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ARTICLES

Five Relational Strategies for Mentoring Female Faculty

Tonya Hammer, Heather Trepal, and Stacy Speedlin

Female faculty mentoring is examined through the conceptual framework of relational cultural theory (RCT). As a theoretical approach that takes into account the importance of relationships and mutuality, it is suggested that RCT concepts be utilized within mentoring relationships. Five relational mentoring strategies for working with female faculty are presented.

Keywords: mentoring, female, faculty, relational cultural theory

All work environments, including academia, are gendered. As such, there are specific roles and values ascribed to both men and women and their work performance at individual and institutional levels (Valian, 1998). Valian (2005) questioned the slow pace of advancement for female academics across disciplines when compared with their male counterparts. She attributed this problem to gender schemas, or the subtle and powerful ways in which we categorize men and women. She concluded that "the gender schemas that we all share result in our overrating men and underrating women in professional settings, only in small, barely visible ways: those small disparities accumulate over time to provide men with more advantages than women" (Valian, 2005, p. 198).

In their study, Elg and Jonnergård (2010) followed a Swedish cohort of female doctoral students to observe their experiences. Participants were interviewed during their doctoral studies in 1997, at the completion of their doctoral degrees in 2002, and finally once they were established in their academic work lives in 2008. The study examined various issues concerning the participants' experiences in graduate school ranging from their demographic information and personal background to their experience of gender issues and future plans. The analysis of the qualitative data obtained revealed that, although there have been changes

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in academia, it is still gender biased. "It shows that graduated female PhDs may be more often forced to change employer, have fewer career alternatives and have less support from prevailing formal and informal organisational structures" (Elg & Jonnergård, 2010, p. 222). In summary, Elg and Jonnergård (2010) argued, "the mere existence of societal support will not guarantee equality. Instead, there is likely to be a complex interplay between external forces, the organizational structure, and the activities of the women" (p. 210).

Thus, female faculty members have specific needs and challenges, and those employed in the counseling profession are no exception. For example, Hill, Leinbaugh, Bradley, and Hazler (2005) explored encouraging and discouraging factors in academia for women counselor educators. They found that these women conceptualized both personal and professional factors that involved relational aspects to be important, noting that "supportive, growth-producing interactions with students and other professionals" (Hill et al., 2005, p. 378) were extremely important to their overall career satisfaction. Personally, aspects such as controlling one's own destiny and influencing others in the profession were thought to be encouraging. Aspects having to do with organizational politics and overcontrol were thought to be discouraging.

Female academics who are also parents struggle with competing demands for their time and energy. Trepal and Stinchfield (2012) found that environmental influences, or the elements in the academic environment related to being a mother and a counselor educator, were conflictual for the participants in their study. Participants reported receiving both overt and covert messages related to motherhood and work, resulting in both experiences of perceived discrimination and felt support (Trepal & Stinchfield, 2012).

Rheineck and Roland (2008) offered the Rheineck Mentoring Model as a framework for conceptualizing the developmental mentoring relationship between academic women. In this model, the researchers discussed the importance of mentoring being viewed as a developmental process. The model focuses on two domains, the personal and professional, with both being viewed as equally important. In the qualitative portion of the research, participants described the importance of their mentoring relationship with three to five descriptive words. The words were, on average, very relational in nature, such as *affirming, safe, supportive, helpful,* and *inspiring*.

Given the culture of academia, the literature obviously indicates a need for mentoring for female faculty on professional and personal levels. In short, relationships and a relational work environment are important to women's career growth and development. Authors such as Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, and Surrey (1991) have argued that relationships play a critical role in well-being. In fact, Deanow (2011) posited that "feminist theorists posit that women's central organizing core is based on themes of affiliation, connection, and relationship, rather than the themes of separation, individuation, and autonomy that are emphasized in familiar models of development" (p. 125). Thus, an

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examination of relational cultural theory (RCT), which was developed with this premise in mind, is crucial in the development of relational strategies for mentoring female faculty.

RCT

In traditional (i.e., Western) theories of development, importance is placed on the concept of "self" and on the idea of separation and individuation, whereas in RCT, the establishment and development of relationships and connections are seen as critical. Duffey (2008) summarized this: "According to RCT, individuals grow through their connections with others. That is, we become more relationally competent as we represent ourselves authentically in our relationships and as we negotiate the relational ruptures we experience" (p. 50).

Mutual Empathy

A vital concept in relational cultural theory is that of mutual empathy or a mutually empathic relationship (Jordan et al., 1991). According to Surrey (1983), "the ability to be in relationship appears to rest on the development of the capacity for empathy in both or all persons involved" (p. 53). Furthermore, "such capacities imply highly developed emotional and cognitive operations requiring practice, modeling, and feedback in relationship" (Surrey, 1983, p. 53). Jordan (1991) stated that

> While some mutual empathy involves an acknowledgment of sameness in the other, an appreciation of the differentness of the other's experience is also vital. . . . I accommodate to your experience and therefore am changed by our interaction. . . . The validation occurs because the person being empathized with feels her differentness or uniqueness can be accepted. (p. 89)

Through the exercise of mutual empathy, growth-fostering relationships can develop.

