

Feminism and mentoring of graduate students

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Version Post-print/Accepted manuscript

Citation (published version) Humble, Á. M., Solomon, C. R., Allen, K. R., Blaisure, K. R. and Johnson, M. P. (2006). Feminism and Mentoring of Graduate Students*. *Family Relations*, 55: 2-15. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3729.2006.00352.x

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Humble, A. M., Solomon, C. R., Allen, K. R., Blaisure, K. R., & Johnson, M. P. (2006). Feminism and mentoring of graduate students. *Family Relations*, 55(1), 2-15. (In SPECIAL COLLECTION: Educating a new generation of family scholars: Current issues and trends in graduate education) doi:10.1111/j.1741-3729.2006.00352.x

This is an author-generated post-print of the article- please refer to published version for page numbers

See also:

Humble, A. M. (2006). A note from the guest coordinator. *Family Relations*, 55(1), 1. (In SPECIAL COLLECTION: Educating a new generation of family scholars: Current issues and trends in graduate education) doi:10.1111/j.1741-3729.2006.00351.x
(post-print version not available)

Abstract

A small body of mentoring literature exists, but how mentoring relates to feminist supervision of graduate students has not been explicitly addressed. Because mentoring typically socializes individuals into a preexisting structure that feminist scholars may be challenging, critiquing, and attempting to change, important considerations arise for feminist mentoring. Three established feminist educators' stories of mentoring are presented. Commonalities and concerns are identified, and implications for graduate pedagogy are presented.

Key words: feminism, graduate studies, mentoring, pedagogy

*This paper is based on a symposium presented at the Annual Conference of the National Council on Family Relations, Vancouver, BC, Canada, November 2003. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Áine M. Humble, Department of Family Studies and Gerontology, Mount Saint Vincent University, 166 Bedford Highway, Halifax, Nova Scotia, B3M 2J6, Canada. E-mail: aine.humble@msvu.ca

Feminism and Mentoring of Graduate Students

Feminist pedagogy in family studies is concerned with women's experiences in families (Allen, 1988); family diversity on the basis of characteristics such as structure, race, ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation (Thompson, 1995; Walker, 1993); and continuing imbalances of power within families on the basis of gender and other characteristics (Allen & Baber, 1992). Understanding how the social structure affects personal experiences is key, as is working toward changing unjust social structures (Walker, Martin, & Thompson, 1988). Feminist pedagogical approaches such as reflexivity, self-disclosure, and classroom dialogue (e.g., Blaisure & Koivunen, 2003; Thompson) have been explicated, and various substantive resources have been described (e.g., Baber & Murray, 2001; Walker). However, this scholarship has focused primarily on undergraduate education and such discourse may not be easily or necessarily transferable to the graduate experience (Kameen, 1995). Graduate education occurs in smaller classrooms, and in particular, through one-on-one relationships in which professors are "driven by contradictory combinations of personal and institutional desires" while students oscillate between the "originality and conformity" of their work (Kameen, pp. 449 - 450). The intense and complex nature of such exchanges sets the stage for mentoring relationships to develop. Yet, faculty members do not necessarily know how to mentor (Johnson, 2002; Luna & Cullen, 1998), and graduate students may not have the opportunity to think intentionally about professional issues involved in long-term graduate student-faculty relationships (Johnson & Nelson, 1999).

Moreover, although a small body of literature exists on mentoring, very little of it focuses on mentoring from a feminist perspective. The concept and process of mentoring raises interesting issues for feminist educators because mentoring is intended to socialize individuals into a preexisting environment (Cochran-Smith & Paris, 1995), intentionally or unintentionally

reproducing systems of inequality (Colley, 2001). The purpose of this article is to explore aspects of feminist mentoring relevant to family studies graduate study. We use three feminist educators' stories of mentoring and being mentored to elucidate pivotal issues and challenges. We discuss their experiences, addressing themes of (a) self-disclosure, (b) power, (c) resistance to feminism, and (d) social change and advocacy. We extend these themes with recommendations for feminist graduate pedagogy, and provide a brief annotated bibliography of feminist research resources.

Mentoring

Upon entrance into a graduate program, students are assigned an advisor. Although the same person may become a mentor, that is not necessarily the case (Peyton, Marton, Perkins, & Dougherty, 2001). Advising merely ensures that students meet the requirements for graduation (Cronan-Hillix, Gensheimer, Cronan-Hillix, & Davidson, 1986; Peyton et al.), whereas mentoring involves a personal relationship in which a faculty member guides, advises, supports, and challenges the graduate student toward the “development of a strong professional identity and clear professional competence” (Johnson, 2002, p. 88).

In Kram's (1985) seminal work, she suggested that mentoring consisted of two functions: *career*, preparing individuals for a career; and *psychosocial*, providing emotional support. Mentoring research in a variety of contexts supports the existence of these two main functions. In academia, for example, involving students in the research process and educating them about unwritten academic rules meet the career functions of mentoring, whereas providing emotional support to students (Anderson & Louis, 1994; Ellis, 1992) addresses a psychosocial aspect. Role modeling also is important, as faculty members model the “role” graduate students are expected to learn (Blankemeyer & Weber, 1996; Peyton et al., 2001).

Having an academic mentor appears to improve students' performance. Graduate

students who had a mentor had higher numbers of publications, conference presentations, and overall research productivity when compared to students who did not have a mentor (Cronan-Hillix et al., 1986). Such outcomes have important implications for obtaining academic jobs after graduation and potentially for career success. Psychosocial support also has increased students' satisfaction with their graduate experience (Tenenbaum, Crosby, & Gliner, 2001).

