

## **Women, Leadership, and Equality in Academe: Moving Beyond Double Binds**

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### **Introduction**

Although gender discrimination in all of its manifestations is often thought to be absent from higher education, academic institutions are hierarchical organizations that offer rewards, status and privilege, thereby rendering the status of women within these institutions politically and economically vulnerable. With each generation of female academics, the organizational structures that both free and bind women are altered through agency and progress. Invariably, the advancement of women disrupts and alters normative power structures and offers hope and promise for the next generation of women in academe.

Using a personal narrative framework from which to analyze the Catch-22s that often impede women from advancing and succeeding within academe, this paper will provide a feminist analysis of the role of women in academic organizations by focusing on the double binds that have been offered to women as dichotomous choices. Using theories of communication and feminism alongside personal experience within a teaching university, the study will explore the dichotomies between the following areas:

- Motherhood vs. academe (womb or brain);
- University teaching vs. research (emotion or mind);
- Community and university service vs. leadership and professional advancement (femininity or competence);
- Discrimination and pay equity (equality or difference);

Through personal reflections on struggle and achievement, my goal is to offer strategies for maneuvering past sexist barricades as a means toward success and equality in academe.

### **Identifying the Possibilities and Limits of Post Feminism in Academe**

In the late 1980s, I attended the University of New Hampshire for my undergraduate studies where I majored in the discipline of Communication. Roughly twenty years after the second-wave feminist movement began, I was fortunate that the university had approved a Women's Studies program, allowing me to begin to solidify my understanding of equal rights

and opportunities as part of my studies. At the time, Laura Thatcher Ulrich, an associate professor of history at the university, had obtained the Pulitzer Prize in history for her book, “A Midwife’s Tale.”<sup>1</sup> Ulrich’s scholarship, and her now famously coined phrase, “Well behaved women rarely make history,” served as an inspiration for young women aspiring to flourish in academe. In many ways, my undergraduate experience afforded me the benefits of what many have called a post-feminist culture in that I did not really experience gender discrimination. I served as the president of the Mortar Board Honor Society, obtained a competitive research fellowship, and was awarded with the highest academic distinction in my major.

Although I learned feminist theory and was able to put my academic ambitions into practice as an undergraduate, I slowly began to discern the obstacles women in academe face within those years. A few distinct memories come to mind. Among the twenty or so distinguished deans, provosts and administrators who presided over a university sponsored honor roll induction ceremony that I attended, only one was female. I also recall reading a number of contemporary library books and course materials that continued to make reference to all humans as “men” and used the pronoun “he” to stand in for both sexes. When an advisor asked me about my scholarly areas of interest and I included feminist theory in my response, I was discouraged from studying feminism since there were too many divisive camps within it. Adrienne Rich’s assessment of education epitomizes these experiences: “the content of education itself validates men even as it invalidates women. Its very message is that men have been the shapers and thinkers of the world, and that this is only natural.”<sup>2</sup> Although I wrote about these observations in a campus news article at the time, I assured myself that these incidents were the exception to the “equality” rule as vestiges of previous generational struggles for gender equality. I had bought into the mythic belief that academia represented a distinctive power-neutral realm predicated on intellectual merit and non-discriminatory practices.

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<sup>1</sup> Laura Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife’s Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, based on her diary, 1785-1812* (New York: Vintage, 1990).

<sup>2</sup> Adrienne Rich, *On Lies, Secrets and Silences* (New York, NY: Norton, 1979), 241.

## Double Binds, Catch-22s, and Stumbling Blocks for Women in Academe

In the book *Beyond the Double Bind: Women and Leadership*, Kathleen Hall Jamieson explores how the history of culture, including academe, is “riddled with evidence of traps for women that have forcefully curtailed their options.” She explains,

...the double bind is a strategy perennially used by those with power against those without. The overwhelming evidence shows that, historically, women are usually the quarry. Binds draw their power from their capacity to simplify complexity. Faced with a complicated situation or behavior, the human tendency is to split apart and dichotomize its elements. So we contrast good and bad, strong and weak, for and against, true and false, and in so doing assume that a person can't be both at once—or somewhere in between. Such distinctions are often useful. But when this tendency drives us to see life's options or the choices available to women as polarities and irreconcilable opposites, those differences become troublesome.<sup>3</sup>

Also known as “self-defeating traps” or Catch-22s, such binaries have been assessed within feminist scholarship to be particularly representative of the quandaries that women find themselves in today.<sup>4</sup> In professional contexts, “this double yardstick of gender appropriateness and managerial effectiveness often leaves women in an unbreakable, untenable double bind.”<sup>5</sup>

Nadya Aisenberg and Mona Harrington explore the ramifications of double binds within academe, noting that “a two-tiered structure of professional authority and the exclusion of women from affairs of the mind” are endemic in the academic profession. As a “profession most directly occupied with intellectual power,” an academic career is particularly fraught with discriminatory assumptions “tying women to the physical, denying the power of their minds [that] set up stumbling blocks for the advancement of women in any work dependent on the trained mind.”<sup>6</sup>

One of the most pervasive double binds women find themselves trapped within is the mind / body or womb / brain dichotomy. Western philosophy has been predicated upon the superiority of the mind over the physical body. Human progress over that of the animal and natural world has been attributed to cognitive development. However, “the conceptual

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<sup>3</sup> Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Beyond the Double Bind: Women and Leadership* (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 1995), 14.

<sup>4</sup> Rosabeth Kanter Moss, *Men and Women of the Corporation* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1977).

<sup>5</sup> Nancy A. Nichols, “What happened to Rosie the Riveter?” *Harvard Business Review* July/August, 60 (1993).

<sup>6</sup> Nadya Aisenberg and Mona Harrington, *Women of Academe: Outsiders in the Sacred Grove* (Amherst, MA:

University of Massachusetts, 1988), 5.

dichotomy between mind and body underwrote the belief that white men were the most highly evolved and most purely human persons, while women and non-Caucasian racial groups were thought both less intellectually capable and more closely tied to the animal and natural world.”<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, these perceptions were used to legitimate sexist gender roles for women and men relegating women’s work to childbirth (womb over brain / body over mind) and care giving (femininity over competence). The following sections explore these themes, as well as the dichotomies predicated upon the double binds of equality / difference through a feminist analysis within a teaching university.

