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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the assumptions made about organizational and social equity and fairness in higher education institutions that prove to be untrue when applied to women. Through personal narrative and interviews with women faculty and professional staff, the paper presents a view of university work and life from the perspective of the women who experience it. Areas examined concern assignments to committees, program development in relation to academic and professional goals, faculty rewards and support, responsibilities and recognition, and pay and workload. Each of these areas is shown through the experiences of those interviewed, to contain practices which are discriminatory against women faculty and staff, and it is suggested that these occurrences are not extraordinary, but typical. It is argued that institutionalized discrimination is still going on, yet hard to detect unless one is personally being affected. The recommended action is that those affected by discriminatory practices must push for advancement and help others see the inequity of policies, norms, beliefs and attitudes within these institutions. Contains 13 references. (GLR)

WOMEN AND THE COMMUNITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION:

Invisibility through Institutionalization?

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine, within the context of higher education, the dominant constructions of the inner eye (the assumptions of organizational and social reality) and the social phenomena of gender issues that consequently they render invisible. Through an examination of my experiences and those of my colleagues, awareness of the possible need for the reconstruction of perceptions about higher education shall emerge.

The importance of this study is the introspection it invites, the learning it enhances, and the evolution of constructions of inner eyes it enables. This experience for the individual is inevitable; it must occur. For in the occurrence, the realities of life in higher education are revealed not for what they espouse to be, but for what they are perceived to be from a variety of perspectives.

WOMEN AND THE COMMUNITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION: Invisibility through Institutionalization?

Universities employ all kinds of people: male/female, white/people of color, old/young, single/married, and liberal/conservative. Institutional and state reporting documents note many of these demographics in numbers and percentages. Legislation protects various groups and enables their serious representation in all educational organizations. Title IX, Equal Employment Opportunity Act, Affirmative Action, and the civil rights acts guarantee equal representation and educational/occupational opportunities.

This is the world I perceived upon entry into academe in the fall of 1987. I believed that this world of higher education respected and cherished multiplicity, diversity and uniqueness. My worth as an academic, though yet proven, was without question. I could do anything, try anything, and be anything if I were willing to put forth enough effort. This reality, however, was perceived through a conditioned "construction of my inner eye." The world of higher education I saw was composed of "deeply embedded and largely unexamined assumptions" (Anderson, 1990, p. 38) about my social world, academe.

It is now the spring of 1993. Five full years have enabled me to see anew the realities of my world. A new reflective and critical construction has emerged from reexamination of my own experiences and the experiences of my colleagues. From this new construction, I now know that colleges and universities prefer to employ married white males. Administrators like people who look, live, and think like they do. Colleges fight diversity and promote a myopic world view. The social realities of the 1960s and 1970s that fueled the equity and equality enactments and legislation still exist. But the national issues are no longer issues, not because the underlying problems have been solved, but because people believe, therefore see, social constructions or realities that do not exist.

The worlds described are the same worlds. Nothing has changed except my vision. What was invisible before is now quite clear. Somehow I am able to construct a reality different from that constructed five years ago. How that happened is of no consequence. What this new construction allows me, and others, to see is.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to examine, within the context of higher education, the legitimate and dominant constructions of the inner eye (the assumptions of organizational and social reality) and the social phenomena of gender issues that they consequently render invisible. Through an examination of my experiences and those of other women colleagues, assumptions about life in higher education will be challenged. Through this examination, the possible need for the reconstruction of perceptions about higher education shall be revealed.

Theoretical Frame

Denial and institutionalization of organizational and social realities result in the invisibility of organizational phenomena and their redefinition as non-issues or their classification as "non-events." These actions or "constructions of our inner eyes" collectively permit us not to see certain social phenomena (Anderson, 1990). By asking the questions "what counts as knowledge?" and "how is what counts as knowledge organized and transmitted?," these social constructions may be illuminated (Bates, 1980; Smyth, 1989).

Questions posed in terms of "what counts" rather than "what constitutes" or "what is" illustrate the conflictual nature of meaning in educational organizations. As Bates points out, what "counts" as meaning is determined within organizational and social contexts and

> because administrators in most organizations are in a better position to influence what "counts" as knowledge than other organizational members, they are to a great extent the managers of organizational meaning, the custodians of organizational legitimacy, and the definers of

organizational and social reality. (Anderson, 1990, p. 43)

Critical theory offers a way in which to see a variety of organizational and social contexts and their conflictual meanings.