A small amount of unpublished literature exists on mentoring in our field (e.g., Umana & Downs, 1998), but how mentoring relates to supervision of graduate students has not been explicitly addressed. One exception is Blankemeyer and Weber (1996), who found that mentees and mentors viewed some aspects of the mentoring relationship differently. Overall, the literature on graduate student mentoring is lacking, and more specifically, there is no literature on feminist mentoring of family studies graduate students.

Feminist Mentoring

An issue for feminist mentors is the paradoxical nature of feminist mentoring. On one hand, feminist educators question mentoring relationships, recognizing that because such relationships socialize individuals into preexisting systems, they can assist in maintaining systems of inequality (Colley, 2001). In academia, maintenance of inequality can be seen in noninclusive, noncontextual research (e.g., inattention given to family diversity); hierarchical, impersonal interactions between faculty and students; and lack of attention given to how individuals' personal lives intersect with their work/school experiences. Feminists work to change these aspects of academia and have challenged traditional mentoring relationships that reinforce such facets of inequality (Colley). On the other hand, feminist mentors of graduate students still must prepare students to work and succeed in academia, a setting maintained by an inevitable degree of inequality. Thus it is important to consider how feminists mentor graduate

students to enter into the very status quo they are challenging (Collins, 1990; Stalker, 1994).

Given this paradox, the career, psychosocial, and role modeling functions in feminist mentoring may be distinct from nonfeminist mentoring. For example, the basic tenets of feminist family studies takes students well beyond the nuts and bolts of the scientific research method, necessitating a more complex mentoring relationship that involves elements of a feminist research agenda such as: (a) social construction of gender as a central concept, (b) commitment to gender equality and change, (c) centrality of women's lives and experiences, and (d) questioning ideology around "family" (Thompson & Walker, 1995). Thus, because of the necessity to incorporate feminist principles and theories into standard research training, feminist mentoring may have an additional purpose, compared to nonfeminist mentoring.

As with any type of mentoring relationship, feminist mentoring does not consist solely of the analytical work involved in a thesis or dissertation. It extends into encouragement and nurturance of the graduate students' immersion in the professional environment and into the personal lives of graduate students and faculty members, both at home and in academia. Feminist mentoring thus may include role modeling on how to blend the personal and professional. In particular, feminist mentoring may pay careful attention to issues of power in the psychosocial and role modeling functions of mentoring to demonstrate what it means to live in an authentic way as a feminist (i.e., a feminist in one's professional life *and* one's personal life). Tom (1997) described the "frame of the deliberate relationship," in which a faculty member "acknowledge[s] the responsibilities of being in a position of authority in relation to students while working with them to challenge, question, and redistribute power to the fullest extent possible" (p. 4).

Attention to the personal lives of both individuals in the mentoring relationship through disclosure might address some of these power issues. For instance, faculty disclosure of certain

aspects of their personal life allows for more genuineness in relationships with their students (Tom, 1997). Through such presence, students realize, too, that “their indigestion, children, doubts, and difficulties are not major flaws” (p. 18).

Summary and Questions

Feminist mentoring entails attending to its paradoxical nature, incorporation of feminist theory in research, and the blending of the professional and personal. Yet, a number of questions emerge from a consideration of the various elements of feminism as they apply to pedagogy and relationships between mentors and graduate students. For example, how do feminist mentors teach about feminist research, and does the process of feminist mentoring change depending on the role of the person providing feminist guidance? We also wonder how feminist educators use personal disclosure. Do they feel that sharing aspects of their lives is an integral part of feminist mentoring? Finally, how do feminist mentors reconcile having to prepare students for the rigors of academia with their efforts to change the status quo? To help make sense of these questions, we turn now to the stories of three established university educators.

Method

This paper is based on a 2003 National Council on Family Relations conference symposium in which four feminist scholars talked about their experiences of graduate mentorship, focusing on how feminism guided those experiences. The first two authors invited these individuals to participate in the symposium because they had been outspoken advocates of using feminist theory in their work and integral in developing feminist family studies research. Individuals also were invited with a view toward diversity in backgrounds and experiences. Three of the four individuals—Katherine Allen, Karen Blaisure, and Michael Johnson—provided shorter written versions of their presentations for this paper. They have worked with graduate

students for 21, 13, and 32 years respectively. Katherine and Karen have published articles about feminist pedagogy, and Karen was mentored by Katherine during her PhD. Karen's story was solicited to provide a student's perspective. Michael's story provided a male feminist's perspective.

We kept contributors' stories as intact as possible, using reflexive narrative because it is helpful in providing insights into social process and is often identified as a feminist method (Fonow & Cook, 1991; Lather, 1991; Thompson, 1992). This approach follows a feminist commitment to constructed knowledge—knowledge that is informed by theory and individuals' personal experiences, and also allows for “complexity. . . and contradiction” in experience (Thompson, p. 10), which we theorized were important components of feminist mentoring. Additionally, the sharing of educators' narratives is seen as critical in teacher education (Connelly & Clandinin, 1989; Kainan, 2002). What is presented here is an oral history, a type of life history that focuses on one aspect of a person's life (Atkinson, 2002). Such narratives typically highlight “the most important influences, experiences, circumstances, issues, themes, and lessons” of what is being recounted (Atkinson, p. 125).