### **‘The Mommy Penalty’ for Graduate Students (Womb or Brain)**

As a product of post-feminism, I was cultivated to believe that women can lead successful professional lives in academe by breaking down barriers. A romanticized notion of the female academic reaching the top of the intellectual apex inspired me to continue my graduate education at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. In many ways, I was pursuing a course that my own mother and mother-in-law had not been able to take due to familial and financial obligations. While I originally boarded on the fast track to a professional career, my husband and I happily discovered that our lives would soon be transformed within the first year of my Master’s degree program with the birth of our son. Determined that I could balance the juggling act of mothering and academe, I successfully returned to my studies, teaching, and other professional obligations after a few short weeks off during summer recess.

Despite the difficulties of being a new mother, I persevered academically, never missing a day of class, and continued to earn high marks. My teaching evaluations were the highest among my peers, earning me the distinction of the International Communication Award for Outstanding Teaching by a Graduate Student. I also engaged in additional interdisciplinary collaboration through important grant initiatives, one of which enabled me to serve as the Associate Director of the Five College Institute in Critical Media Studies for several years.

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<sup>7</sup> Kathryn Cirksena and Lisa Cuklanz, "Male is to Female as \_\_\_\_\_ is to \_\_\_\_\_: A Guided Tour of Five Feminist Frameworks for Communication Studies," in *Women Making Meaning: New Feminist Directions in Communication*, ed. Lana F. Rakow (New York: Routledge, 1992), 33.

While my newfound status as a mother served as an additional motivational force for academic success in graduate school, my impressive strides were unexpectedly halted by a powerful double standard that judges the role of the serious female academic according to ‘The Mommy Penalty.’<sup>8</sup> I was shocked to discover that my new identity as a mother had caused a male faculty member who had previously praised my work and theoretical inquiry to reconsider my academic fervor. Upon scheduling a meeting with this professor to begin work on an approved independent study, I was told in no uncertain terms, “You’re a mother now, so you may not have the same time and ability to pursue your studies and a career in academe.” When I countered by pointing out that my undergraduate mentor had been a father of two and a successful scholar, I was told that this person succeeded because he “has a wife.” The conversation deteriorated from there, as I was informed that despite my academic successes, he would not support my application to the Ph.D. program since my new responsibilities as a mother would not allow for adequate time to defend and complete my Masters degree thesis. In essence, I was being asked to deny my hard-earned academic funding and benefits by resigning from the program.

In that short conversation, the culmination of my sixteen-year scholarly efforts and hard-earned scholarly funding and benefits were entrapped within what feminist scholars have identified as the “womb vs. brain” dichotomy. For this male faculty member, my abilities to succeed within the realms of academe and motherhood were judged by two contingent premises: 1) to be taken seriously, a female academic must not have a family, else familial obligations intrude upon scholarly excellence; 2) to be a good mother, one must not engage in lofty scholarly realms that may detract from her moral duties as mother and wife.

According to Rosabeth Kanter Moss’ assessment of stereotypes that women encounter in organizational settings, the ‘mother’ stereotype can be quite literal: “women who have children are viewed as mothers first and workers,” or in this case academics, “second.”<sup>9</sup> In *Getting Even*, Evelyn Murphy documents how mothers get held back unfairly and are “mommy-tracked” without being asked about their professional goals. When women return from maternity leave or giving birth, they discover that they were removed from important projects “since managers

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<sup>8</sup> Catherine Rampell, "The Mommy Penalty (or Lack Thereof)," Economix Blog, NYTimes.com, posted September 26, 2008, <http://economix.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/09/26/the-mommy-penalty-or-lack-thereof/> (accessed March 22, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> Rosabeth Kanter Moss, *Men and Women of the Corporation* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1977), 209.

assumed their ‘work-family conflict’ would slow them down.”<sup>10</sup> As feminist scholars have documented, many professions are predicated on the notion of an ideal employee unconstrained by child rearing responsibilities.<sup>11</sup>

Hall-Jamieson explores how sequencing was part of women’s employment cycles whereby they left the labor force or worked part time to have children. She explains that while delaying childbearing carries biological penalties, it also carries financial penalties in the form of loss opportunities for promotion and skill acquisition. Stemming from a long history of pregnant women’s exclusion from the workforce, women have had to fight to retain their status as professionals. Lucinda Finley documents school policies from the 1930s to late 1970s that dismissed pregnant teachers in their fourth or fifth month of pregnancy, aptly noting, “The very fact that schoolchildren or male workers have been insulated from the sight of pregnant women has only helped to reinforce the mystery and embarrassment that justified the exclusions” (1986, p. 1135).<sup>12</sup> Hence, whereas women who obtained professional occupations were asked to leave them at the first sign of pregnancy through mandated sequencing before 1978, the dilemma for women in academe today is having the choice to determine whether or not to have children and pursue a career within higher education.

Although academic settings are often idealized according to lofty principles of egalitarianism and ethical codes against discrimination, the “Mommy Penalty” is still applied to female students and faculty alike. Tamara L. Smith and Laura West Steck contend that “institutions of higher education are likely organized around an “ideal graduate student” without children. As a result of this “ideal student” institutional expectation, graduate student mothers may be marginalized by the existing organization of graduate institutions. Sources of this marginalization come from other graduate students, faculty mentors, faculty employers, and other departmental faculty members.”<sup>13</sup> Consequently, the idealized image of the graduate

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<sup>10</sup> Evelyn Murphy and E. J. Graff, *Getting Even Why Women Don't Get Paid Like Men--And What to Do About It* (New York: Touchstone, 2006) 195.

<sup>11</sup> Joan Williams, *Unbending Gender: Why Family and Work Conflict and What to Do About It* (New York: Oxford UP, 2001).

