# Articles

## Women's Ways of Collaboration:
## A Case Study in Proposal Development

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## Author's Note

## Abstract

Research has shown that women may perform actions such as leading, communicating, or working on a team differently than men perform them. For example, female leaders may have a more inclusive rather than authoritarian style. The American university is an institution designed by men for men. Women are increasingly represented as students and faculty in higher education, but are they able to succeed in this structure? Meyerson and Ely (2003) have provided an approach that could change the "masculine" structure. An examination of the work conducted by a group at Idaho State University as they developed a proposal for funds from the National Science Foundation ADVANCE grant program reveals examples of the theories of women's ways of working, Meyerson and Ely's approach, and how this model could be incorporated into the work conducted by research administrators. This case study examined how this group (six women and one man) worked together, comparing the work to current theories on women's communication and leadership. This knowledge is valuable for research administrators as they work to assist faculty with development of proposals for external funds, work that many faculty are finding is now a requirement of their career in academia.

*Keywords:* Grant proposal writing, faculty development, women in higher education, female faculty.

## Introduction

American universities were designed by men for men. Structures such as tenure accommodated the lifestyles of men, who usually had women at home to care for them, be it a wife, mother, sister, or housekeeper (Hamilton, 2002). A work ethic grounded in long hours of conducting research, teaching, or writing papers was the norm in the "male" university (Ostrow, 2002). The "ideal faculty worker puts in long hours and demonstrates high levels of effort and commitment to the job" (Helfat, 2002, p. 330). This "unbending nature of the American workplace, configured

around a male career model established in the 19th century" is a custom that higher education still clings to today (Mason & Goulden, 2002, p. 11), as indicated by the work of several authors. Park (1996) posited that "A gendered division of labor exists within (as outside) the contemporary academy wherein research is implicitly deemed 'men's work' and is explicitly valued, whereas teaching and service are characterized as 'women's work' and explicitly devalued" (p. 4). Gunter and Stambach (2003) stated, "Historians and anthropologists point out that academic science has typically been a male-dominated field, and that it continues to be organized in ways that reflect its gendered history" (p. 24). Even research methodology has been said to follow a masculine framework (Harding & Norberg, 2005).

This model was useful when males were the only faculty and students in higher education. Although historically the structure of the university was male-oriented, women did become students and faculty members. As women earned degrees, they became qualified to hold faculty positions (Nidiffer & Bashaw, 2001) and slowly entered every field, some with more difficulty than others. Before 1900, many women who graduated with science-related degrees found themselves in home economics departments (Nidiffer & Bashaw, 2001). By 2003, across all types of institutions, women comprised 38% of full-time faculty (Forrest Cataldi, Fahimi, & Bradburn, 2005).

Throughout the twentieth century, the number of women in higher education has ebbed and flowed, increasing in the 1920s, decreasing in the 1950s as men returned from fighting in World War II, and increasing again with the women's liberation movement and associated shifts in societal norms and values in the 1960s (Nidiffer & Bashaw, 2001). More recently, over the past 30 years, there have been improvements and gains for women at all levels of education. The number of women entering higher education has risen steadily since the 1970s, increasing by 13% between 1989 and 1999. In fact, in 1999, more women than men earned associate, bachelor's and master's degrees (National Science Foundation [NSF], 2000). More women have also entered graduate school, and at a higher rate than men. For example, the number of male full-time graduate students increased by 18% from 1989 to 1999, while the number of full-time female graduate students increased by 59% (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2002).

Just as college/university gender-specific enrollment trends have evolved over time, according to reports completed by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), the number of female faculty in higher education has also grown. In 1974-75, women made up 22.5% of all faculty at U.S. institutions of higher education. That percentage rose to 33.8% in 1997-98, 36% in 2000-01, and 39% in 2005-06 (AAUP, 2001; AAUP, 2006).

While the number of female faculty has and continues to increase, it is doing so more at lower level faculty ranks and institutions. In 2005-06 women made up 51% of the faculty at associate degree-granting colleges, 42% of faculty at baccalaureate and master's degree institutions, and 34% of faculty at doctoral-level institutions (AAUP, 2006). Women made up 46% of assistant professors, 38% of associate professors, 23% of full professors, and women held 51% of unranked faculty positions in universities and colleges (AAUP, 2004). Further, according to AAUP (2006), more male faculty than female faculty had tenure. Table 1 summarizes discrepancies in several areas.

