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ABSTRACT

This self-inquiry study, by two untenured women faculty in leadership roles, attempted to identify and analyze internalized oppressive thinking and behavioral responses to specific institutional situations using Senge's (1990) theory of structural archetypes in organizations to uncover patterns underlying the identified responses. Data included journaling; field notes; notes taken during narrative, interview, and analysis sessions; extensive reading notes and memos; and memos of conversational exchanges with university colleagues. Examples are given of scenarios, problem situations, unintended consequences, and analyses illustrating the following structural archetypes: (1) "fixes that fail," a fix, effective in the short term, has unforeseen long-term consequences; (2)"shifting the burden," a short-term solution with immediate positive results but resulting in decreasing use of more fundamental corrective measures; and (3)escalation, a competitive situation in which each side is led to act more aggressively to re-establish its advantage. The paper concludes that the process allowed the authors to recognize how patterns of victim behavior come from an insistence on returning to past perfectionist strategies. (Contains 41 references.) (DB)

Running head: EXAMINING PARADOXES IN LEADERSHIP

Examining the Lived Paradoxes of Women in Leadership in an Academic Culture

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Examining the Lived Paradoxes of Women in Leadership in an Academic Culture

We can do nothing substantial toward changing our course on the planet, a destructive one, without rousing ourselves, individual by individual, and bringing our small, imperfect stones to the pile.

–Alice Walker

The theme of the 1998 AERA annual meeting calls us to consider the recognition and legitimacy of diversity, the realization of potential for all of those marginalized, and the challenge to epistemologically position ourselves as educators to educate others to value differences that contribute to more equitable communities. Yet, in the day to day work of energizing the rhetoric into the lived practice, we find entrenched patriarchal attitudes and underlying systems that sustain old ways of marginalization. Because patriarchal systems are so entrenched in Western cultures (Tarnas, 1991; Weedon, 1987), the rules of the day to day game occur within complex layers of acts and responses, some more conscious or unconscious than others for the involved parties.

Thus, the call requires an examination of the way we think about being marginalized, about our values and valuing others, about boundaries and the politics of difference (Nicholson, 1990; Young, 1990) and individual differentiation (Yeatman, 1990, 1994). Our research (Wesson & Hauschildt, 1997a, 1997b) investigates ways to identify/define "success" for women in academia. While we found personal success in academia to be most evident in our teaching and in our research, we were also successful in the area of institutional service. "Rewarded" for these successes, we were recently both sought out for leadership positions within our respective departments as chair and assistant chair. Thinking at first that we were being valued for constructive and visionary contributions, our early interactions within a different circle of institutional processes soon led us to several realizations: that *our willingness to do the work* was

the value being rewarded; that we had avoided many of our institution's political games by remaining busy and absorbed in teaching and research; and that our new positions now found us involved in the politics of the institution and caused us to raise questions about issues we had previously been able to ignore or deny.

In the new leadership positions we see ourselves as *players* in the patriarchal game; prior to this, the patriarchal game was not *us* but *them*–the "good old boys." While we knew we were not part of the inside network, we had to accept that although we were players now in a different way, we still had always been players. We played by excelling in any assignment we had been given; we followed the rules to the nth degree; we had been pleasing the gatekeepers who could/would "move us up" the patriarchal ladder. We had become compliant pleasers in innumerable ways, such as not questioning, good listening, taking on new tasks willingly, and trying to become part of the team. We saw that we were sustaining oppressed player positions by working the system to get the rewards that we thought would move us out of a marginalized position (Wesson & Hauschildt, 1997b). In effect, we were maintaining the system through the same kind of complicit behavior we had used in the past without receiving the status we had expected. We were still waiting for permission for a non-marginalized voice.

As new academics we gradually began to see our behavior as paradoxical. While we thought we were innocent outsiders desirous of a public voice and a place from which to change the system, we were actually the complicit workers necessary to sustain the system's status quo. A deeper paradox was our feeling proud of our work ethic while remaining ignorant of its "sustaining" effect, its counter-productive "contribution" to any self-development or to any change in the institution. Our lifetime of complicit behaviors had created a perfectionist mentality that could not admit to the error of its ways.