<sup>12</sup> Lucinda M. Finley, "Transcending equality theory: A way out of the maternity and the workplace debate," *Columbia Law Review* 86, 6 (October 1986): 1135.

<sup>13</sup> Tamara L. Smith and Laura West Smith, "The Emotion Work of Managing Motherhood and Graduate Student," in

student is grounded in normative gender behaviors that exclude women who are pregnant or have children.

Whereas most women would have been discouraged from continuing their education in this scenario, the feminist underpinnings of my undergraduate and graduate studies served as a source of inspiration and agency, making it harder for antiquated sexist ideologies to have a lasting effect on my academic pursuits. Elizabeth Langland and Walter Grove attest to the difference a feminist standpoint can make in the academy. “A feminist perspective, whether in women’s studies courses or scholarly essays...seeks to correct the bias present in our academic disciplines by uncovering and questioning the hidden assumptions about men and women that have shaped and informed standard academic subjects.”<sup>14</sup> Fortunately, my exposure to feminist theory as an undergraduate, and strong social ties with my graduate colleagues provided me with the means to challenge the gender discrimination I had experienced as a young mother.

It was not long before I discovered that this same faculty member who was unwilling to support my Ph.D. candidacy out of concern that being a mother would compromise my academic efforts was supporting the candidacy of several other Masters students who had *not* defended their theses. The difference was that these students were males, or women without children. In order to redress these blatant inconsistencies, a feminist collective of peers encouraged me to proceed with a formal university grievance, which overturned the outcome in my favor. I was allowed to apply to the Ph.D. program and was accepted with strong commendations and my scholarship intact.

A few short years later, during my comprehensive exams, I gave birth to my second son. Despite earlier objections to the limits raising a child would place on my academic timetable, I graduated well ahead of most of my peers and obtained a tenure-track job before completing my dissertation. During my second pregnancy, there was much less doubt or resistance to my dual role as mother and student, as I had passed a critical litmus test. In fact, I was told on many occasions that I was a role model for those in my graduate cohort.

Although this “womb or brain” dichotomy represents only one of several double binds I have found myself caught within, there are several important lessons to be drawn from my

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Academic One, Inc. (accessed May 8, 2009).

<sup>14</sup>Langland, Elizabeth and Walter Grove, *A Feminist Perspective in the Academy: The Difference it Makes* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago P, 1981), 3.

experiences in graduate school. First, women in academe must be prepared to encounter a variety of obstacles and stumbling blocks along their educational journey. Realizing that gender discrimination is part of broader social patterns is important, particularly for young women who emerge from a post-feminism paradigm of experience that has afforded them numerous opportunities for academic advancement at early stages of their professional training and career. Recognizing patterns of discrimination can help alleviate women's tendencies to blame themselves for forms of oppression. Exposure to feminist scholarship provides a solid foundational context from which to situate one's self, and inspires action and resistance in the face of defeat. Mobilizing with other women and men who are supportive is a necessary part of dealing with oppression of any kind, especially in competitive academic environments. Overcoming fears of incompetence or retribution are equally important in moving ahead with summative actions at administrative levels to redress forms of gender discrimination.

### **'The Mommy Penalty' for Untenured Faculty (Womb or Brain)**

As a young female academic and mother of two children entering a tenure-track position, the womb or brain dichotomy continued to thwart my abilities to be respected as a smart, effective professor capable of raising children. In her influential book *Lifting a Ton of Feathers: A Woman's Guide to Surviving in the Academic World*, Paula Caplan (1995) draws out the Catch-22 scenarios that women in these situations have experienced. She observes that "women academics are not considered real women if they don't have children and devote a great deal of time to them; but women academics who devote much time to their children are said not to take their careers seriously. Even if you do not have children, you may be taken less seriously because some day you might have them"<sup>15</sup>.

Upon obtaining my first professorship at a teaching university, the accumulated forces of ageism and sexism carried over from my graduate school and served as additional rites of passage into academe. In many ways, my professional efforts were driven by a desire to overcompensate for the motherhood vs. scholarship binary by showing my competencies in both realms so as to fulfill expectations of me and avoid a repeat experience from my graduate school days. As an untenured faculty member with childrearing responsibilities, this meant devoting

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<sup>15</sup> Paula Caplan, *Lifting a Ton of Feathers: A Woman's Guide to Surviving in the Academic World* (Toronto: University of Toronto P, 1995), 67.

lots of time and effort proving myself in extraordinary ways. My efforts included devising new pedagogical initiatives, serving on numerous committees, authoring extensive program reviews, chairing multiple campus committees, engaging in community service, and helping to generate positive media within the press for my program and the university.

Although such undertakings are not unusual for untenured faculty, in my case, I was pinioned between the dichotomous realms of academe and motherhood through unusual circumstances. Early in my career, my chair and other faculty forewarned me that it was not appropriate to turn down committee work due to familial obligations, as this would be negatively attributed to the limits of my gender. I was also advised not to publicly mention any conflicts with daycare or childcare responsibilities, such as late afternoon meetings, as doing so would demonstrate poor time management and priorities. Ironically, one of my male colleagues often objected to late department meetings or left early because he had childcare issues. For my male colleague, the ramifications of his childcare conflicts were attributed positively in that his character was ameliorated for showing his nurturing side as a dedicated father. Role reversals like these demonstrate the contradictions that are inherent in gendered social codes within academe.

On another occasion, I presented at a conference session where one of my male colleagues delivered his entire presentation while holstering his infant son on his hip. A female colleague leaned over to tell me that this was an encouraging sign of gender barriers coming down. Irked, I immediately inverted the situation by reminding her of the double standard that would be applied if I had brought either of my sons to the lecture and held them while presenting my research. Indeed, my colleague conceded that this would have led to compromised perceptions of my professionalism and scholarship among those present.