> Critical theory provides an attitude, a way of conceptualizing reality, and a way of addressing social change through individually formulated actions. It does not prescribe; it does not determine; rather, it attempts to educate, and in so educating attempts to introduce us to our surroundings and how they consciously or unconsciously influence us. (Foster, 1986, p. 90)

Constructivist theory focuses on stakeholder claims, concerns, and issues as organizers. The stakeholders are groups at risk; they are open to exploitation, disempowerment and disenfranchisement. But they use the information generated through constructivist inquiry to their benefit, and they learn from it (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Critical constructivist theory will serve as the lens through which the exploration of legitimate and dominant constructions of the inner eye concerning women in higher education will occur. In this way, the assumptions of organizational and social realities of higher education and the gender issues that they render invisible can be seen in a variety of ways - for what they espouse to be as well as by women in higher education.

Procedures

Method

The method of choice for the constructivist is qualitative, for it assumes multiple realities dependent on the time and context of the constructors who hold them. "The human is the instrument of choice for the constructivist.... Objections that humans are subjective, biased, or unreliable are irrelevant, for there is no other option" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 175). Methods include "talking to people, observing their activities, reading their documents, assessing the unobtrusive signs they

leave behind, responding to their non-verbal cues, and the like" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, pp. 175-176).

Specifically, occurrences that reflect my own experiences and those of other women whom I know in higher education will be presented as vignettes. The vignettes will depict the assumptions of life in higher education about "what counts." They are considered "traditionally accepted," they are typical or natural, yet at the same time illustrate interpretations which render gender issues "invisible" and ultimately discriminate against women.

These familiar realities illustrate the heart of the problems experienced by women in higher education. They reflect disparities in load, advising, teaching, service, reappointment, promotion/tenure, recognition, leadership opportunities, inbreeding policies, and underpay/overwork.

Data Sources

My friends and female colleagues, women faculty and professional staff employed in institutions of higher education, have provided the data used in this study.

Points of View

It must be remembered that:

> A paradigm is a world view, a general perspective, a way of breaking down the complexity of the real world. As such, paradigms are deeply embedded in the socialization of adherents and practitioners: paradigms tell them what is important, legitimate, and reasonable. Paradigms are also normative, telling the practitioner what to do without the necessity of long existential or epistemological considerations. But it is this aspect of paradigms that constitutes both their strength and their weakness - their strength in that it makes action possible, their weakness in that the very reason for action is hidden in the unquestioned assumptions of the paradigm. (Patton, 1980, p. 203)

The organizational and social constructions of higher education can be interpreted differently. Some interpretations render gender discrimination

invisible, while others illustrate the various ways in which it exists. The readers of this study will encounter again a familiar reality or meet for the first time invisibility and discrimination. Through vicarious experiences, they will be introduced to "new information and new levels of sophistication that can, with a little effort and assuming only good intention on the part of the reader, lead to a reconstruction, perhaps even a radical one, of the reader's original construction" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 181).

It is awareness of the possibility of reconstruction that is the merit of this paper.

Findings

For ease of presentation, each of the following vignettes will focus on general assumptions about the academic triad of teaching, research and service as well as more specific issues such as load, student advisement, recognition of effort, leadership opportunities, inbreeding, and underpay/overwork. Experiences will be described briefly: this is the way this place works, "what counts" and how people fit within it. Then, the same experiences will be described with a different and gendered "construction." The intent is not to bemoan situations or happenings, but to illustrate possible realities of higher education that may be masked. Which realities exist are debatable. Those who have lived masked discrimination or conditioned invisibility will recognize it; those who have not may learn to see differently.

The past and present constructions of the inner eye, my realities of the community of higher education and related organizational assumptions, illustrate disparities very like those noted earlier by many researchers. Pottker's (1977) presentation of overt and covert forms of institutionalized discrimination against university women serves as an excellent example. One striking difference must be noted, however. Pottker believed that institutionalized discrimination stemmed from the normal structure and functioning of the institution itself; it was not caused by the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of the actors within that institution. Her example

concerning inbreeding/nepotism policies clearly illustrates this perspective: "The individual only has to conform to the operating norms of the organization and the institution will do the discriminating for him" (Pottker, 1977, p. 381).