Each paradox seems to touch the deepest place of human needs, our need for safety—in job security, in collegial relationships—and of being valued for the integrity we bring to scholarship and teaching. Out of safety needs, we tend to key into institutions that implicitly promise us that these needs will be satisfied. As middle-aged, white women in U.S. culture, we have keyed into schooling, marriages, churches, and other structures that are patriarchal by historical design. The interplay of safety-needs and institutional dependency leaves us blind to the part we play in holding onto the illusion that institutions will meet our needs. We then live the paradox of interpreting ourselves as victims of the institution rather than recognizing the part we play as participating members.

In *Prisons We Choose to Live Inside*, Doris Lessing tells us that

> Once we have learned to see this mechanism in operation, it can be seen how little of life is free of it. Nearly all the pressures from outside are in terms of group beliefs, group needs, national needs, patriotism and the demands of local loyalties, such as to your city and local groups of all kinds. But more subtle and more demanding—more dangerous—are the pressures from inside, which demand that you should conform, and it is these that are the hardest to watch and to control. (p. 55)

The Study

The self-inquiry study was designed to help us identify specific behaviors in particular situations in which we were sustaining unhealthy, counter-productive compliance. We saw ourselves behaving out of deep, life-long patterns of silence, of living and acting in ways that accept oppression and marginalization (Wesson & Hauschildt, 1997a, 1997b). We began to document micropractices of particularized interactions in one academic setting. In this paper we, as two untenured women in leadership roles, identify and analyze internalized oppressive

thinking and behavioral responses to specific institutional situations. Using Senge's (1990) structural archetypes to uncover the patterns underlying the identified responses, we can discover the when, how, and why of several lived paradoxes.

> We want to find
>
> the myriad ways [that] structures of domination operate in our daily lives to undermine our capacity to be self-determining. Without knowing what factors have created certain problems in the first place, we could not begin to develop meaningful strategies of personal and collective resistance. (hooks, 1993, p. 14)

With hooks, we consider such examination a crucial process not only as an expression of a liberatory political practice, but as necessary for women as an oppressed group to move beyond compliance with the status quo.

Methodology

Method of Inquiry

The larger study draws from several research methodologies, all of which have the commonalities of self study, inquiry into theory and practice, and a dialogic discourse analysis that sustains the examination process and transformative action taken throughout the study's data processing. Methods of action research (Elliott, 1991; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Lewin, 1946, 1948) and self inquiry from a critical perspective (Lather, 1991; Zeichner, 1993) serve as the ground. Using Lather's (1991) call to "operationalize reflexivity into uncharted territory" (pp. 62-63) and Fine's (1994) invitation to "work the hyphens," we utilize ethnographic interview questions (Spradley, 1979) that are personal and conversational (Mies, 1983), narrative in both form and analytical approach (Gluck & Patai, 1991; Nielsen, 1990; Personal Narratives Group, 1989; Vaughan, 1997; Visweswaran, 1994), dialogic in the search for meaning (Bakhtin, 1981;

Jaworski, 1996), and autobiographical (Ashley, Gilmore, & Peters, 1994; Heilbrun, 1988; hooks, 1989, 1994, 1997; Steedman, 1989; Wear, 1996) by virtue of one's storied interpretation.

The theories supporting the inquiry methodologies allow us to explore and analyze how and why we live the moments and days of academic practices as we do. Going back and forth between our exchanged stories and journals, the week to week analysis of events and our responses and behaviors, and constant reading and rereadings of a broad range of literature, we become researchers of the researched. We question each other in ways that demand more detail and call for deeper explanations of why. We rely on each other to challenge the other's assumptions behind responses to events and to push easy rationalizations into "autobiographical theorizing" (Wear, 1996), not in a psychoanalytical sense, yet in a search for patterned behaviors that occur before reflective thought and extended analysis can interrupt/disrupt/change any action. We track our days and then expose the experiences for analysis.

For this paper, we sustained the dialogic, analytical approach and added the outside use of an objectified structural device (Senge, 1990) that permits a juxtaposition of a structural analysis of particular situations against women (two authors) thinking and behaving within the situations. The autobiographical examination of situational responses offer us a "discourse through which to theorize human agency...[seeing] human agents as producers of discourse who tend to heighten the contradictions" (Gilmore, 1994, p. 8). Believing that we are socially constructed agents, at the mercy of innermost thoughts, we recognize the complexity and the paradoxes inherent for women in patriarchal systems and situations as "the body of the text, the body of the narrator, the body of the narrated I, the cultural body, and the body politic all [merging] in skins and skeins of meaning" (Smith, 1994). By putting the female human response next to common academic/institutional situations, we have found a new mirror.