Culturally ascribed gender perceptions are not merely reserved for married women or mothers. On the flip side of the myth that married women and mothers do less professional work than single women lies the myth that single academics have all the time in the world and thus should take on more teaching and committee responsibilities. Caplan writes of an interview from a single woman who explains, “My department chair keeps putting me on more and more committees, asking me to do the work of writing our lengthy, detailed reports for tenure and promotion and applications. The reason given is, ‘You’re single and you have no kids, so you’ve got more time than the rest of us.’” She intones, “It is especially ironic when ‘the rest of us’

includes single men and men who do little or no household-related work” (p. 60). As these Catch-22s attest, the competencies of women academics are associated with their gender and sexuality in unfair and inconsistent ways from their male counterparts. This leads to inequitable workloads, dual standards, and inconsistent application of criteria for tenure and promotion.

### **University Teaching vs. Research (Emotion or Mind)**

Another dichotomy that women contend with in academe is the myth that university teaching is incommensurate with research, and that women are better skilled in the classroom than the lab or field. This binary is premised upon the notion that women are more emotional and nurturing as feminine subjects and that they should not concern themselves with matters of the mind (emotion or mind). Simone de Beauvoir examined the long-standing cultural beliefs that men are associated with the mind, women are associated with emotions, and that the mind is always superior to emotion.<sup>16</sup> With the majority of “Tier 1” ranked research universities dominated by male faculty, a schism between teaching and research is invariably drawn between the sexes in higher education. In many ways, it is no accident that, like the majority of women in academe, I find myself at a teaching university that stresses classroom instruction, advising, and campus and community service. One of the reasons I sought to obtain a career at a teaching university is that I value educational forums and contexts that create synergy between research and application, theory and praxis. Yet most formal academic settings segregate these realms in arbitrary ways that make it difficult for those who wish to build bridges between the ivory tower and the regional community.

Combined with normative gender expectations for women, the divisions drawn between teaching and research can often leave female researchers in the lurch. From the very first day that I began teaching at my university, my department chair lectured me on the importance of teaching over research, informing me that there was no need to engage in serious research at our institution because it was not valued for tenure or promotion. In his estimation, research was unnecessary for my professional advancement, and that I should concentrate my efforts on the teaching needs of the students and the department. In my first year, my chair assigned me to a teaching schedule of five days a week, and then four days a week until I earned tenure, which left me with little time for research during the critical years of my profession. In obtaining a second

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<sup>16</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1974).

opinion on the merits of research and obtaining a better schedule, I went to the faculty union leadership run by two male veteran faculty. Rather than consider my professional goals and supporting my efforts to obtain a more suitable teaching schedule, both faculty union officials assured me that I need not trouble myself with research, as teaching was where I should focus my energies.

Since I value research as much as teaching, I was discouraged to learn that my research interests and engagements would not be evaluated by my chair as necessary components of my professional advancement. Up to that point, my training had been scholarly in nature, and I was seeking a collaborative cohort interested in the cross-sections of the scholarship of teaching and research. Given that my department chair and the faculty union leadership had been at the institution for many years when perhaps research had not been the primary focus for obtaining tenure, I decided to follow my own professional trajectory and continued to engage in scholarly publications and conferences. I reached out to new hires from my cohort and began a series of professional collaborations across disciplinary lines.

Through these ventures, I recognized that many of my female colleagues and I were trying to bring our scholarly interests and research into the classroom to remain timely in our fields as well as our teaching. Most of us who had been recently hired were of the mindset that teaching excellence is predicated on sustained research in our disciplines. To deny ourselves opportunities to engage in research would be personally and professionally dispiriting. The greatest challenge for my cohort was finding the time to balance a full teaching load of four classes per semester while carving out a research niche. In assessing the challenges, my colleagues and I discovered that we were all overly burdened with heavy teaching requirements and substantial committee work, while many of our male peers had obtained course releases through committee work, special program directorships, and department chairmanships. This gave us pause to reflect on whether or not we were taking on too much responsibility while getting little institutional support in return.

As many feminist scholars have observed, such experiences are not unique for women in academe. “Writing for publication requires concentration,” writes Caplan, “but if you refuse to become overloaded with work other people ask you to take on, you are considered uncollegial and even ‘bitchy.’ Based on the myth that women are naturally nurturant...this Catch-22 has psychologically paralyzed or exhausted many women. Having learned that they have to work

extra hard to prove their worthiness, women are likely to deal with this dilemma by accepting teaching or committee-work overloads *while also* working additional hours in order to do the work required to produce publications.”<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, what my female colleagues and I discovered early on in our academic careers is that, by engaging in research, we were disrupting the nature of how workloads had been distributed at our academic institution since its inception. We were also exposing the myth that women are intellectually inferior to men by obtaining publications and scholarship opportunities, proving to ourselves, and an older generation of scholars, that women could successfully engage in research.

In addition to gender barriers, seasoned faculty who do not value research or have given up their interests in pursuing it often scrutinizes women faculty who demonstrate an interest and the skills to engage in research. This situation is particularly sensitive at a teaching university where the administration has benefited from an increased talent pool of graduate students from research institutions seeking employment within a teaching university as a result of a competitive job market. Administrators within teaching universities have taken note of this trend by placing more emphasis on scholarship as a means for hiring, tenure, and post-tenure review. With budget shortfalls and cost-saving initiatives, administrators use scholarly publications as competitive bargaining chips to reward only a select few who demonstrate exemplary scholarship, teaching, and service for tenure and post-tenure promotions. Naturally, these measures tend to split the faculty along a teaching vs. research dichotomy.

Faced with a history of narrowly prescribed, male-centric parameters for scholarly excellence, and imbalances in teaching loads and leadership opportunities, women are often faced with the quandary of doing too much with too little, or resigning themselves to traditional professional duties. Situations such as these compound the difficulties for women who wish to pursue scholarship within academe. As bell hooks reminds us, women must often confront critics who see their work as “not scholarly, or not scholarly enough,” or must squeeze in their research interests within their already overloaded teaching schedules and service commitments.<sup>18</sup>

Through demonstrated teaching and research, my female colleagues and I have challenged normalized workload allocations based on traditional gender norms. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, Mary Wollstonecraft demonstrated the limits of the ‘emotion or mind’

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<sup>17</sup> Paula Caplan, *Lifting a Ton of Feathers*, 71.