Pottker is only half right. Institutionalized discrimination does stem from the normal structure and functioning of the institution itself, but it is the result of beliefs, attitudes and behaviors of the actors within that institution. Because policy is put in place by people, it reflects their overt and covert beliefs, attitudes and behaviors. Institutions cannot discriminate, but people can. The ability to see this other half is vital to each individual's ability to reconstruct and reexamine assumptions. Hopefully, these vignettes are convincing presentations of other perspectives.

Organizational Overview

Within every organization there is a hierarchy. When new faculty members enter, they are at the bottom. They know that if they are capable, over time, they will rise. In the community of higher education, they will eventually have an office with a view and they will also have graduate assistants to help them accomplish the rigors of academe. They also know that they will be able to have a sabbatical in seven years or so, and that their research efforts should be accepted and published in refereed journals. Teaching, research and service are the tantamount triad, equal because of their related outcomes. If a faculty member does the right things, the right things will be his/hers; the norms of academe dictate this. Committee assignments, service obligations and teaching loads will be equitable eventually.

This scenario reflects what we are told, indirectly and directly. We "know" this to be true. The following assumptions about life in higher education will reflect other realities that we now "know" (realities that reflect "what counts") in higher education. These assumptions are some less-likely truths, or at least we have been told that we should think so.

Service: Committee Assignments

My first year as a faculty member I was asked by my department head to serve on three college committees: the Multicultural Committee, the Scholarship Committee and the Convocation Committee. At the beginning of my second year, I was appointed as departmental representative to the college Academic Standards and Curriculum Committee and was also asked to be the departmental representative for the college picnic, be a member of a committee examining possible departmental reorganization, and was given final advisement responsibility for half of our student population. That same year, I was afforded the opportunity to be a member of two university-wide committees, the Committee on Effective Teaching as well as the Library Advisory Committee. Obviously, committee service was an activity that "counted."

Prior to taking my first faculty position, I knew that one of the important social constructions associated with faculty responsibilities was service. A part of service was membership on university committees. I also knew that new faculty served on committees, or at least I did. New faculty worked on assignments within their department, and they also represented their department at the college level and represented the college at the university level. This was one of the many jobs of faculty. I also knew that when I was no longer new, I would serve on fewer committees. Or, at least this assumption seemed reasonable. Newer faculty would take my place on committees as I had taken the place of faculty upon my entry into academe. Given my initial assignments and activities, I reaffirmed these assumptions about faculty service.

Throughout my first years in higher education, I listened to and read about the activities of other faculty in my department and college. I knew what my assignments were and began to realize that I served on quite a few committees. I also began to examine my participation on these committees and the value of the work with which each committee was charged. I carefully began to examine what "counted" for me and what "counted" for others.

The Multicultural Committee was chaired by a black female faculty member and comprised a small group of majority and minority, female and male faculty, and staff. I was one of two faculty from my department on this committee; the other faculty member was the other female in my department. We met once a month. The Scholarship Committee and the Convocation Committee met less regularly; once a year we reviewed scholarship applicant forms, and twice a year the Convocation Committee met to go over procedures for undergraduate graduation and graduate hooding.

These committee assignments were time-consuming but were part of what counted for reappointment, promotion and tenure. They must count because I was being asked to participate, role was taken and department and/or college representation was needed. I believed that my involvement in this number of committees was "typical." I did, however, become aware of differences. There appeared to be committees that "counted" more than others. It also appeared that some committees accomplished tasks while others merely met.

Over the time I was a member of the Multicultural Committee, membership changed only marginally. The same faculty member chaired the committee, we never received an agenda prior to the meeting and never seriously asked questions about our responsibilities to recruitment and retention within the college. We did survey students to determine their needs, but by the time I rotated off the committee policy or strategies had not changed to reflect those findings. We did little but meet.