Growth-Fostering Relationships

A *growth-fostering relationship* is defined as a fundamental and complex process of active participation in the development and growth of other people and the relationship that results in mutual development (Miller & Stiver, 1998); such a relationship creates growth in both (or more) people. In a growth-fostering relationship, Miller (1986) proposed that people experience the five good things: zest or a sense of excitement and vitality; sense of worth or value in the relationship; clarity of purpose; productivity or energy; and, in turn, a desire for more connection.

A fundamental cornerstone of this theory involves disconnections, or times when there are challenges in relationships. These challenges can be routine,

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such as arguments or disagreements, or chronic, such as experiences of abuse and humiliation. How people negotiate these disconnections influences their relational competency and potential for deepened and enhanced connections.

Furthermore, the desire to have and maintain emotional safety in relationships is important. In fact, people will use strategies of disconnection to maintain this at all costs. For example, people can distort their authentic responses to conflict in relationships (e.g., avoid instead of engage), thus resulting in the central relational paradox: wanting growth-fostering relationships but exercising strategies that keep them out of the very relationships that they desire. In traditional, mainstream language, this is the equivalent to "I am rejecting you before you can reject me."

Power and Marginalization

According to RCT, issues of power, oppression, and marginalization are at the core of disconnecting experiences, often resulting in experiences of hurt and isolation. Society's stratification of certain privileged statuses (e.g., heterosexuality, wealth, ableism, education, thinness, Whiteness) has resulted in many people being pushed to the margins. As people are often composed of an intersection of identities, this can result in sometimes confusing experiences where they go through their day interacting in relationships where their privileged and nonprivileged statuses convene and diverge. With one group of people, a person is likely to have a dominant status (e.g., education), whereas, with another, they are likely to be marginalized (e.g., gay/lesbian). Societal expectations and organizational structure regarding identity and status can result in chronic disconnections.

RELATIONAL MENTORING STRATEGIES

The core concepts of RCT—the importance of growth-fostering relationships, attention to issues of power and marginalization, and opportunities to grow from disconnections through authenticity and mutual empathy—might serve as guiding principles for mentoring relationships, particularly for female faculty. As indicated earlier, the gendered environment of academia may devalue women and their relational style. Thus, by incorporating relational mentoring strategies, women may be better able to navigate the academic environment.

As Walker (2006) proposed in mentoring students, "by using a relational model of mentoring, [counselor educators] can foster a sense of mutuality and empathic understanding that will serve to empower and enhance the growth" of female faculty (p. 62). Considering the concepts presented above, we would like to offer five relational mentoring strategies for female faculty.

Strategy 1: Attend to Power in Academic Relationships

Hartling and Sparks (2008) described challenges to working in a hierarchical culture as (a) one-way, nonmutual relationships; (b) power-over, controlling

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relationships; (c) conflict being controlled or suppressed; and (d) a devaluing of relational practice. To remedy the situation, Hartling and Sparks (2008) suggested taking "micro movements" (p. 175) toward mutuality. These small movements pave the way for larger, organizational changes. One such micro movement might include attending to the power dynamics that are inherent in academic relationships. Miller (1976) also presented the idea of the importance of a power-with stance in relationships as opposed to a power-over stance. Miller (1991) expanded on this concept by stressing the importance of using one's own power to empower others. The person with more power should work to "advance the movement of the less powerful person in a positive, stronger direction" (Miller, 1991, p. 199).

By naming the power dynamics involved in the academic work environment (e.g., junior/senior faculty relationships, administrative hierarchies), women may be more likely to put the issue of power "on the table" when they are interacting with others at work. For example, a female faculty member might struggle when department meetings are scheduled on a day when her children are off of school for a national holiday. When taken from her vantage point, she might view the situation through the inherent power structure of her environment. Her choices might include (a) attending the meeting and locating alternative child-care arrangements for her children or (b) missing the meeting to take care of her children. As mentioned earlier, many gendered factors may also play into her choice. For example, she may consider the culture of her work environment toward parenting; she may feel internal conflict and/or oppression with a traditional gender model of caregiving responsibilities for mothers; and she may feel (particularly if she is not yet tenured or is seeking promotion to full professor) as though she needs to have a presence at departmental meetings. A relational mentoring strategy would involve naming the power (acknowledging that the chair has power in the faculty member's role within the program) and letting the female faculty member survey the options and collaborate on a decision, while supporting both the process and the faculty member.

