, develop confidence.” When asked for personal wisdom, the respondents replied with the following: “(1) do what’s good for you, (2) follow your values, be yourself, (3) do what you love, (4) go for it, high

68K. C. Scanlon, “Mentoring women administrators: Breaking through the glass ceiling,” *Initiatives* 58, no. 39-59 (1997).

69Lawler, Harvard pledges to fix gender gap.”

70Young and Wright, *Mothers making tenure.*,” 555-568.

aspirations, (5) work hard, do your best, excel.” (p. 272-273)⁷¹

Limitations

In order to address issues of retention and attraction of women faculty, the researcher wanted an in-depth analysis of the perception of the dynamics of being a woman faculty at a faith-based institution of higher learning. Although involving cumbersome analysis, qualitative research methodology was best suited for this examination. It could be determined that a limitation of the research was the small sample size of thirty-six participants. This was necessary, however, in order to encourage the depth of discussion allowed by the methodology. The result was the emergence of rich themes through the conversation. A serendipity of the interviews with these small groups was that they created a natural support group for the women involved. The camaraderie was apparent as they spoke of common areas of interests.

The utilization of the college and universities affiliated with one denomination might also be viewed as a limitation. It is hoped that future research might remedy this situation by examining a broader population. The purposive nature of the study in terms of its exclusive population, however, did allow the researcher access to the women faculty. Because the researcher was “one of them,” the administrators at the chosen schools were, with the exception of the school that dropped out, eager to have the study occur. They wanted to address the difficulty of attraction and retention of women faculty at their own institutions so were supportive.

⁷¹Ibid.

Conclusion

The keys to changing the plight of women professors are not always obvious. With the exception of the allowances made for the patriarchal beliefs of faith-based institutions of higher learning, the dynamics faced by women faculty were isomorphic to those faced at other institutions. An interesting dynamic that was viewed within and across the focus groups was a split in terms of generation. Senior faculty appeared to have weathered much in terms of gender bias and had viewed some success. They were cautiously optimistic regarding possible change of the institutions. On the other end of the spectrum, the freshman faculty were at times unaware of disadvantages of women faculty. They portrayed more of an entitled perspective as they spoke of the challenges and solutions to address issues of attraction and retention. This may have in part been due to naivety as new faculty, but it might also reflect change that has occurred over the years.

It is obvious that much needs to be done. Change is most likely to happen if addressed at both an individual and institutional level. As demonstrated by the recommended solutions, there are areas in which women can be proactive in changing their situations. However, in order to address institutional barriers, the administration must be willing to address the challenges in an vigorous manner. By establishing a climate that helps faculty members succeed, institutions save themselves from having to recruit new faculty.⁷² When an institution shows that it can offer its faculty that kind of environment, it has a better chance of attracting qualified faculty. Gerdes suggested that the situation will not be rectified “until institutional structures fit women as well as men and until women’s issues truly become people’s issues.” (p. 269)⁷³

⁷²Curtis, Balancing work and family for faculty,” 21-23.

⁷³Gerdes, Do it your way: Advice from senior academic women,” 253-275.

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