Table 1

*Comparison of Significant Issues in Higher Education, Based on Gender*

| Issue | Women | Men |
|---|---|---|
| Number of students enrolled in higher education, fall 2002 | 57% | 43% |
| Number of students graduating with bachelor's degree, 2003 | 57% | 43% |
| Number students enrolled in higher education since 1981 | 54% | 46% |
| Full-time faculty, fall 2003 | 38% | 62% |
| Faculty with spouse in academia | 49% | 12% |
| Full professors, 2003 | 24% | 76% |
| Assistant professors, 2003 | 45% | 55% |

As noted, there have been an ever-increasing number of women in higher education, as students and faculty, but not in the higher ranks of academia. While many reasons have been put forth to explain this, could it be that the male-focused system does not serve women as well as men? Perhaps it is not conducive to the advancement of women. Perhaps, as stated by Beaman-Smith and Placier (1996), "Women in academe are initiates who wandered into a ritual designed for men" (p. 3).

## Women's Ways

Research has been conducted looking at "women's ways" of learning, communicating, and leading, among other issues. In *Women's Ways of Knowing*, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) theorized that measures of psychological development were based on male models as only males were used in many studies of the past. They studied women's communication systems and development patterns to determine "women's ways of knowing." Gilligan (1982) in her work entitled, *In a Different Voice*, posited that women do communicate differently from men and develop morally and emotionally in dissimilar ways.

Literature on women's ways of working reveals that women, in general, tend to work in a collaborative fashion. Dickens and Sagaria (1997) reported that "collaboration is a common practice among feminist scholars" (p. 50). Women, in their study of collaborative relationships between female faculty members, sought out close relationships in their professional lives and felt that such relationships were a support in their work. The "participants consistently described their desire to function as democratic, equal partners rather than as hierarchical team leaders" (p. 53). Etzkowitz, Kemelgor, and Uzzi (2000) wrote, "younger up-and-coming junior and newly tenured women faculty members emphasize a more relational, collaborative approach within their research groups" (p. 147). Community is important for these new female faculty members, as is emphasizing the strengths of group members. Gunter and Stambach (2003) conducted research looking at the ways women and men science faculty perceived and experienced the promotion process in higher education. Men describe this process as "a game to be played and won," while women see it as "a balancing act" between their professional and personal lives (p. 40). They found that women's personal lives, their families and domestic duties, affect women in their quest for promotion, while men's personal lives do not impact their promotion efforts.

In 1990 Helgesen wrote *The Female Advantage: Women's Ways of Leadership*, which described her review of female leadership styles. Similar to the work of Belenky et al., Helgesen reviewed a study on leadership styles that used only male leaders, then expanded this to an examination of women as leaders. She found differences between female and male leaders. Female leaders saw interruptions in their schedules by employees as time to show they cared, to help them, to be involved with employees. Men saw these only as interruptions in their schedule. Women scheduled time to share information while men had trouble sharing information. Women appeared to be better managers than men did.

Reviewing behaviors of female leaders can provide another picture of women's ways of leading. Values associated with female leaders include:

> a willingness to look at how action will affect other people instead of simply asking 'what's in it for me?,' a concern for the wider needs of the community, a disposition to draw on personal, private sphere experience when dealing in the public realm,... and an outsider's impatience with rituals and symbols of status that divide people who work together and so reinforce hierarchies. (Helgesen, 1990, p. xx-xxi)

Doyle and Smith (2001) asserted that women as leaders focus on relationships more than on task-oriented behavior. Chliwniak (1997) concluded that female leaders have a tendency to include everyone in group work and decision-making.

Some researchers have stated that there is even a difference in the way females and males conduct research. Feminist research, in particular, states that a woman's perspective on life gives her a perspective different from a man's, when doing scientific research. These researchers state that science is "masculine," which precludes women from being successful in these fields. Harding (2005) contended that women and men conduct research differently because women will ask questions from a female viewpoint. Blickenstaff (2005) wrote that Harding "argues that science should be done from the perspective of women, because their position outside the dominant social order (as mothers and caregivers) endows women with a more objective view of the world than men have" (p. 382).

If women do behave differently from men in these areas, how is that difference acknowledged? Meyerson and Ely (2003) wrote of three approaches that are often taken when women are found to "not fit in." They labeled the first approach "fix the women" (p. 130). In this approach the reason women are not in roles of leadership (or high-ranking faculty) is that they "lack the requisite skills" (p. 130). By training women and providing them with skills to fit into the current system, they will succeed. As Meyerson and Ely point out, this approach merely makes women assimilate into current structures, conforming to rules and structures that may not be the most beneficial for them. A second approach was called "create equal opportunity" (p. 131). "Rather than fix the women, the approach to change is to fix the policies and practices that have blocked women's advancement" (p. 131). This includes policies on hiring, promoting, and dividing resources. While this approach has been of benefit to women, it is still not the solution, according to Meyerson and Ely. Women may not use the programs and new policies as they fear backlash and being stigmatized for using them. Those in power may indeed feel women have an unfair advantage with policies changed for them. In the end, this approach does not

providing lasting resolution to the problem. "Celebrate the feminine" is Meyerson and Ely's third approach, in which differences are celebrated, not eliminated. Women are different from men and those differences should be allowed. Diversity should be valued and women should be allowed to do what they are good at. Unfortunately, this approach can keep women in roles, such as "housekeeping activities" (p. 135). "This approach may simply create and justify an ever more sophisticated form of sex segregation at work" (p. 135).