Data Sources

Data include journaling; field notes; notes taken during narrative, interview, and analysis sessions; extensive reading notes and memos; and memos of conversational exchanges with university colleagues. Data for the larger study was collected over a period of two and one-half years. Primary data for this paper extends over a fifteen month period.

Analytical Frame

We use Senge's (1990) work on organizations to provide us with a conceptual frame and a language to analyze the patterned behavior that we believe contributes to the paradoxical dilemmas of leadership in academia. Why do we explore the notion of lived paradoxes? We want to know if, as academic leaders, we are actually living a paradox; i. e., if we are achieving personal goals while actually maintaining a victimized status because of our patterned behavior. We wonder if we are changing this behavior or if the behavior of the past has just become more sophisticated, more refined, and more subtle. By uncovering these kinds of paradoxes, we can begin to know ourselves as we are beneath the exterior patterns of thinking and responding. Only with increased knowledge about how our everyday actions work for or against the best interests of a whole and healthy self can we interrupt actions that keep us trapped in victim positions.

Senge's archetypes offer us a way to look at situationalized behaviors through the perspective of systems thinking, a body of knowledge and tools that has been developed over the past fifty years. With systems thinking, one can see larger patterns and uncover the structure of our patterned behavior so that we can better facilitate effective changes.

Using Senge's Archetypes to Examine Situated Problems

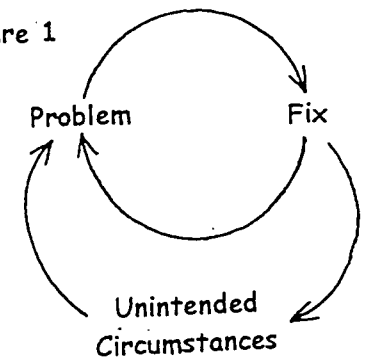
The archetypes give systems thinking a graphic form from which to visualize situations. In this section, we use three of Senge's archetypes (Fixes that Fail, Shifting the Burden,

Escalation) to initiate each analysis. We describe a situational scenario depicting specific leadership experiences and then look at the events through the structural components of the archetype. After a brief analysis of the situation, we discuss the lived paradoxes raised in each scenario. We begin with the archetype "Fixes that Fail."

Fixes that Fail: "A fix, effective in the short term, has unforeseen long-term consequences which may require even more use of the same fix" (Senge, 1990, p. 388; see Figure 1).

Scenario: A veteran male faculty and former dean seems to want to work with both Pat and Linda, as new leaders in his college. Moving from an inactive to a more involved role in his department since Linda became chair, he willingly assumes responsibility for work that draws on his expertise. Linda values his past experiences and willingness to collaborate with her to complete various tasks. He recently asked Pat to serve on a dissertation committee that he chairs.

Figure 1



Problem: While interacting with Linda and Pat in professional dialogue/discussions, he refers to them both with cute, silly names. Linda and Pat assume and interpret the name-calling as his attempt to maintain his position within a patriarchal hierarchy in which women are not accepted as equals and cannot be envisioned as leaders. Both women are frustrated with feeling demeaned yet feel constrained because of their acceptance of social expectations for new female

faculty/leaders. The tension builds as their acceptance of these socially constructed expectations gets in the way of building positive working relationships with well-established male faculty members.

The Fix We Use: When he continues to use the "cute" names in both formal and informal conversations, publicly and privately, Linda and Pat resort to habitualized behaviors from a lifetime of practice. Instead of proactively addressing what was for them an inequity issue, they chose silence, a silence that bespoke an acceptance of their sense of marginalization. Because they saw him as a power player in the "good old boys" network, silence for them represented a place of safety.

Unintended Consequences: Pat and Linda then harbor anger at feeling demeaned and being translated into little girls instead of being treated as women and academics.

Delay: By harboring the anger, Linda and Pat are unable to confront the situation. They hesitate to be assertive for fear of insulting him and losing his regenerated work ethic and positive attitude. They choose to diffuse the problem by using humor or by ignoring the name-calling, thus trying to relegate the anger to an insignificant status.