The themes that follow the stories emerged as the first two authors, discussants for the conference symposium, combined their comments regarding patterns among the three pieces. We were interested in whether there was a mentoring that feminists could “claim” as feminist, or if feminist mentoring was just good mentoring in practice. Thus, analysis focused specifically on what aspects of the mentoring being described were connected to feminist principles. The validity or trustworthiness of the analysis (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002) was supported throughout the process by feedback from the three educators who provided their stories, also authors on this paper. Thus, trustworthiness occurred in two ways: (a) via the

provision of opportunities for the three educators to recognize and confirm (or disconfirm) how the themes “resonated” with their own experiences (Atkinson, 2002), and (b) through the application of their feminist lens to the analysis (i.e., did the themes fit with what they felt was feminist pedagogy?).

The Three Stories

Katherine’s Story

My vision of feminist mentoring is to put the student in the center and to help draw out the student’s ideas, abilities, and talents. I believe there is a shining star in every person. We work together to elicit, nurture, and polish the gem of knowledge.

Strategy. My strategy of feminist mentoring is to use the skills and resources at hand, just as we do in feminist research (Fonow & Cook, 1991), feminist mothering (Ruddick, 1982), and other feminist practice. As a mentor, I notice and handle with care the student’s often contradictory needs. As a feminist scholar, I try to be conscious, authentic, and alive in the moment—a full presence, not a fake. In addition to standard scholarly practices of research and theorizing, I rely on reflexive methods—storytelling, intuition, metaphor, and serendipity. When talking with a student, I use my humanity, my spirituality, and my commitment to social justice to connect across our differences because my goal is transformation (hooks, 1994). If I say something that rings true in our interaction, my skin erupts in goose bumps. I share my epiphany, and try to create safe spaces where students can recognize and share theirs. I have learned through experience to trust these kinetic sensations. They provide an energy bridge by which I transfer the excitement of making connections with ideas and people in a scholarly context.

Ontology. My ontology of feminist mentoring is to work diligently at my practice. I believe the teacher should work harder than the student, to be a person and scholar worthy of

being emulated. Feminist mentoring means blending ideology, theory, and practice—living what you believe and showing students a way of connecting the inner self to the world around them in a professional context. To be an effective mentor, I constantly replenish my own reserves by reading widely across disciplines, conducting research, giving lectures and participating in discussions with multidisciplinary peers, and being an activist in personal and professional life. A mentor cannot ask a student to do more than she is willing to do herself. Feminist practice is actively working to change unjust relations of power.

Assumptions. My assumption about feminist mentoring is that it is necessary to survive in a male-dominated system. Feminist mentoring demystifies the processes by which status is achieved, ascribed, or denied by uncovering, unmasking, debunking, and exposing the structures that constrain human beings into caste systems by race, class, gender, sexual orientation, age, and physical and mental ability statuses. We share our knowledge by helping others negotiate the landmine of power systems that we perpetuate as members of the patriarchal system we join by virtue of our professional status, but also challenge as change agents.

The academy sometimes makes room for scholars who do not follow the beaten path. Some students work with me because they want to develop a different part of themselves. I once asked a student, a fundamentalist, evangelical Christian, why she wanted to work with someone like me—at the time, an out, proud lesbian—and she said she wanted a role model on becoming a new version of herself. She wanted to nurture her free-spirited side to come out from under the cloak of the traditional gender role in which she had hidden for many years. She wanted from me the part that gave her permission to be new.

Approach. My approach to feminist mentoring is personal, collaborative, and politicized. I like the emotional climate in my relationships to be open and free from unexpressed conflict. I

have sought therapy for most of my adult life to handle the pressures of an intense academic career. I have learned how to have better boundaries with students and not expect them to be my friends. Having mentored for 20 years, I now understand that I can be emotionally close to a student but that my power as a mentor is put to better use by being someone they can rely upon to be consistent and trustworthy *for* them (e.g., more of a secure attachment figure), rather than a best friend model where I am free to make demands *upon* them (e.g., listen to my problems, empathize with my busy schedule). To protect my students from my own needs, I have a strong support network lest I rely too much on them. I am alert to my potential to oppress others. Feminist mentors put safety valves in place so as not to abuse the power they do have.

A gift to students. My gift to students as a feminist mentor is in understanding that ours is a special type of professor-student relationship. My two decades of university experience have given me an intellectual and intuitive understanding of the rules and procedures that students must negotiate to obtain a degree. I use this reflexive knowledge to help me guide students in a creative and humanizing way through what they might otherwise perceive as “hoops.” First, we have a honeymoon phase. It is exciting to get to know each other—perhaps some of it comes from being high-energy people or from freely speaking our minds. The honeymoon phase inevitably wears off and conflict erupts when our expectations of one another peak as students take preliminary exams or defend proposals. I see my role as a feminist mentor to empower by helping students claim their education (Rich, 1979). I try to reframe the experience of exams and defenses as an opportunity to integrate what a student already knows in a coherent way—mostly for oneself. I teach that having constructed knowledge inside oneself, no one else can take it away.

If our relationship survives the tension of prelims, proposals, and initiating research, then

a different type of mentoring is needed as a graduate student completes his or her own research. My mentor, Dr. Robert S. Pickett, of Syracuse University, was hands off, but always ready to catch me if I fell. That is the model I use to this day. I had a vision of how I wanted to do my research on older women who never married, and what I needed was an agent of the university who would stand behind me and back me up if things got rough. He was a brilliant wordsmith with a passionate love for family history. He had confidence in my ability and did not try to micromanage my work. I chose him for my advisor because he was also the smartest person I knew *and* he was going to let me follow the vision that captured my sociological imagination (Mills, 1959). Because I had confidence in him, I could borrow confidence from him when my confidence in myself faltered. I chose him on both intellectual and intuitive grounds.