After five years, I am now able to describe a different assumption about committee service in higher education: New female faculty serve on a variety of meaningless departmental, college and university committees. I now believe that I was selected to represent the college on university-wide committees because I was a new female. A male colleague, hired at the same time as I but who arrived a semester later than, was not given these committee assignments, I got them all. Other representatives on college committees were females from other departments, very nice men or staff. Other representatives on

university committees were from the other typically female college at a land grant institution, the library or staff.

This presentation of my own experiences is honest and factual. I also believe my experiences were typical although others might say they were extraordinary. Some would say I was naive, even dumb; others would say that I was fulfilling my faculty duties. Both explanations were provided by colleagues and peers but each explanation supports a different perspective about what counts and even who counts. It is also possible that one view is gendered and the other is not; one view illustrates masked discrimination and the other faculty responsibility. The difference is in how we construct our realities and the lenses through which we view our world.

There is a fine line between providing opportunities and overwhelming people. I did not know what opinion would be formed of me when I accepted a committee assignment, but I did assume that serving on committees was one of my responsibilities. I also did not know if I could turn an assignment down. I assumed that it was a wise act to accept committee assignments cheerfully. I now believe that no one cares whether I did or not. Why take on the work when it is not appreciated and does take time away from "scholarly" activities?

The old construction of my inner eye was that my participation was needed, merited and appreciated. The new construction is that my participation filled a void. One could deduce that my committee assignments were neither malicious nor meaningful; they just were. But other new faculty did not receive such assignments; they were not female.

It is possible that I am not reconstructing a truly plausible reality. It is also possible that the reality I now see does exist. I now know that saying "no thank you" can occur. Asking for different assignments is possible, too. Willing (and blind) acceptance is no longer part of my repertoire. It need not be in the repertoire of any faculty member, male or female. Was I being taken advantage of? I think so. Others may disagree.

Another set of assumptions emerged from this experience. I now assume that it is my responsibility to tell others to say "no thank you" and help them focus on meaningful activities, activities that will count toward their development and ultimate rise within the ranks of academe. Committee service may not be the best activity for any new faculty member to engage in, male or female.

Program Development

A colleague in another department had been at our institution for two years when I arrived in the fall of 1987. She has been hired into a tenure track position that she was told had four distinct, yet related, quarter-time responsibilities. Her academic background had been in one-quarter of the position description, her doctoral research in another. Her responsibilities were well defined; she was to branch out into two additional related areas, become multi-faceted.

She refocused her academic and professional goals into the development of two new program areas as instructed. Essential to the development of these new program areas were two occurrences: technical support and coursework development. Although the two new program areas required extensive computer software and hardware expertise and use, she was provided timed and limited access only to the needed technical materials. She did not have in her office the technology she was to teach in her program coursework. Other higher ranking faculty in the department did, but they did not teach in her area. They were also male.

In addition to her problems procuring technical support, her efforts to secure approval for program coursework were met with remarkable requests for documentation. Department and college committees required her to attend multiple meetings for discussion about program plans and provide extensive supporting materials including course syllabi, text reviews and annotated bibliographies prior to approval of her requests. The requests of other faculty in her department for new courses for their programs received approval

without meetings, discussion or supporting documentation. The other faculty were male.

Multiple messages were being sent through the department about "what counts" and ways in which to accomplish "what counts." It could even be posited that disparity was possible and probable. She had experienced rigorous review by both department and college colleagues for her requests. She was the youngest faculty member in the department and she was a woman. One interpretation can describe this disparity in terms of tenure, rank and experience or a lack thereof. Another interpretation of her treatment supports her belief that being female had not been to her advantage. She believes that men were accepted and women were required to constantly prove themselves. Was her interpretation of what counts accurate? Is there evidence to support a gendered reconstruction of organizational assumptions? She believes that there is.

Successful implementation of two new programs within her department required her to refocus her academic and professional goals, learn new technology, design new coursework for those areas and initiate contacts with the field. After five years she received tenure and was promoted to Associate Professor. She completed her seventh year at this institution last spring. At that time she was told that her tenure track position was in jeopardy. Her department head indicated that the monies supporting one-quarter of her position were now uncertain. Faculty in the department rallied in support, and meetings with both the department head and the dean followed. A solution was provided by the department head and dean. She was asked to take a new assignment, an unfilled faculty position in her doctoral content area.