<sup>18</sup> bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 132.

dichotomy for women in academe by noting that women did not practice or display their rational capabilities because they were not expected to use their minds.<sup>19</sup> Given that women were not allowed to attend college with men until the mid-1800s and were not admitted to graduate school until the end of that century, it is not terribly surprising to note that women have been cultivated as teachers, not researchers. Women's mythic capacity as nurturers has been used to justify increased workloads in student advising and committee work. As a result, gendered labor divisions in academe have afforded males a better chance of obtaining course reductions for research endeavors, or higher salaries as deans and administrators. As Lee and Gropper indicated in their assessment of educational settings over 35 years ago, sexism functions through institutional organization, the curriculum, and varied teaching styles.<sup>20</sup> By assigning leadership roles to men and subsidiary roles to women, educational institutions continue to ascribe a higher place for men in the institutional hierarchy of academe, thereby reifying the emotion vs. mind dichotomy.

### **Community and University Service vs. Leadership and Self-Advancement (Femininity or Competence).**

In conjunction with the emotion vs. mind binary, women in academe are encouraged to take on a disproportionate share of community and university service over leadership and professional advancement opportunities. Inasmuch as men are associated with the mind and women emotions or the body, cultural stereotypes continue to undermine women's progress in areas of leadership and professional advancement. One prominent reason for women's exclusion from leadership opportunities is that women are represented through normative standards of femininity that emphasize the importance of collegiality over independence, group cooperation over leadership, and deference over assertion. To be powerful, confident, and intellectual defies such normativity, even within academe. Women who persevere professionally and intellectually are entrapped within the "femininity or competence" binary. In this scenario, Hall Jamieson

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<sup>19</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (New York: Source Book P, 1971).

<sup>20</sup> Patrick C. Lee and Nancy B. Gropper, "Sex Role Culture and Educational Practice," *Harvard Educational Review* 44, no. 3 (1974): 369-407.

explains, “we still confront a bind that expects a woman to be feminine, then offers her a concept of femininity that ensures that as a feminine creature she cannot be mature or decisive.”<sup>21</sup>

To succeed as a leader within higher education is particularly trying since women with towering intellects or professional acumen are often criticized and penalized for assuming ‘masculine’ traits or behaviors. To this extreme, women in leadership positions who are professionally motivated are ostracized and vilified as selfish, ball-busting, power hungry narcissists. Such women are judged according to the double bind of failed femininity while undergoing extreme scrutiny for any possible flaws in their intellectual capabilities or leadership. For Caplan, double standards in this category lead to another Catch-22: “If you do well in your academic work, you are not ‘truly’ feminine; if you do badly, you will fail for sure.”<sup>22</sup> Based on the myth that women cannot engage in the same kind of analytical thinking as their male counterparts, and the myth that women who are ambitious are egotistical and less feminine, this Catch-22 is particularly daunting for female academics with intellectual insights and leadership qualities.

The promises and perils for women who wish to engage in academic leadership at my institution are varied. Overall, despite an extremely burdensome teaching schedule, a large majority of the female professors take on extensive service commitments that consist of committee work for summative tenure and promotional evaluations, disciplinary and interdisciplinary searches and hires, program and accreditation reviews, and curriculum reform. Additional extensions of these undertakings include volunteering to serve as advisors to student groups, as well as incorporating service learning initiatives within the class curriculum. While most of the service realms are allocated to female faculty, the upper echelons of leadership and intellectual innovation at my institution are hard fought for as a means to ameliorate low state university salaries for faculty, particularly among female faculty who continue to earn on average between five to ten thousand dollars less than their male counterparts at our institution.<sup>23</sup> Historically, males have dominated the upper ranks of administration at my institution, with recent changes in the last five years. My university now has its first female president, as well as a female vice president of academic affairs. Despite these positive changes, prominent

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<sup>21</sup> Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Beyond the Double Bind*, 120.

<sup>22</sup> Paula Caplan, *Lifting a Ton of Feathers*, 70.

<sup>23</sup> Worcester State College Information, U.S. University Directory “State Universities, Online University Degree Search and College Rankings,” [http://www.stateuniversity.com/universities/MA/Worcester\\_State\\_College.html](http://www.stateuniversity.com/universities/MA/Worcester_State_College.html) (accessed May 01, 2009).

leadership roles for women often carry the stigma of inconsistent judgments and assessment standards due to gender stereotypes.<sup>24</sup>

With few opportunities for leadership at the top, women continue to represent a disproportionate share of the service leadership roles at my university with few rewards and compensation. In my ten-year career at Worcester State University, I have experienced the benefits and risks associated with a variety of leadership opportunities related to my professional training and interdisciplinary education. My efforts to create collaborative partnerships across disciplinary lines for academic and professional development enabled me to obtain limited funds from the university administration to create a Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL). Keeping in line with other institutions, my proposal for the CTL was predicated upon offering an array of new opportunities to engage in individual and peer-group collaboration on the scholarship of teaching, as well as to create innovative faculty projects in teaching and learning across disciplinary lines. Along with another female colleague, I co-founded and co-directed the program for seven years. During this time, my efforts included the following initiatives: conducting a comprehensive needs assessment of the faculty; writing and editing a quarterly newsletter with faculty insights; coordinating a dozen or more annual teaching and learning workshops, presentations, and reading groups; engaging in consortium sponsored professional development opportunities among nine colleges and universities; founding and leading a mentoring program that pairs new and seasoned faculty; and establishing a university-wide teaching excellence award. I also wrote and received a \$143,000 grant to create a faculty fellowship program for those interested in engaging in research initiatives at the university and beyond.