Doing a dissertation is exhausting. Many do not finish. I want to be ready to catch a student who feels she or he may fall. But each student might need a different type of safety net, and feminism, theoretically, ideologically, and practically, is about versatility. We often have to make up methods as we go along (Fonow & Cook, 1991), so this is a good fit for me, a scholar who appreciates spontaneity in my work. If a student needs a champion with the Institutional Review Board, I am there. If a student needs someone to read her transcripts, I am there. If a student needs a place to stay while defending her dissertation, I am there. One summer, I taught a personalized “dissertation *kamp*” for two students who were analyzing data at the same time. One size does not fit all.

Because feminism is about the inseparability of the personal and the political, feminist mentoring means I understand in a deep way the *rhythm* of academic life. I communicate this knowledge to students to help alleviate their anxiety or fear, as it arises. By sharing knowledge in a way that presupposes there is anxiety with not-knowing (e.g., demystifying the process of

knowledge production, professional-credentialing, impression management), I can be an active agent of change in the process of teaching someone to negotiate a system that is often designed to scare and divide. I further appreciate that each mentoring relationship will have its own unique process, depending upon our respective locations in the life course.

Karen's Story

My understanding of feminist mentoring developed inductively over a decade ago during my doctoral studies when I was mentored by a feminist scholar and continues to develop as I, in turn, mentor graduate students. My doctoral experience was more than I had expected. The “more” was the feminist mentoring I received, including the safety in which and the empowerment to challenge myself and be challenged by others. The following are what I consider to be important components of feminist mentoring from the perspective of a student.

Telling the truth of your own life permits students to tell their truth. Within a few days of my arrival at Virginia Tech as a graduate student, the new doctoral students were invited to meet the faculty and other graduate students. After a bit of socializing I found myself alone, so I walked over to someone who was looking at art work. I thought that I would befriend this person and pull her into the larger group. So I went over and began talking and asked her what she hoped to study. She turned to me and said matter-of-factly that she was a professor and her name was Katherine Allen. I do not remember exactly what happened then, other than my own acute embarrassment, but as I consider that interaction, it was just the beginning of seeing a feminist modeling a core tenet of feminism: tell the truth of your life, even if others will feel uncomfortable, so that others may speak their truth (Rich, 1979). Over the years, I saw Katherine speak her truth and in so doing, make room for others to speak the truth of their lives, whether that was in the classroom, at the kitchen table, in an article or book chapter, or at a conference.

Integrating the personal and professional. Through feminist mentoring I saw how to live and work with integrity; how to teach and conduct research from a perspective that resonates personally and professionally; how to speak from the heart and the mind; how to approach scholarship reflexively, responsibly, and with discipline; how to work with colleagues with differing perspectives and priorities; and how to critique a system while being part of it—not to dismantle it but to repair and strengthen it. Key to the mentoring process was hearing Katherine explain what, how, and why she was doing what she was doing regarding teaching, advising, research, and mentoring. From her transparency I learned of the challenges facing faculty and possible ways of responding to complicated situations. Although I saw Katherine engage in feminist praxis, I also needed the connection between theory and practice made explicit.

Engaging in research as praxis. For feminists, research becomes an emancipatory endeavor (Lather, 1991). Students often find themselves engaging in demanding research designs and wrestling with the implications of their role as researcher (Sollie & Leslie, 1994). Guiding graduate students in their thesis or dissertation is time consuming for the faculty member, while conducting a first research project is a potentially solitary process for the graduate student.

To manage an abundance of doctoral students who were grappling with the concerns common to new researchers, Katherine held regular group research meetings. These 3-hour gatherings exposed us to various research topics and methods. Students were guided through a dialectical process that engaged their personal experience and knowledge of a literature to generate research questions (Nielsen, 1990) and consider research methodology (e.g., Ferree, 1990; Thompson, 1992). These group meetings served dual purposes: we progressed with our own dissertations; and as observers, we saw a process unfold through which students gained the necessary confidence to carry out their data collection and analysis.

Accepting and challenging identities. I arrived at Virginia Tech seeking acceptance of my ideas, questions, anger, and desire to know more, and my right to construct a life rather than living a life prescribed and proscribed. What I received from feminist mentoring was that acceptance, the space in which I did not have to fight for my right to talk; to notice inequities; to want something better for individuals, couples, and families. Of course, once so received, the need to point out the inequities and the feelings of anger paradoxically lessened over time. Eventually I felt more at peace and saw more possibility for change in the world.

Students who seek out a feminist mentor, either consciously or unconsciously, may not be able to articulate what they are seeking and need assistance in identifying their expectations. Ideally students choose to work with a faculty member whom they respect; however, sometimes students and faculty have little choice about working together. Feminist perspectives and praxis do not resonate with every student.

Feminism is about the idea that power is gendered and it should not be and that idea remains a radical one for many. Thinking about gender and power cuts into who we are and our sense of ourselves. It challenges us as students and as mentors, and our family theories tell us it will challenge those around us. As we mentor, we must tap into deep reservoirs of empathy for students and their lives because knitting together the personal and political is not just an intellectual enterprise, but a process in which students become more of themselves (Allen, 1994).