She declined the opportunity and the assurance of funding for her position. Her rationale for this stance was simple and understandable: Her seven year investment in program development, research, service, teaching, students and professional affiliation was too great to give up because of funding uncertainties. But she also wondered why the funding uncertainties

could not be transferred to the unfilled position instead of her own. Also, what was to be done with her programs and students if she changed positions? Who would serve them and cover the coursework?

It is possible that many people, both male and female, have been placed in such a position. At this institution, we know of none other than she. She tried to go with the flow, bend in the breeze and accommodate. Following the request for reassignment and her refusal, she was asked to write a concept paper noting the validity of her program and supporting rationale. No other faculty member had been asked to do so. The concept paper was then discussed in a meeting with the department head and another faculty member.

During the meeting she did not react emotionally or loose composure. Why? A few years prior she had and her reactions were noted for her personnel file. She was told that she could not handle the pressures of her position. She knows of others, males, in her department who have lost their composure, but they were never written up or told that they could not handle the pressures of their positions. For women, loss of composure is emotionalism, for men it is defense of turf. Again, a women was measured with a different ruler than her male counterparts.

Her assumptions about life in the community of higher education were first based upon a description of "what counts" in terms of credentials and outcomes. If you had the background and desire, and could realize goals, the organization would support you and be pleased. Her assumptions are different now. Her gender was a liability, it counted against her at all junctures. She believes that she was fighting an up hill battle that could not be countered; she looked too different from the male masses and could not be viewed as credible.

Faculty Rewards

In our college, all faculty receive a $200 payoff per course for windshield time accrued teaching coursework at an off-campus site. A colleague in another department taught four courses at the off-campus site

over the calendar year. Her extra pay was $600. She approached her department head inquiring about the discrepancy. He informed her that although the course had not been canceled by administration (himself), one of her courses had less than the required number of students enrolled in it and was not counted in the tally. She requested that he consider the fact that the other three courses taught during that period of time had enrollments noticeably above that required and approach the dean about the discrepancy. He then asked her if she really wanted him to fight this $200 battle or save his energies for a later battle with a greater payoff. She withdrew her request, later regretting "backing down."

This may well be a reality of life in academe. Some battles can be better defended for greater gain. But she loses; he does not. Her assumptions about what counts have now changed. She thought faculty effort counted but it appears that they did not count as much as $200 or program needs. Program needs supported teaching a course in which enrollment was low, but rewarding the instructor $200 for her windshield time was deemed a battle not worth fighting. She believes that her department head would have fought this battle for a male. In fact, she believes the discrepancy never would have occurred if she were male. Her new assumption is that female faculty are expected to support program needs with no reward; male faculty are smarter than that.

She knows her situation better than anyone else. Her assumptions about her reality, her social construction of equity and equality, are different than those of her department head. He may be right. She may be right as well.

Support

We had a number of new faculty in the college last year. We all know the importance of research to success in academe and an enhancer to the possibility of success is a computer in your office. Articles can be processed quickly and information stored and retrieved conveniently. This

faculty members asked for an office computer prior to accepting the position. She was assured that she would have easy access and that a computer of her own would not be necessary.

To date, the two computers to which she was to have easy access have been besieged with "a virus" or were "not ready" to be used. She knows of a male faculty member in her department who arrived the same time she did. He held rank as an associate professor and was successful in negotiating a computer with his contract. Why was he successful and she was not?

Gender might be one reason for success. His skills at negotiation might be another. And his rank could be another factor. A different vision of life in academe emerges from each interpretation, however. A social construction of equality and equity that is different from that traditionally defined is obvious. Women are equal, but men are more equal. Rank has it's privileges. Equity between men or at a specific rank is appropriate, but equity across the board is not possible even though success leading to promotion in rank may be measured by the same factors.

Responsibilities and Recognition

In the fall of my second year, the department head needed release time to complete a book. Two colleagues were asked to "fill-in" for him. Both had held administrative positions outside the institution, both were hired at the same time, and both were Assistant Professors; but one was male, the other female. The male was asked to take over administrative responsibilities; the female was asked to take over teaching responsibility for a great books course.