How then, should organizations deal with the very real fact that women are not advancing as quickly and as far as men? Meyerson and Ely (2003) outlined a two-pronged approach, called "using difference to make a difference" (p. 136). The first prong is "the eradication of structural barriers that have excluded women - all kinds of women -- and many men as well, who have been traditionally underrepresented in leadership and other organizational roles" (p. 136). The second prong "requires a shift in emphasis from simply adding different perspectives to the traditional mix to using different perspectives to transform the traditional mix itself" (p. 137). Meyerson and Ely called for a change in the definition of the norm, thus allowing women, and others from underrepresented groups to fit into the norm. "People must be able to use their cultural identity differences -- which give rise to different life experiences, knowledge, and insights -- to inform alternative views about their work and how best to accomplish it" (p. 138). As the make-up of the workplace changes, administrators in all fields, including higher education and research administration, must be prepared to look for these different perspectives and put them into place to encourage a culture change to effectively use the talents of everyone.

Research administrators will benefit by using Meyerson and Ely's model as they work with faculty. Part of the research administration function is to assist faculty with the development of grant proposals for funding. The following case study examines a "different perspective" in proposal development.

### Case Study

Idaho State University (ISU)  is a research-intensive institution, with 641 faculty -- 271 women and 370 men. There are 49 department chairs at ISU, 13 (27%) of whom are women, many in traditionally female-dominated fields such as nursing and education. Women make up 19% of the full professors, 49% of the associate professors, 52% of the assistant professors, 41% of the instructors, and 58% of the lecturers employed at ISU. Of the 248 tenured faculty, 30% are women. The president's cabinet, a group of 13 members, contains two women - the Associate Provost for Institutional Planning and Effectiveness and a student-elected student representative. Out of  11 deans, five are women - four permanent and one interim (ISU AAUP Report, 2006). Men make up the majority of the ISU faculty who submit proposals for external funds (personal observation, ISU reports). Individuals on campus expressed concern about these demographics, but it was not until 2005, when a group of faculty and staff (six women and one man) met to work on a National Science Foundation (NSF) ADVANCE grant, that a concerted effort would be made to change this picture.

The goal of the NSF ADVANCE grant program is to "increase the representation and advancement of women in academic science and engineering careers, thereby contributing to the development of a more diverse science and engineering workforce" (NSF, March 2007). Based on the information described

above, the group felt that ISU was a perfect site for an ADVANCE grant. The six months of work on this proposal serves as an example of "women's ways of collaborating."

The research administrator in the Office of Research spoke with a female friend, a faculty member at ISU, about developing an ISU application for an ADVANCE grant. This conversation led to the discovery that there were three other women who were interested in pursuing a grant. These women, representing Math, Biological Sciences, Economics, and the Research Office, decided to develop a proposal. Two more faculty members were invited to work on this project, a female from Pharmaceutical Sciences and a male from Psychology. The faculty were at the associate professor level and above. All members of the team had been at ISU for at least eight years. The members of this team were feminists with a common goal, advancement of female faculty at ISU. As stated by Dickens and Sagaria (1997), "collaboration is a common practice among feminist scholars." A schedule of weekly meetings was arranged and coordinated by the Office of Research staff member.

Much of the time during the first meetings was spent brainstorming. The group shared stories and anecdotes about the status of women faculty at ISU and discussed previously funded ADVANCE grant projects. Several team members had been in contact or involved with ADVANCE grant activities at other universities, and they shared their experiences. Team members had knowledge and expertise in different areas. The Research Administrator was working on her dissertation, which focused on women faculty in higher education; she could contribute to the literature review. The associate dean of the College of Arts and Sciences had access to university data needed to write the proposal. After several meetings, the project began to take shape and proposal development began.

The RFP was carefully read and assignments were made, with everyone contributing ideas. Weekly reports were made on accomplishments and discussion continued. The associate dean was designated the PI, but meetings were led by whoever had the expertise or information for the week's topic. Everyone shared leading discussions, taking notes, and being in charge. Sharing leadership is a trait female leaders often exhibit (Chliwniak, 1997). Team members, who worked together and sometimes saw each other socially, encountered each other during the week in other settings and continued the discussions, reporting back to the group with new ideas. Conversation occurred not only about the proposal and project, but also about personal issues. People shared their lives and had fun while they worked, which women will often do (Dickens & Sangaria, 1997). Each person in the group had both a personal and professional commitment to advance women at ISU. Incorporating the personal into the development of the proposal was only natural, as is often the case when women work together (Gunter & Stambach, 2003).