Claiming one's own style. I knew at the time, and confirm with some hindsight, that I benefited enormously from feminist mentoring during my doctoral program. I am forever grateful for the experience, and for the direction and continued support from Katherine to develop my own style as a feminist in academia. This support speaks to another component of feminist mentoring: empowering others.

Although I bring myself as a feminist to the whole of my professional life, how I have engaged in feminist mentoring depends upon a mixture of factors: the professional role (e.g., advisor, dissertation chair, committee member, teacher), student receptivity to feminism, personality, research interests, and whether the relationship was mutually chosen. What remains constant for me is the understanding that feminism calls on us to denounce social constructions of gender and power that restrict lives and to engage in practices that empower women to be innovators of their own lives (Baber & Allen, 1992).

Michael's Story

I have organized my contribution to this discussion around a distinction between feminist content and feminist pedagogy. A feminist mentor has to attend to both. Two central themes that emerge are the impact of the gender of student and professor and the mentoring of nonfeminist as well as feminist students.

The feminist content of mentoring. A feminist mentor might not always be the student's major professor. In a department like my sociology department, with a number of major areas to which I do not belong, I often am the feminist on the committee of a doctoral candidate whose major professor is nonfeminist (or even antifeminist), and being what one might call a secondary mentor intensifies my obligations as a feminist mentor. A major part of my mentoring function in such cases is to make sure I help that student to be constantly conscious of the implications of feminist perspectives for his or her scholarly work. This "interference" will probably call for increased attention to another major aspect of mentoring, helping the student learn the unwritten academic rules, one of which is that the dissertation chair is in charge. In such cases, I need to be careful not to jeopardize the student's relationship with her primary mentor, and if her mentor is not a feminist this process can also introduce her to the intricacies of feminist "resistance without

self-destruction.” Gender may be a consideration here because if this student is a woman and her chair is a man (particularly a nonfeminist man), resistance might be seen as an affront to his manhood. We may have made considerable progress in the last 30 years, but in most fields we still have a long way to go when it comes to the acceptance of feminist perspectives.

All students and faculty have to figure out the unwritten rules of academic performance and etiquette, but feminist students have to go beyond the ordinary rules to be prepared for battle. They need to know the extent to which their commitment to feminist pedagogy and their feminist perspective on their discipline will make them *outsiders within* (Collins, 1990). This struggle will vary from discipline to discipline and from job to job, and part of our mentoring of feminists should be to help them to think about the extent to which they are going to position themselves as “out” feminists in various contexts.

One last issue of content that I would like to address is the matter of activism. I am not one to see feminism as a perspective that can be “merely academic.” It is inextricably tied to an interest in movement toward gender equality. Thus, we have an obligation to help our students consider research topics with the potential to contribute to change, publication outlets that may contribute more to social movement than to career development, and career trajectories that may not be those most emphasized in our academic departments. We need to give our students access to information sources that can help them think about how to construct the careers they choose.

The feminist pedagogy of mentoring. Many of the feminist dilemmas that we face in the classroom also are relevant to mentoring, but with a more intimate cast to them because of the one-to-one personalism of the mentoring relationship. I speak to two such feminist dilemmas here: (a) authority and hierarchy and (b) self-disclosure/closeness.

The feminist discussion of hierarchy in our own organizations and careers seems to be

unending. My own position owes much to a paper by Friedman (1985). The core of her argument is that too often our feminist distaste for hierarchy leads us to forfeit the authority of our knowledge and experience along with the authority of our position. Yes, we want to reduce the authority of position (hierarchy) to create relationships with students that will empower them to challenge us. However, we also have an obligation as teachers to make use of the authority of our knowledge to guide them in directions that they cannot see from their relatively inexperienced vantage point. We *do* know things that they do not know, and we have done things that they have not done, and we have a moral obligation to give our students the benefits of our perspective. I still struggle to find this balance. My general strategy is to try to develop an overall relationship with the student that leans toward the nonhierarchical approach, while using a more authoritative style in particular encounters in which I feel we might waste a lot of time without it.

It is possible, even likely, that feminist students will relate to hierarchy and authority differently than will nonfeminist students. As feminist students are involved in the *study* of privilege and disadvantage, one might expect that a hierarchical student-teacher relationship will be particularly salient to them, perhaps even offensive, especially if it involves a male teacher and a female student. So, on the one hand, one might need to be especially nonhierarchical with feminist students when it comes to the authority of position. On the other hand, one might need to be even more firm in situations that require an exercise of one's authority of knowledge. To put it another way, perhaps one needs to be especially clear about the distinction between the authority of position and the authority of knowledge with feminist students.

Feminist mentoring calls for more self-disclosure than does nonfeminist mentoring. Partly this has to do with the issues of hierarchy that I just discussed. One way to reduce hierarchy of position is to provide your student with more information about yourself as just

another fallible scholar who is working to understand social life. But self-disclosure is more important than that. The more your student knows about your frustration with the scholarly processes you go through, your disappointment with the mistakes you make, your anger at the illegitimate demands placed on you, and your joy when you learn or teach something important, the more she will understand that her own emotions are not unique, but socially located. The more she learns about emotional experiences that she has not yet experienced, the more she will be ready for the emotional roller-coaster yet to come. Gender is relevant here, as there is evidence that men are generally not as comfortable as women with showing the full range of emotions that they experience, especially in front of other men. As a result, I may need to work harder at this than do my female colleagues, especially so when I am mentoring male students.