Linda and Pat's Analysis: Instead of confronting the behavior in terms of patriarchal power and gender, our acceptance of the "little girl" status and other ineffective response mechanisms sustain the problem. These kinds of response mechanisms initiate caretaking, which sustains the inequitable relationship. Thus, the fix fails because the name-calling does not work toward establishing equitable relationships. We fail, as well, to generate ways to achieve an equitable, working relationship in which respect can be developed. As long as we relied on past patterns of compliant pleasing, we were sustaining our oppressed player positions and supporting patriarchal hierarchy. Although we knew intellectually that with respect, power can be redefined

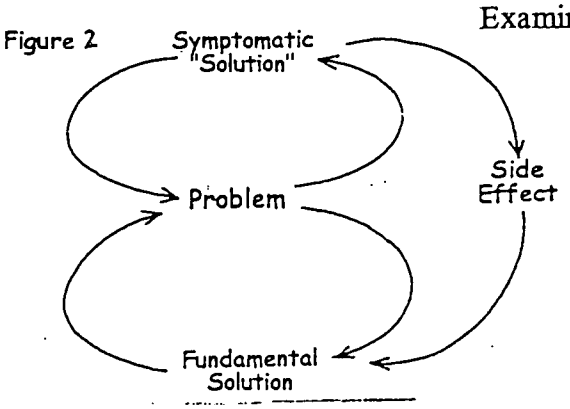
as *power with* instead of *power over* for both males and females, we behaved in ways that contradict the intellectual understanding.

Operating out of past experiences, we believe that a direct confrontation will exacerbate the inequitable relationship or destroy it completely. We think we have gained respect by being nice, pleasing, friendly—compliant. A new pattern will need honesty and a letting go of the fear that imagines consequences (his rejection of us or his work cessation). For us, the paradox and tension is accepting stereotypical behaviors when we are trying to build a working relationship and believing that we can build equitable relationship while holding onto repressed anger.

Shifting the Burden: "A short-term 'solution' is used to correct a problem, with seemingly positive immediate results. As this correction is used more and more, more fundamental corrective measures are used less and less. Over time, the capabilities for the fundamental solution may atrophy or become disabled, leading to even greater reliance on the symptomatic solution" (Senge, p. 381; see Figure 2).

Scenario: When the college restructured, Linda became chair of the newly combined departments of educational administration and foundations. Over a period of six months, Linda garnered support for the new configuration by having individual meetings with faculty to identify the strengths and vision each would bring to the new department. In full faculty meetings, Linda encouraged an airing of differences even when tempers and tensions erupted. Each perspective was gradually heard and respected. Her hard work seemed to be paying off. Linda believed she was holding a productive tension without asking for closure or consensus around every issue. She also believed that the newly formed department faculty were enjoying the processing of decisions in more democratic ways. Although individual agendas seemed to be waning, differences continued to surface and governance/power issues were sustained.

Figure 2



Problem: Disruptions continue to occur when departments merge, when power shifts, and when a new chair introduces a different style of leadership.

Symptomatic Solutions: Individuals strategize to reorganize personal or small-group power bases. Because of increased workload and external demands on the chair—exacerbated by university downsizing, more distancing occurs between the chair and faculty. As the distancing accelerates, Linda is unable to analyze the problem in terms of faculty needs and instead relies on past patterns of her individualistic perfectionism to complete reports on time and do the "best" work for the University.

Side Effects: The more the chair's attention is deflected from faculty needs, the more the faculty's neediness manifests itself. As both departments try to hold on to the former departmental configurations of power while trying to fit into new patterns of collaboration toward the new department's policies and governance, Linda becomes distracted from the process of identifying needs and chooses to focus on administrative tasks. Linda was unable to understand the struggle of the faculty to balance the structural disruption with the emotional needs that are concomitant with upheaval.

Fundamental Solution: Use a systems perspective that will initiate the notion of long-term solutions, educate participants, and build a long-range democratic process that values each department member. Using public forums and/or personal conferences to discuss "agendas"

keeps the discourse honest and moving toward constructing an organizational intelligence. In such a culture, each accepts their responsibility for the working of the group.