Alongside the successes of my CTL efforts, I was recruited into the Women's Studies Program to advance the cause of women on our campus resulting from the fact that the curriculum for the program was in its infancy, and the university was deficient in providing resources and co-curricular events for and about women. Although this responsibility involved a significant amount of additional time and effort, I cared deeply about the program's mission. I was asked to serve as the director of co-curricular planning for a few reasons, namely because I had a graduate concentration in Women's Studies, and my service and outreach efforts across the campus had been recognized in my summative evaluations as leading to the creation of 'the most

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<sup>24</sup>See Fine 2009, Cobble 2004, Dines & Humez 2003, Stone & McKee 2002, Davis 1983.

visible and effective programs on the campus.’ In my role as the co-curriculum director for four years, and later as the elected Women’s Studies Director for a three-year term, I worked in collaboration with over thirty faculty to create a strong interdisciplinary academic program that included the following: expanding the course offerings across disciplines and faculty; bringing Women’s Studies students to conferences, events and programs in the regional area; financially sponsoring faculty and students so that they could attend annual conferences in Women’s Studies; writing grants to obtain funds and curricular materials; providing a rich array of seasonal programming and presentations by renown speakers and academics; and helping devise appropriate policies, such as sexual harassment policies and initiatives to reduce domestic violence and violence against women on campus and in the community.

The benefits of these leadership experiences in academe were gratifying and challenging, as they enabled me to be part of an exciting range of progressive programs that sought to unite theory and praxis within the university. While the most enduring aspects of my leadership were in helping to meet my institution’s mission, the fruitions of my efforts were made visible through an array of publicity materials to alumni and potential college campaign benefactors, as well as the administration’s assessment reports for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and accreditation reports. My efforts for these and other service commitments were also publicly acknowledged on the campus as I was selected for the “Extraordinary Dedication Award” at the university.

While most academics would be pleased with these outcomes, the public exposure and visibility of these initiatives, as well as the strides I was making as an academic program leader, became sources of contention among many faculty, administrators and staff. Following the trajectory of Catch-22s and stumbling blocks identified by women in academe, my leadership was construed by a handful of faculty and administrators as evidence of a lack of commitment to teaching. Since I was spending less time teaching and more time leading, my priorities and objectives were called into question, so that with each program gain and success—whether through grant funding, additional allocated resources, or public visibility—a level of competition and professional resentment formed. My department chair and some fellow department faculty expressed to me that they felt that my campus outreach in the CTL and Women’s Studies were negatively impacting my responsibilities in the department, despite the fact that my teaching evaluations were the highest among my peers and that I was nominated each year by students for

the university teaching excellence award.

In addition to concerns about my leadership responsibilities affecting my teaching, the resources I had obtained to aide in the development of the CTL and Women's Studies program became a source of envy for some peers, as did a new office location. Faculty who in the past had unsuccessfully tried to establish similar program initiatives felt betrayed by an administration that had seemed unwilling to provide the resources for their projects. Moreover, some department chairs were displeased that I was being invited to attend chairs meetings and events alongside them. Given the contested nature of Women's Studies among some faculty, such sentiments reflected concerns that the program was too far-reaching and not scholarly enough.<sup>25</sup> Despite thirty years of social change, feminist academics still do not fare well within traditional disciplines and departments.<sup>26</sup> Even the CTL was regarded to be a threat by the faculty union leadership who believed that summative evaluations would accompany efforts to assist faculty with teaching and learning projects.

As for the funding I had obtained for each program's expansion and growth, I came to realize that everyone wanted a piece of the monetary pie, including newly appointed administrators who had their own visions for how the funds should be spent. Unbeknownst to me at the time, public recognition of the gains made in the programs I directed were projected onto my personal ambitions, with inaccurate speculations that I was using my leadership successes to climb the academic ladder. Over time, new administrators were pressured to address some of these concerns. Before I could spend a penny of the monies obtained through my \$143,000 CTL grant, I was informed by the new vice president of academic affairs that I would not be allowed to co-direct the CTL and Women's Studies simultaneously due to a "new policy" on the campus. With the gains made in Women's Studies and my growing responsibilities in the program, I was happy to hand over the reins to a newly appointed director. However, shortly thereafter, the same vice president called for a new Women's Studies director. When I questioned her about the underlying root of this decision, she praised my efforts at raising the Women's Studies program to a whole new level, but admitted to being pressured to have me reassume my teaching responsibilities in my respective department.

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<sup>25</sup>See Wilson 2007, Campbell & Patterson 2007, Veney & Zeleza 2001, Bowen & Perez 2002.

<sup>26</sup>Bonnie Zimmerman, "Women's Studies, NWSA, and the Future of the (Inter)discipline." *NWSA Journal* 14, no. 1 (spring 2002): 1-13.

The unraveling of my leadership successes in service and outreach at the university represent but one set of experiences. Notwithstanding, the lessons learned are indicative of the challenges women in academe face as intellectuals and leaders. As with the inconsistent application of policies I had experienced as a graduate student, I later discovered that the same vice president of academic affairs who had relieved me of my professional leadership opportunities was allowing three male faculty to assume multiple directorships and leadership opportunities simultaneously without having to relegate their roles exclusively to departmental teaching, thereby making it clear to me that there was something uniquely gendered about my leadership experiences at the university.

Drawing upon the binary divisions women face between traditional femininity and competence, as well as teaching and leadership, the fact remains that “the old norms dichotomize women’s sexual and intellectual natures and, given this split, women are *accused* of being rational and ambitious rather than commended for it.”<sup>27</sup> In a New York Times article, Hannah Seligson writes of the unfortunate lessons that smart and motivated women receive in their professions. Aptly titled, “Girl power at school, but not at the office,” Seligson explains the ironic schism between academe as an educational environment for female learners and the professional world where sexism, discrimination, pay inequity, and undermining by other women serve as major obstacles to success:

When I was in college, the female students excelled academically, sometimes running laps around their male counterparts. Women easily ascended to school leadership positions and prestigious internships. In my graduating class (more than half of which was female) there was a feeling of camaraderie, a sense that we were helping each other succeed. Then I left the egalitarianism of the classroom for the cubicle, and everything changed. The realization that the knowledge and skills acquired in school don’t always translate at the office is something that all college graduates, men and women, must face. But for women, I have found, the adjustment tends to be harder. It was certainly hard for me...<sup>28</sup>

Seligson describes that upon interviewing other young women, she noted interesting gender patterns. Instead of reaching out to help a new female colleague, some women undermined “the new girl” resulting from the few leadership or professional opportunities for women in the workplace. She notes that sexism, pay discrimination, and sexual harassment all

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<sup>27</sup> Paula Caplan, *Lifting a Ton of Feathers*, 70.