So far, the self-disclosure I have discussed is purely professional. What about disclosures related to one's personal life? Again, I think that feminist mentoring calls upon us for more self-disclosure, for three reasons. First, the gendering of our personal lives is a window to the importance of what we do as feminist scholars. After all, as feminist family scholars, the gendering of personal lives is what we study. Of course, my gender will shape the personal life that I disclose to my student. If I am a woman, my personal struggles with gender inequity may energize my student's commitment to feminism, and may even provide some important insights into the effects of gender in families. If I am a man, my student may learn something about professional and personal authenticity and inauthenticity by learning how I do or do not work to extend to everyone the unearned gender privileges from which I benefit (McIntosh, 2001).

Second, the gendering of our personal lives has important effects on the nature of our careers, and part of our mentoring should be giving our students as much insight into those effects as possible. That may call for a good deal of personal self-disclosure. As for the role of

my own gender in that, imagine how difficult it might be for a male feminist to speak of the tremendous leg-up his career has received if he happens to have a partner who has chosen to be a stay-at-home mother. For women mentors, it might be important to give students some insight into the special guilt that can be visited upon mothers with demanding careers, or the difficulties of dealing with gender inequities that are perpetrated at home by those one loves.

A third reason for self-disclosure is that it can help to create the kind of personal bond between a student and a teacher that energizes the mentoring process. Part of it has to do with the trust that is created by honest self-disclosure. Part of it comes from the emotions that accompany self-disclosure for both individuals. I vote for closeness, but must note the potential risk of sexual harassment if the mix of power, gender, and sexual orientation offers such a possibility.

Closeness and self-disclosure seem especially important when the student is a feminist. If the student is authentically feminist, then she or he is probably struggling with the personal dilemmas that inevitably confront a feminist in a patriarchal society. Her mentor should be able to help her work out strategies for dealing with those dilemmas, and I do not think the mentor can be as helpful if a close relationship has not developed—the problems are, after all, personal.

Feminist Mentoring in Graduate Family Studies Education

Katherine's, Karen's, and Michael's stories address important issues related to career, psychosocial, and role modeling functions of feminist mentoring, and our interpretive analysis of their oral histories suggests four themes central to the feminist mentoring process. These themes are: (a) nurturing relationships through self-disclosure related to the gendered topics being studied, (b) being intentional and thoughtful about power issues, (c) demystifying academic processes related to feminist resistance, and (d) working toward social change in a variety of ways. Several recommendations follow this analysis, including consideration of issues pertaining

to the provision of guidance to graduate students in feminist research topics and analysis. This particular theme is more an extension of the stories rather than a strong theme that emerged from the reading of the oral histories.

Self-Disclosing to Reveal the Inseparability of the Personal and Political

Self-disclosure is an important part of mentor's role, and is a means of providing psychosocial support. A theme in these three stories is that feminist mentoring may involve more self-disclosure than nonfeminist mentoring, and that such disclosure reflects the inseparability of the personal and political and the true complexity of families' experiences.

Michael notes how we can connect our life experiences with the very issues that students are studying, questioning, and challenging, and also experiencing. Students can learn from hearing their mentor's stories, such as the struggle of what it is like to be a woman of color in a predominantly white university or the privileges a feminist man struggles with, by virtue of his gender. Moreover, as outsiders within (Collins, 1990), feminist educators are acutely aware of the contradictions and challenges they experience working in an environment that they are seeking to change. As mentors, they can speak openly about the challenges of when to speak up for feminist concerns, when to challenge institutional practices or expectations, and of knowing or feeling that they have "lived up to" feminist principles in their actions and interactions. Indeed, as the stories demonstrated, feminist mentoring entails occupying a state of neverending reflection about one's practices within the academy and the place of feminist pedagogy and theory. Feminist mentors believe that self-disclosure about the real aspects of academics' lives helps students to act and work with integrity.

Additionally, through a reflective understanding of the links between the personal and political and through understanding the rhythms of academic life, self-disclosure can help

students navigate through the system. Feminist mentors can provide gendered explanations to graduate students about institutional constraints, and hopefully also provide them with strategies for overcoming or dealing with such barriers (Curran, 2003). Feminist mentoring may be especially important for female doctoral students, who are likely to be more acutely aware of the negative aspects of failing within the profession (DeMarco, 1993).

Critically Analyzing Power

The three stories demonstrate how the analysis of power within and outside of the mentoring relationship may be a second theme in feminist mentoring. When a faculty member has the potential to affect a graduate student's academic future, a truly consensual relationship may not be possible (Tom, 1997). Thus, a commitment to feminist pedagogy does not mean that feminist mentors do not engage in any hierarchy. Rather, feminist educators are aware of the complexity of this issue. Indeed, issues around power go beyond its mere presence or absence. For example, a mentoring relationship can be both hierarchical (in terms of knowledge) and collaborative and mutual (in terms of the relationship) at the same time (Cochran-Smith & Paris, 1995). Such a dialectic suggests the need for educators to be clear about the distinction between the authority of position and the authority of knowledge when working with feminist students. Thematic content in the educators' stories suggests ways mentors can use their positions to accept students' anger, questions, and desires, and help students move forward in new, personal, more empowering ways. Dedrick and Watson (2002) also note that feminist mentors have the obligation of using their authority of knowledge to help students from marginalized groups, such as women, international students, and minority students, who continue to be challenged in terms of "extended time-to-degree, degree completion rates, and unequal representation in the academe" (p. 276).