There came a point when weekly, one-hour meetings did not provide enough time to pull the proposal together. All group members had full-time jobs as faculty and/or administrators and lives outside the university which limited the time available to meet. The team decided a retreat was necessary to give them an uninterrupted block of time to work on the proposal. The Office of Research at ISU committed funds for this retreat, allowing the group to get away from campus and to bring in a consultant who was active in the field of women in science and familiar with other ADVANCE grant programs. The two-day retreat was held in West Yellowstone, MT, two hours from ISU.

Discussions and brainstorming continued, refining what had already been planned. Time was taken for dinner and a short hike in Yellowstone Park, but the conversation in any setting usually drifted back to the project. The personal became the professional and vice-versa (Gunter & Stambach, 2003). A solid plan and a name for the project (WeLEAD - Women Empowered to Learn, Educate, Advance and Develop) were the result of a successful weekend.

With concrete, workable plans in hand, the actual writing of the proposal started two and a half months before the due date. Most of the writing was done by two or three members of the team, but all contributed by making tables, gathering and analyzing data, and proofreading. In January 2006 the proposal was submitted. Not only were the team members looking forward to a positive response, but administrators and staff who had been peripherally involved were also excited about the project. In August 2006 ISU learned that the proposal had been funded.

## Discussion

This proposal and subsequent award were not the result of work by a lone faculty member sitting in her office, single-handedly developing a project. It was a team effort, a reflection of what could be accomplished by working together to accomplish a common goal; a method of working that women often use (Rosser & Lane, 2002). No one person was the authoritative leader; all contributed to the leadership of the group, in the manner that women often conduct a group (Chliwniak, 1997). The group worked together professionally, but also developed personal relationships, another "trait" of women working together (Dickens & Sagaria, 1997). Research showed that women do want to work collaboratively when writing grant proposals and that they see teams and mentors as a support when developing proposals (Easterly, 2006).

Use of a group method may not be successful for all projects, but, can provide what Meyerson and Ely (2003) called a "different perspective" that may be successful for men and women, especially as more funding agencies make interdisciplinary research a priority. By becoming aware of various ways of proposal writing, staff in offices of research and offices of sponsored programs can provide a multitude of ways to work with faculty and to encourage interdisciplinary work. Research administrators do not need to be major players in the proposal (as was the case in this study), but can take an active role in this type of process, without requiring a great deal of extra resources. Research and Sponsored Programs offices can help by contacting faculty whom have similar interests, arranging meetings so they can discuss ideas, providing secretarial help at such meetings, gathering institutional data so that other team members can concentrate on the research aspect of the proposal, and working with the team on proposal development. It may be possible to provide funds for time away from work and family life to write proposals; maybe not a retreat in West Yellowstone, but perhaps lunch at a Saturday work session.

One of the measures often used in tenure and promotion decisions is the number of proposals written and awarded for external funds. Female faculty in higher education do not submit as many proposals for external funds as do male faculty (Boyer & Cockriel, 1999; personal observation, 1996-2004), which may in turn negatively impact their survival and success in academia in terms of tenure and promotions. Easterly (2006) found that working with someone on proposal development is important to women. Fifty-seven percent of the participants in

her study felt that lack of a collaborator was a strong to moderate barrier in the process of writing proposals for external funds. Sixty-five percent of the participants felt that both a *lack of a peer network* and *lack of a mentor* were also strong to moderate barriers to writing grant proposals. Participants indicated the following were strong to moderate supports when writing proposals for external funds: 50%, *a network of peers*, 63% *collaborators at my university*, and 60% *mentor is a support*. Research administrators must become aware of different ways women and other underrepresented groups work and examine ways to incorporate those practices into assisting faculty. Higher education must no longer be a "ritual designed for men" but a setting designed for all.

## Conclusion

Research has shown that women write fewer grant proposals for external funds than do men and that proposal writing is often taken into account in tenure and promotion decisions (Boyer & Cockriel, 1999; Vesilind, 2000). If the trend to strongly encourage or even require faculty to secure external funds continues, facilitating faculty efforts to write proposals for external funds generally, and female faculty efforts in particular, will require changes in the university policy, practice, structure, and culture to provide a more facilitative and ultimately level playing field for all faculty.

August and Waltman (2004) wrote, "It is not enough merely to recruit and hire more women; once hired, women faculty must be retained by fostering a satisfying work environment in which they can perform well and prosper" (p. 178). Being aware of women's ways of working, as well as conducting further research on this issue, will help foster a satisfying work environment in which women faculty, as well as male faculty, can and will "perform well and prosper."

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