Time commitments for both assignments were not equal; teaching a course that required reading a book a week outweighed the time required to conduct bi-monthly faculty meetings. Exposure to activities that might aid development of each as a member of academe was not equal either; additional teaching experience versus experience in administration cannot be equated. The academic responsibility of teaching far outweighs that of administration,

many would believe, especially when the course was used to screen students' entry into our doctoral program. But when acknowledgements were written for the book, the administrative fill-in was thanked for his assistance and the teaching fill-in was not mentioned.

People make mistakes, but this oversight was very revealing. Higher education values administration over teaching, and its administrators value males over females. Now we know what counts. This assumption is obvious to many and has been for a long, long time. But the academic social constructions of the triad of teaching, research and service, and Affirmative Action allow us to be mislead. They confuse us into believing that the triad is vital but then we find out that administration ranks above the triad.

From this experience, a different construction of assumptions emerges, a construction in which gender plays a very important part. The true reality of higher education is a diad: the triad and administration. In this instance, a man functioned within one and received recognition; a woman functioned in the other and was overlooked. The impact of Affirmative Action is moot when administration is introduced. Women compete in one arena and men compete in both. As usual, women have fewer opportunities to excel than their male counterparts.

Pay and Work

A graduate school colleague completed her doctoral coursework shortly after I did. She was unable to relocate because of family circumstances - her husband was a tenured "full" professor in Arts and Sciences. Seeing limited opportunities, she sought a position within the extension/service end of our alma mater. There she became successful very quickly. She brought to the institution more than $3 million in grant money in the four years she had served in her extension position. She was able to do what was needed and counted in her position.

Job security and grant money, however, do not go hand in hand. Each year grants must be submitted and there was no way in which her efforts would

result in tenure, the opportunity to work with graduate students and faculty rank. She wanted a tenure track position tied to a department. She also wanted retirement and other traditional benefits associated with tenure-track life in academe. Despite her best efforts and those of her academic and administrative friends, she was never deemed an appropriate candidate for tenure-track life because she was inbreed, she held a Ph.D. from the institution in which she was employed.

Last spring she was offered a hard-money research/grant position out-of-state and she was giving it very serious consideration despite her family constraints. Administration got wind of her good fortune and set about to induce her to stay in her current position. Through unemotional negotiations and the support of a variety of administrators, she now holds a hard-money tenure-track position doing exactly what she was doing before. Why? Is this just the way life is in academe or was her worth recognized at long last? Did her gender make a difference?

She believes that the money she has brought to her alma mater has made this possible; her worth was recognized. She also believes that this is the way female faculty spouses are treated. The traditional interpretation of the social construction of academic inbreeding is being challenged. She is describing it anew as a gendered phenomena. She knew all along that having a degree from the institution where you wanted to work and being a faculty spouse guaranteed life as a second class citizen. But eternal hope existed for individual worth to be seen and recognized. It may be an academically and scholarly unsound practice to inbreed, but it is also wrong to hire female graduates cheaply, keep them for nothing and generally take advantage of them while they are with the institution.

This not so "new" gendered social reconstruction or assumption about inbreeding reflects a belief that inbreeding is designed to discriminate against women. Women, more than men, find themselves unable to move from the institution where their spouse is employed (Pottker, 1977). And, in this

case, they receive less recognition for their efforts because of their incestual relationship with their alma mater. What continues to count is not what you do or your worth, but a degree from another institution and this phenomenon impacts women much more frequently than it does men.

Conclusions

Over 15 years ago, Pottker (1977) noted the following about institutionalized discrimination:

> It is therefore in the best interest of those who benefit in the present system (usually men), to resist voluntary changes in the current discriminatory treatment of women academics. Too much is personally at stake for most people in the universities to end discrimination against women. It will not end voluntarily; it must be required. (p. 407)

The perpetuation of institutionalized discrimination continues. My colleagues and I have provided illustrations of its invisibility as well as it existence. We have not come very far, have we?

The women whose stories were told have gone on to success both in and out of academe. Their experiences helped me understand that I was not alone but, in fact, I was lucky. I was mobile, had a tenure track line, a computer in my office, a narrowly focused job description, autonomy and flexibility, and I got $200 for each course taught off-campus. My good fortune does not diminish the need to continually examine my assumptions about academe, however.