<sup>28</sup> Hannah Seligson, "Girl power at school, but not at the office," *The New York Times*, August 31, 2008, (accessed August 31, 2008).

remain top contenders for problems of equality for women in professional settings. What these patterns indicate is that, regardless of their professional ambitions or academic successes, women face particular challenges as professionals. Within academe, equality, democracy, and transparency are principled ideals that belie reform efforts to improve work conditions across intersecting matrices of race, class and gender. However, such ideals often represent philosophical values over material outcomes. “Myths of affirmative action are dangerous,” writes Caplan, because they can “lull members of underrepresented groups into believing that changes in numbers are all it will take to create an academic environment where diversity is truly respected.” She warns, “It doesn’t do women very much good if we constitute half of the faculty but if the kinds of work that many of us do (such as women’s studies or applied work rather than theoretical work with no practical applications) are accorded less value and less respect.”<sup>29</sup>

Taken as a whole, women must carefully balance professional workloads in academia, including initiatives that are often veiled as service and leadership opportunities. The harsh political and economic realities of competition, self-advancement, and sexism continue to thwart the ambitions of some of the brightest and most dedicated women in academe who have proven their competencies as scholars and leaders, but are ignored in the faculty reward system, including tenure. Recent discussions about the place of universities in a “knowledge society” have not necessarily addressed how faculty workloads have been impacted by increased expectations for measurable outputs, responsiveness to societal and student needs, and overall performance accountability.<sup>30</sup> Accordingly, university faculty motivated by core academic disciplinary or interdisciplinary interests, as well as leadership opportunities, will continue to be challenged by increased accountability and workloads that are often inconsistent based on normative gender expectations.

### **Pay Equity and Discrimination (Equality or Difference)**

Within the top echelons of the business world, women appear to be making economic strides, as the average compensation for women chief executive officers (CEOs) is very close to that of male CEOs. However, a study of salary, perks, stock option profits, and cash bonuses for

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<sup>29</sup> Paula Caplan, *Lifting a Ton of Feathers*, 62.

<sup>30</sup> Don Houston, Luanna Meyer and Paewai Shelley, "Academic staff workloads and job satisfaction: Expectations and values in academe," *Journal of Higher Education Policy & Management* 28, no. 1 (March 2006): 17-30.

women and men CEOs has revealed that the median compensation of women CEOs is 85% of their male counterparts.<sup>31</sup> Academia functions in a similar fashion in that, on the surface, women appear to be making gains financially. According to statistics from the U.S. Department of Education's postsecondary data, female faculty members at community and baccalaureate colleges continue to show smaller salary differences than their male counterparts, and the number of women faculty continues to increase. Notwithstanding, with the exception of private Affirmative Action institutions, female faculty members continue to earn less than male faculty. Doctoral universities continue to represent the greatest pay gaps with women earning between 77 – 80 percent of men's salaries at private and public institutions respectively.<sup>32</sup>

As a result of gender biases and discriminations that deny women a fair and equitable place in academe, women and minority faculty find themselves to be the victims of inequitable salaries and biased reward systems. Women faculty's inequitable access to institutional resources and rewards that promote professional parity represent the double bind of difference over equality.<sup>33</sup> Although academic institutions aim to mask white-collar or professional sex segregation regarding pay, women have not yet found themselves earning the same pay for the same work. Pay equity is often difficult in academe because of inherent biases that reward men for serious intellectual work and initiative, while women's intellectual and professional contributions are downplayed and regarded as intuitive.<sup>34</sup> Biased attitudes within academic culture transcend into inequitable pay differentials in base salaries, grant allocations, stipends, honorarium, and other rewards.

In my experience, the gender-biased culture of academe is the underlying cause for compensatory inequities between the sexes. Since women are thought to be intuitively adept at teaching and service, and these contributions are devalued and regarded as less rigorous than research, men continue to disproportionately receive reward measures, course reductions, and pay for service and leadership. Such prejudicial biases undermine women's efforts to obtain the same pay and rewards as their male colleagues, and leads to setbacks in acquiring fairly

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<sup>31</sup> Jena McGregor, "In CEO pay, another gender gap," *Business Week*, (November 24, 2008).

<sup>32</sup> "Women and Minority Faculty Members: Salary review," *The National Education Association Higher Education Advocate* 26, no. 4 (2009): 1-44.

<sup>33</sup> Adalberto Aquirre, Jr., *Women and Minority Faculty in the Academic Workplace: Recruitment, Retention, and Academic Culture* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000).

<sup>34</sup> Evelyn Murphy and E. J. Graff. *Getting Even*.

compensated leadership opportunities. Rather than unite female faculty through a common cause, such inequalities can also lead to forms of competition between and among women in academe who are faced with a paucity of resources and opportunities for professional advancement.

The aforementioned outcomes of my CTL and Women's Studies service contributions at the university demonstrate the anti-climactic outcomes of biased attitudes and behaviors. First, although a marginal stipend was provided to me for co-directing the CTL, I was given no course reduction for my assumed leadership responsibilities because the administration did not want to have to pay for adjunct faculty to fill my teaching requirements. Given the amount of work involved in the program's execution, most universities hire a well-paid and staffed CTL director whose sole responsibility is to lead the program. However, in my case, my gender, lack of tenure, and dedication to the program were misappropriated by the administration as cheap labor for an invaluable program.