Feminist mentors also seem to be cognizant of not abusing their structural power in their relationships with students. This awareness is particularly important in feminist mentoring relationships because of the close relationships that can develop, which can create more potential for abuse of power or sexual harassment. Mentors must be mindful, as Katherine learned, not to burden students with the details of their challenging lives.

Dealing with Resistance to Feminism

Mentoring typically includes educating individuals in the unwritten rules of the institution into which they are being socialized (Ellis, 1992). In understanding the politics of being different or marginalized, a third theme in feminist mentoring deals with resistance to feminist perspectives. This can take place in a number of ways, depending on the students' career stage (e.g., whether they are starting out or working on their research).

The oral histories reflect how important it is to “[demystify] the process of knowledge production, professional-credentialing, and impression management” for students (Katherine's story). Academics may go to great lengths to hide these processes from their students, for fear of being seen as fallible, unprofessional, or unethical. Yet, there is a place for this in feminist mentoring, as long as it is done appropriately and responsibly. In classes or individual meetings, graduate students can hear about the gatekeeping process and how knowledge is produced.

Students working on their research may need additional advice on issues regarding committee makeup, or how to deal with committee members who do not work from a feminist perspective. The need for advice may be particularly important when working as a secondary mentor (Johnson, 2002) in cases when a nonfeminist committee member is the students' main advisor.

Working Toward Social Change

Consistent with feminist research (Thompson & Walker, 1995), a fourth theme of feminist mentoring is a commitment to social change and activism. The mentors in our study described how they saw themselves as role models to their students. Thus their social activism was evidence of being “authentically feminist” in both their professional and personal lives. Additionally, although feminist mentors might encourage research leading to social change, students may choose a number of pathways toward social change, some of which may not be traditionally supported by their departments. For example, students may wish to publish in alternative outlets or they may seek out nonresearch-focused careers they feel will make more of a difference. If we follow the suggestion to “draw out the ideas, abilities, and talents” of each student (Katherine’s story), we have an obligation to support the varied pathways that students feel will make a difference.

Further Recommendation for Practice

Our analysis of these oral histories revealed several themes related to self disclosure, power, resistance, and social change. However, we also noted what was omitted or given less attention to in the stories, which resulted in further issues emerging for consideration. In this section, we extend the themes by suggesting three additional recommendations related to feminist mentoring and feminist pedagogy at the graduate level.

First, both Katherine and Michael briefly noted the potential for negative experiences to occur in mentoring relationships, and more attention needs to be given to this topic. Although most articles on mentoring focus only on the positive aspects of mentoring, some researchers have begun to draw more attention to ethical dilemmas (Johnson, 2002, 2003; Johnson & Nelson, 1999) and negative experiences (Eby, McManus, Simon, & Russell, 2000). Moreover, organizational factors that make it difficult to mentor effectively, such as increasing numbers of

part-time professors and increasing demands for publications and research that take time away from teaching, need to be considered. Not surprisingly, as feminist educators, we draw attention to the patriarchal academic context in which mentoring is occurring, bringing us back to the point regarding the paradoxical nature of feminist academic mentoring.

Second, dealing with feminist resistance was discussed primarily within the experience of completing a thesis or dissertation. However, graduate students may need advice further into their careers. As students are thinking about and preparing for job interviews, mentors can advise them on how to modify job talks to particular audiences or point out feminist-friendly environments to which they might consider applying. Once in academic positions, students still may need assistance with decisions they face as new faculty members, such as whether or not they should seek a joint appointment with Women's Studies prior to tenure. Some concerns may only be realized once *in* an academic position; anticipatory socialization may be only partially helpful. Thus, the feminist mentoring relationship and issues related to feminist resistance may continue to be important during the immediate years following graduation.

Third, all three feminist academics make reference to the importance of making sure research involves a feminist component. Katherine said that she reads widely to inform her own feminist scholarship, and Karen noted how Katherine had groups of graduate students over to read important articles on feminist research and methods. Michael described how, as a secondary mentor, he reminds students of important feminist readings to incorporate into their research. We found it interesting that more emphasis was given in the oral histories to relationships, emotions, and navigating through the system than on the academic particulars of how to actually do feminist research. Perhaps it is through the actual experience of hierarchy being challenged and confronted and the role modeling of faculty members that the majority of feminist learning

relative to research takes place in mentoring relationships. Nevertheless, learning how to do feminist research will be important to mentors and mentees alike.

It is not enough to have research about women—feminist research should be research that is in the *interests of* women, not just *about* women (Westcott, 1979), and various resources may help graduate students understand the difference between the two. For example, as previously noted, Thompson and Walker (1995) suggest that the social construction of gender is a central concept involved in feminist family studies research. Specific readings such as Ferree (1990) and Thompson (1993) might be helpful in assisting graduate students to see how gender is constructed at various levels. This article already contains references to a number of helpful resources that have informed our practice. To supplement these suggestions and to assist researchers in developing a deeper understanding of how to do feminist research, we also provide a short annotated bibliography at the end of this article (see Appendix). We stress that there is no one way of doing feminist research, and we note that this is only a small list of “favorite” resources generated by our group. We put forth these readings as a starting point, and we encourage others to consider important works related to feminist family studies research.

It is our hope that feminist mentoring stays focused on the academic purpose of forwarding feminist theory in family studies scholarship so that this perspective is not marginalized (Thompson & Walker, 1995) or left out of the larger academic discourse. Training in a particular theory is imperative toward ensuring popularity of that theory (Mullins, 1973). As well, we cannot lose sight of the fact that the evolution and continuation of feminist thought in family studies is vital in changing an unjust society. Thus, advancement of feminist theories and scholarship through the training and mentoring of new graduate students is key.