I know what "counts" as a faculty member and that knowledge has grown from what I have read (Gilligan, 1982; Simeone, 1987; Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988; Chamberlain, 1991; Hensel, 1991), other people's experiences and my own. But, not until I experienced discrimination or until I was able to look at my experiences through a lens less deeply embedded with largely unexamined assumptions about life in academe did that occur. I had to develop a different conditioned "construction of my inner eye" which enabled a different perception of my world. It seems that this ability to see differently was

only possible after I had determined "what counts" institutionally and then reconstructed "what counts" from a gendered perspective. Following that experience, there was a move from naivete to knowing. The key was looking at things, not only believing what I had been told.

Reconstruction of my lens for viewing academe began when my female colleague went unrecognized for her efforts in teaching for our department head. At first I was unable to see the incongruity, but my colleague was. Her ability to take her own experience, reconstruct it, provide a different meaning and make the invisible visible was the key to my new vision. That experience led to my reflection upon past events and the development of multiple interpretations of new events as they unfolded. As I spoke with others about my new lens, they began to see their experiences differently too. Story after story added fuel to this new and visible reconstruction fire.

The event for my colleague, however, was not transformational. It did not change her lens for viewing her experiences; she returned to a myopic and invisible view of academe. She was discriminated against, but saw the incident as a single unfortunate and uncomfortable occurrence. She bought the oversight rationale and continues to believe that her merits will be rewarded just as those of the majority gender. She does not see that our department head was an artifact of or a supporter of institutional discrimination. I might be taking the connection further than advisable or appropriate, but I still keep getting story after story to add fuel to the reconstruction fire. I believe that she cannot see the forest for the trees.

It is possible that some of my colleagues would believe that my arrival at this redefinition of assumptions about higher education has come after the embers of the women's movement and feminism have long cooled. It is true that I did not burn my bra or take women's studies courses. I was not active in NOW nor did I subscribe to MS. Though I am of the age who could have participated in the women's movement, I was one of many who gleefully missed its impact. We were happy doing something else that we believed meaningful

and important, whatever that was. But, the women who fought so hard for my opportunities today are not forgotten. Unfortunately, I no longer believe that their efforts of the 1970s made a big difference for higher education. Others believe as I do

> that despite the efforts women have made and the battles they have fought and won, academic women must still overcome the individual and institutional sexism that is woven into the fabric of academic life. (Simeone, 1987, pp. 142-3)

The reconstruction of perspectives held by people and newly visible interpretations or definitions of "what counts" in academe must begin with the advice of Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) in Women of Academe: Outsiders in the Sacred Grove:

> As a general strategy, we would emphasize the importance of women's continuing to press for positions in the profession as if their holding public authority were the norm, continuing to claim authority as rightfully theirs. (p. 142)

Additionally, however, we need to provide our newly visible interpretations of "what counts" for other members of academe, both male and female. Prior to 1987, I would not have believed and did not believe that institutionalized discrimination occurred in higher education. It is my responsibility, in part, to help others see what I can now see. We must push for advancement and help others see the inequity and disequity of policies, norms, beliefs and attitudes.

Importance of the Study

The importance of this work is the introspection it invites, the learning it enhances and the evolution of constructions of inner eyes it enables. This experience for the individual is inevitable; it must occur. For in the occurrence, the realities of life in higher education are revealed not for what they espouse to be but for what they are from a variety of individual perspectives.

For my personal growth and awareness, the importance of this work cannot be overstated. I have learned to see the things that have been and are happening around me in a different light. I can now see through a lens, a construction of my inner eye, that allows understandings quite different from others with whom I associate. I can appreciate the honesty and opportunity afforded me, because others have not been as fortunate. I can also understand those who have been embraced in ways that I have not. I know what counts.

Others may also benefit. Through my experiences and those of my friends, their own lenses for viewing themselves and higher education may become clearer, even evolve. What and how they see will be different from what I see. They will see an equally real world, because what they see will be their own construction, based upon their experiences and their sense of their world.

Aside from the clarification of lenses and construction, it is hoped that the power of the individual in higher education can be demonstrated through these experiences. People, if they can see differently, can believe a different reality and work for awareness and change. Great freedom ensues from this concept. If seeing is believing, then believing may also lead to seeing and, ultimately, awareness and change (Lotto, 1981). We make our realities; therefore, we can also change them. If we can see discrimination, we may be able to combat it.

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