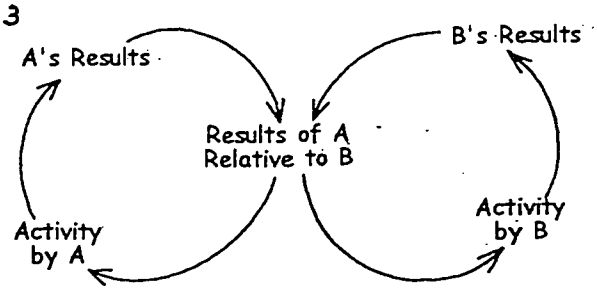
Linda's Analysis: Leadership is my field of expertise; I have held many leadership roles in the past and teach and research in this area. However, being naive about the complexity of the milieu of the new department, I was unaware of how to "fix" early disruptive power plays. Instead, I went into past patterns of perfectionism and caretaking to try to eliminate the feeling of being distanced by the faculty. I even defined some of the dilemmas of the department restructuring in terms of personal attacks and looked for additional symptomatic solutions (silencing, denial of power situation) instead of relying on fundamental solutions (pursuing honest discourse). I looked to my past patterns of caretaking and perfectionism and avoided the fundamental solution strategies. For example, I agreed to co-teach a course beyond my load to ease a faculty member's expressed stress. His workload lessened while mine increased. My stress led to a brief illness.

The paradox remains. Even though I intellectually understand my behavior for what it is, I return to the unhealthy behavior based on past patterns to avoid the groundlessness one experiences when trying to change "comfortable" routines. I fall prey to habitual short-term solutions that do not take into account long-term goals. Reshaping solutions takes skill in analysis, time, and patience.

Escalation: "Two people or organizations each see their welfare as depending on a relative advantage over the other. Whenever one side gets ahead, the other is more threatened, leading it to act more aggressively to reestablish its advantage.... Often each side sees its own aggressive behavior as a defensive response to the other's aggression" (Senge, 1990, p. 394; see Figure 3). Escalation resembles a cold-war mentality.

Scenario: After six months as chair, Linda was faced with a grievance. With new state licensure and national accreditation mandates demanding extensive paper work, she was again less available to the faculty for their day-to-day issues. Some of the faculty had issues that they were not bringing to departmental meetings. Since there were no indications at the department meetings that there were deep-seated problems, Linda was not sure how any issue could escalate to the level of a grievance procedure.

Figure 3



Problem: A grievance is filed against the department chair by members of the department who eight months earlier had campaigned for the election of this particular chairperson.

Activity by A (Department Members): Instead of trying to resolve problems at a departmental level, certain department member chose to use a grievance against the department chair to make a larger political statement against increased class size, lack of secretarial service, and administrative interference in curriculum matters.

A's Results: One-third of the department filed a grievance.

Results of A's Activity relative to B: Linda feels personal betrayal since these particular faculty had initially asked Linda to become department chair. Linda's frustration rises when her time and energy must now be spent on grievance minutia that distracts her from larger goals of the

department. This comes at a time when there is an enormous amount of work to be done to blend the two departments and to meet state and university obligations.

Activity by B (Linda): Linda's initial reaction is to feel victimized by the grievance. She has never worked in a union environment and feels threatened by the process itself. She turns to other department chairs and support faculty outside the college and university to help her process the dilemma. These multiple interpretations of the situation helped her to reexamine her initial feelings of betrayal and victimization and allowed her to initiate a different kind of response.

B's Results: Linda became proactive by going to each faculty member who filed the grievance and sharing honest feelings about how the grievance affected her at a personal level. She then initiated honest conversation about the resolution of specific grievance issues.

Linda's Analysis: Stepping back to see the bigger picture, I was able to first address my emotions honestly and then take actions to stop the escalation. The face-to-face conversations seem to diffuse the tensions, break the silence surrounding the filing of the grievance, and precipitate a resolution at the pre-grievance hearing.

The paradox comes when a new leadership style which considers itself to be participative interrupts entrenched practices that are embedded in cultural thinking. A new leader needs to spend time and energy building open communication and the art of active listening. When energy is not spent in these kinds of activities, the leader loses touch with the amount of escalation that is going on around her. In this case, the leader's energies were escalating around state and university mandates that were not the issues that intersected with the faculty needs.

It seems that the success found in this particular scenario is predicated on the way in which there was open communication and active listening about the personal and professional needs of each person involved, including myself. I found myself able to do this after the

grievance, but as I asked questions of myself and the staff about what precipitated the grievance, I learned that I had been doing neither before the grievance. Since the grievance, I am initiating alternative kinds of practice to continue building a culture of open communications and honest discourse. To date, this seems to be working.