However, what do feminist mentors do when the graduate student who has chosen to

work with them or the one who has been assigned to them to advise is uninterested in, resistant to, or even hostile to feminist analysis? “Professional cloning” (Johnson, 2003, p. 144) should not be the goal of mentoring, yet Eby et al. (2000) reported that negative mentoring experiences were more likely to occur when there was a “mismatch” between the mentor and the mentee’s attitudes, values, and beliefs. Although our findings highlight educators’ beliefs about how feminist mentoring is a necessary condition in a male-dominated system such as academia, questions around the process and content of mentoring, the implications for the continuation of feminist scholarship, and how this might be played out any differently with graduate students who are resistant to feminist perspectives needs to be explored more fully.

Conclusion

A discussion around the career, psychosocial, and role modeling functions of feminist mentoring is important in understanding how feminist educators mentor graduate students to enter into and succeed within the very system they are critiquing. Examining the oral histories of three feminist academics reveals that feminist mentoring is very much about process and personal relationships, helping individuals question power, and connecting the personal with the political, which is intrinsic to feminist practice. We also have suggested that feminist mentoring should extend beyond students’ graduation and/or job procurement and that it should include content related to feminist analysis and research, as this is vital to ensuring the viability of a feminist family studies approach within an environment that sometimes can be hostile or resistant to feminist approaches. The family studies field benefits from a perspective that questions the status quo and contributes to an ongoing critical perspective on family issues. We look forward to seeing this influence continue, particularly through the mentoring of new and upcoming graduate students.

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Appendix

Annotated Bibliography

Allen, K. R. (2000). A conscious and inclusive family studies. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 62, 4 - 17.

Interdisciplinary feminist scholarship has challenged and is changing family research and theory by importing strategies to broaden the rationalist foundation that dominates family scholarship. Allen draws from feminist practices in which the knower is centrally engaged in the work and intersections with race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and other systems of oppression and opportunity are critically acknowledged and challenged, not ignored, flattened, or controlled. Strategies for a conscious and inclusive family studies include the use of interrogating science with personal narrative and taking on our own social locations as felt, embodied experiences.

Collins, P. H. (2000). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. New York: Routledge.

This is a classic, originally published in 1990, and extensively revised for the second edition. Collins addresses the need for attention to what we now call “intersectionality,” beginning with a general discussion of the role of the intersection of race and gender in our own functioning as scholars, then applying a Black feminist perspective to some of the central issues of social life. Of particular interest to family scholars are chapters on motherhood (perhaps one of the most assigned book excerpts of the 1990s); work, family, and Black women’s oppression; and on Black women’s love relationships.

DeVault, M. L. (1999). *Liberating method: Feminism and social research*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

DeVault’s book details a variety of topics of interest to many feminist scholars. She does not

argue that there is one way to do feminist research. Instead, she focuses on thinking about a variety of research-related topics (e.g., institutional ethnography, race and ethnicity, and knowledge production in research), examining how feminist theories can shape feminist scholars' practice of research and interpretation of data, and providing practical advice for feminist researchers.

Freedman, E. B. (2002). *No turning back: The history of feminism and the future of women*. New York: Ballantine.

Feminist historian and women's studies professor, Freedman provides a compelling history and analysis of the global impact of feminism as an intellectual and activist social movement.

Feminism is a social upheaval that "crosses continents, decades, and ideologies" (p. 1). She explains how and why embracing contradictions is a way out of the dualities that have plagued feminists in the past. She offers a broad view of feminism (equal worth, male privilege, social movements, and intersecting hierarchies) that gets beyond the notion of the universal female.

Feminism is a transformative movement on a global scale, not limited to elite white western women in the Academy, as many critics charge. Those of us doing feminist family research today will benefit from this comprehensive analysis of where we have been and where we can go with so many interdisciplinary and international tools and ideas.

Friedman, S. S. (1985). Authority in the feminist classroom: A contradiction in terms? In M. Culley & C. Portuges (Eds.), *Gendered subjects: The dynamics of feminist teaching* (pp. 203 - 208). Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Friedman's discussion of feminist dilemmas regarding authority in the classroom is nicely rooted in personal experiences. The upshot of her argument is that the reduction of hierarchy (authority of position) does not absolve us of the responsibility to give our students the benefits of our

authority of knowledge and experience. Sometimes we do know more than they do, and we should provide guidance when appropriate.

Sollie, D. L., & Leslie, L. A. (Eds.). (1994). *Gender, families, and close relationships: Feminist research journeys*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

This edited book is uniquely different from other feminist methods book. Not only do the researchers describe their work and their findings, but they also discuss issues such as how they became feminists, chose their research topics, and revised their work as their feminist identities developed. They describe the challenges of living up to feminist ideals, and are open and honest about the everyday struggles and challenges they experience in doing research. This is a must read for anyone interested in the deeper and more personal experiences and complexities of doing feminist research.

Thompson, L. (1992). Feminist methodology for family studies. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 54, 3 - 18.

Research methodology encompasses agenda, epistemology, ethics, and methods. Thompson illustrates each of these aspects of methodology with feminist examples from family studies. In so doing, she moves the literature on feminist research beyond the debate of qualitative versus quantitative methods. This article can be assigned to students regardless whether or not they are using a feminist perspective in order to assist them in clarifying for themselves how they are addressing these aspects of methodology in their own research.