Second, upon realizing that the Women's Studies director was receiving less course reductions than other department chairs, I requested new equitable terms, namely two course reductions per semester for curricular and co-curricular assignments along with a modest chair's stipend as allocated in the contract. In an unusual turn of events, the male faculty union president (whose allegiance should have been with his dues-paying unit member) challenged my newly acquired terms and convinced the administration to renegotiate my offer after it had been agreed upon. To make matters worse, the former female director of the program with whom I had worked extremely well with for four years prior expressed personal embitterment toward me as a result of my obtaining better terms for the program. In essence, the core Marxist feminist principles and causes that the former program director and I had championed in solidarity quickly dissipated when the matter was regarded through personal pecuniary terms. Such outcomes are not uncommon given the scarcity of equitable resources and compensatory measures afforded women in academe.

In reviewing the current salary figure reports from the U.S. department of education, I continue to earn five thousand dollars less than the average male professor at my institution, and eight thousand dollars less than the institutional average for faculty across ranks. Due to clerical errors in my rank and promotion schedule, I discovered in my fifth year of teaching that I had not been given the proper rank for my years of service and terminal degree. Clarifying this inequity

meant gearing up for another battle, this time to negotiate retroactive salary and the appropriate rank and years of service for my salary. As predicted, the process was excruciatingly difficult, requiring self-directed institutional fact-finding, contractual scrutiny, and several meetings with the academic vice president. Prior requests for a full rank and salary review according to contractually outlined provisions were ignored by the administration and the faculty union president outright until I discovered the source of the discrepancy in my original hiring contract. However, even with written documentation attesting to the clerical error in my rank in hand, the faculty union president denied the injustice and refused to represent my case to the administration.

Just as obtaining equitable leadership terms for Women's Studies created dissonance for the faculty union leadership, my efforts at salary reparation caused additional conflict. Rather than regard my hard-earned equitable pay terms as a victory for women *and* the union, the faculty union president used my settlement to harbor resentment and jealousy among other faculty. With recession salaries low, and state university faculty without a funded contract, battles over pay equity continue to be a source of scrutiny and divisiveness among faculty across gender lines. In spite of these circumstances, women must be confident and assert themselves in the face of pay inequities and injustice. In heeding the advice to take credit for our work and accomplishments while fearlessly negotiating for compensation, I was able to rectify my rank and salary, and obtain a substantial amount of retroactive salary without anyone's assistance.<sup>35</sup> The lesson learned was to embrace fearlessness and courage in the face of obstacles and backlash as a means to chipping away at the glass ceiling.

### **Conclusion: Post Feminist Possibilities for Women in Academe**

As difficult as the challenges within academe may be for women, it is essential that we systematically expose the mythical constructs of femininity that have historically been used against women and minorities, and provide new visions for post-feminist possibilities. This means defying learned behaviors and feminist tendencies that lead women to blame themselves as inadequate or intellectually inferior, as well as recognizing and resisting the myths that portray

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<sup>35</sup> Arianna Huffington, *On Becoming Fearless in Love, Work, and Life* (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2006).

academia as an idealized environment where equality and justice prevail for all outside of traditional power relations.

If women faculty are to gain the same opportunities as intellectuals and leaders within higher education, we must study the academic workplace to assess how female professors fit in the academic culture. As Adalberto Aquirre recognized almost a decade ago, “an increased representation of women and minorities in the workplace has implications for institutions of higher education, especially at a time when it appears that faculty pools are shrinking as the demand for new faculty is increasing. As a result, one may speculate that women and minorities will increase their representation in the faculty population, thus providing institutions of higher education with an enhanced opportunity to diversity their faculty ranks.”<sup>36</sup>

As I have shown, women’s progress in academe has been thwarted by double binds that, when overcome, have morphed into other setbacks. Pinioned between the dichotomies of womb or brain, emotion or mind, femininity or competence, difference or equality, women have had to assert their rightful place as competent intellectuals and professional leaders by resisting normative frameworks of femininity and discriminatory practices that have kept us out of the academy. Notwithstanding, as women have advocated for equal treatment and recognition, along with their fair share of resources and proper compensation, they have asserted their rights as serious and worthy intellectuals and professionals whose ambitions and hard efforts will allow them to persevere in the face of new perils and promises. Without a doubt, my efforts to overcome discriminatory practices as a graduate student and faculty member represent the significance of women’s efforts to persevere with professional ambition in the face of sexism, discrimination, and cultural ideals of femininity.

Future research on women’s academic workloads will need to consider the intensification of academic responsibilities, as well as the difficulties of balancing teaching, research, and service. Other perspectives and experiences of women in higher education, particularly those of non-dominant minorities, are necessary for a more diverse and representative viewpoint to emerge in light of the challenges ahead. Such inclusions are critical to equality in academe, as

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<sup>36</sup> Adalberto Aquirre, Jr., *Women and Minority Faculty in the Academic Workplace*.

women of color experience sexism in the context of racism, bearing altogether a unique burden from that borne by white women.<sup>37</sup>

What emerges from the accounts I have provided in this analysis are the different forms of power associated with traditional gender roles ascribed within institutions of higher education. Within academe, patriarchy is alive and well. Male ideologies and masculine behaviors continue to control the underlying facets of higher education in ways that sustain sex and gender discrimination and exploitation. Hierarchical gender relations in the academy persist through the undervaluation of feminist scholarship and leadership. While a full account of the double standards and stumbling blocks I have encountered within my academic experiences go beyond the purviews of this analysis, the reflections provided herein represent a set of experiences that are meant to define key areas of discrimination and double binds that entrap women in academe.

By identifying the conditions that have made my experiences challenging in academe through the context of feminist theory, the goal was to provide a critique, as well as offer a new and challenging perspective that enables women to explore post-feminist possibilities for equality and success within the cultural, political and economic realms of higher education. The hope is that academics across disciplinary lines and rank can engage in meaningful dialogues that advocate social justice and better lives for women in higher education and beyond. If we truly believe that academia is a unique place where education can change the lives of its hard working students, then we must ensure that this environment affords women faculty the same transformative outcomes and equitable rewards.

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<sup>37</sup>See Marsha Houston, 1992, D.K. King, 1988 and Elizabeth Spelman, 1988.

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