Discussion

By using Senge's archetypes as an analytical devise, it becomes more clear that the individual sets a system in place by his/her perceptions and behaviors. One's perceptions and behaviors seem to set up an underlying structure for the sending and receiving of all information. In this research we were able to see *when* and *how* our behavior rather than the behavior of others influenced the system. We could then understand how we contributed to the very dilemmas that were keeping us trapped in victimized patterns of behavior. We were surprised to find out how much our own thinking and behaviors were generating our lived paradoxes.

In the subtlest of ways, over a lifetime, we, as educated, high-achieving women have worked to master the art of perfecting ourselves in order to be accepted into patriarchal worlds of institutions; i.e., marriages and churches. By placing all of the responsibility for success on a compliant self that must be perfect, we become the "perfect" victim for the institution—willing to overwork, to over-care in ways that nurture unhealthy relationships, to give up authentic goals for excellence in our work for lesser goals that please others and keep us in the "nice" collegial category. Thus, *we create the paradoxes we live in.*

For us, all of the paradoxes rest on our predilection for perfectionism, which Woodman (1982) discusses at length as a pathological addiction. Perfectionism becomes the deeper paradox that concretizes ideals and searches for external approval. When we succumb to perfectionism,

we lose the flow of the optimal experience (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), the genuine self-development that takes us toward self-actualization, and the satisfaction that comes from good work. Instead, we choose the internalized, past patterns of behaviors that operate out of survival mentality and sustain the constant stress of fear—the fear of not being perfect in everything (Wesson & Hauschildt, 1997a, 1997b). Stress and fear prevent the kind of development that can interrupt and change the adolescent thinking of inadequacy, which ignites perfectionism as one route to adequacy (Gilligan, 1982; Pipher, 1994).

The structural analysis in this paper has helped us locate how the patterns of victim behavior come from our insistence on returning to past perfectionistic strategies. In each scenario, our perfectionist, good-girl patterns take us away from becoming effective leaders. By foregrounding "nice" behavior in the face of patriarchal patterns of little-girl name-calling, Linda and Pat sustain the adolescent behavior of both parties and the unequal relationship between academic colleagues. Linda slows the process of building a democratic organization in her department by becoming a caregiver who feeds into her own feelings of inadequacy as well as into those of her faculty. Attention to faculty needs through honest sharing of feelings surrounding each situational tension helped the group move toward building a democratic community and diffused the power-victim games.

Conclusions

We accepted leadership positions to learn more about ourselves. Much of the learning has come through the uncovering of painful memories we thought we had previously resolved. By accepting the risks of leadership positions, we were able to experience greater disruption in our personal and professional thinking. Although some of these experiences pulled us to places where we often did not want to go and some of the uncoverings are "not very flattering, [yet] all

of our experiences form an essential part of our developmental path [and]...as I look back, I am less judgmental" (Jaworski, 1996, p. xi). We are honestly not the same persons we were a year ago.

We have learned that by looking at the underlying pattern and structure of our behavior, we can see the boundaries we set for ourselves. When we see the structure, we can begin to free ourselves from unseen forces and ultimately master the ability to work with and change the very structures that we create which limit us.

We find that we feel a constant tension when we are breaking patterns that are comfortable to us. And it feels somewhat dangerous when we are crossing boundaries that we "should not" be crossing as good girls. We find support in Chopra's (1989) words:

> Boundaries created in silence are the most confining. . . . Demolishing one's own boundaries does not make the relative world vanish; it adds another dimension of reality to it – reality becomes unbounded. When the walls are down, the world can expand. And that, according to the rishis, makes all the difference between a world that could be a heaven and one that becomes a hell....Courage can be gradually built into oneself by practice. (p. 205)

We know that the kind of developmental path we have chosen requires a willing interest to be disrupted so that the learning can take place. It also requires a willingness to accept the mantle of solitude, reading, and thoughtful reflection with others as a way of life.

We are more committed to practicing a transformative journey by heading into contradictions with courage, by seeking experiences that liberate us from marginalized positions, and by moving toward the healing and strength needed to work against inequities both inside and outside of ourselves. One situation at a time.

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