Additionally, feminist therapists have envisioned supervision as a process where assumptions are questioned, difficult dilemmas are discussed, and power issues are made explicit. Prouty, Thomas, Johnson, and Long (2001) found that feminist supervision methods reflected the value of collaboration and the minimization of hierarchy in relationships while also acknowledging expertise. A relational approach to mentoring female faculty can borrow from feminist supervision methods and account for the power differentials that often exist in academic relationships. For example, often, when called on to mentor junior level colleagues, senior female faculty may see the relationship as fluid. They may believe that the information exchange is both ways and that open and honest communication is valued. On the other hand, junior female faculty, and particularly brand-new faculty, may experience any and all communication from more senior faculty members in the department through the lens of

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the academic hierarchy. They may always wonder how what they say and do might be viewed during the tenure decision process. It is important for senior faculty to remember the lens through which the junior or new faculty view the situation and use their power or privilege to help the new faculty process this view. As Downs (2006) stated, from a relational supervision model, the supervisor (or, in this case, the mentor) can see herself "not as a source of 'objective truth,' but as one whose power is used to create a space for a mutual, reflective process" (p. 8).

Strategy 2: Focus on Mutuality

Another strategy for relational mentoring is to focus on mutuality. Walker (2006) suggested that this form of mentoring highlights emotional needs and personal perceptions while still retaining some instrumental focus. From an RCT perspective, mutual empathy has the potential to occur for both parties in the mentoring relationship. In other words, both parties in the relationship have the potential of being influenced by each other. Downs (2006) enhanced this concept by expressing that "the concept of mutuality requires that its maintenance become a shared responsibility over time. Eventually, both participants should share a sense of commitment" and view the relationship as a "place for collaborative growth and movement" (p. 9).

Hartling and Sparks (2008) offered that "making others more aware of the value of the relational work and negotiating the conditions in which one can successfully do this work, emphasizing that relational work is real work and it benefits clients, the organization, and the bottom line" (p. 185) are important. By negotiating the dance of mutuality in mentoring relationships, both parties can attest to the opportunities for growth that arise.

A prime area for this concept to emerge is in collaborating on research and writing projects. In traditional models of junior/senior faculty, often the senior faculty member's research agenda drives the work. In a relationship of mutuality, a sense of collaboration and cocreating a research agenda could potentially occur. This could serve the role of enhancing both research agendas and possibly create a new line of thought or research. Additionally, when the promotion and tenure process is examined in this area, a difference can be seen in the approach from a traditional standpoint as opposed to a relational view. For example, when discussing the formation of a promotion and tenure committee from a traditional hierarchy position, a senior female faculty might make the statement that "you want me on your committee because I have more pull," which would have the possible effect of oppressing the junior faculty with a sense of fear instead of empowering her. However, from a relational view with an awareness of mutuality, the senior female faculty member would instead work to encourage, inspire, and empower the junior female faculty member so that regardless of who is on the promotion and tenure committee, she is in the position to succeed in the process. The language chosen and the actions have

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the potential to affect the mentee in either a positive or a negative manner, which will then also affect the mentor.

In addition, traditional academic culture may value research agendas and publications that are sole-author driven as well as secure funded grants. However, women may prefer to work in collaboration with others. Thus, although it may look like the female faculty member is relying on others to help publish her work, this may not be the case. According to Viers and Blieszner (2004),

> Direct competition is often counter to many women's work style and serves to subvert their strengths. Instead, institutions need to reward cooperative efforts among faculty. This would include valuing joint authorship on publications and grants, collaboration between disciplines, teaching teams, and team mentoring. (p. 493)

A mentoring strategy that involves mutuality could instead make the female faculty member aware of the systemic requirements for publications (e.g., sole authored), while also attending to her needs for connection and collaboration. An example proposed by Viers and Blieszner (2004) that creates a collaborative environment is research teams:

> Within research teams, faculty would share sources of funding streams as well as the burden of writing proposals and conducting the research. Further, students can be brought onto research teams, which can help change the negative perceptions about research and prepare students for academia. (p. 494)

Strategy 3: Foster Authenticity

From a relational standpoint, another mentoring strategy on which to focus is that of fostering authenticity. In the traditional hierarchy that is academia, as discussed previously in maneuvering the road to promotion and tenure, junior female faculty and those who are seeking promotion to full professorships might find being authentic a difficult task. In a relational model of mentoring, the mentor would encourage authenticity, at least in the mentoring relationship itself. According to Downs (2006), "authenticity is fostered when a person believes she will be heard, understood, and respected" (p. 10). Authenticity in the mentoring relationship would be a two-way street. The mentor sharing her own insecurities, failures, and growth experiences can assist the mentee in her own developmental process. For women, this experience can be particularly salient. Historically, women have been silenced out of sharing their own experiences in the gendered need to please others.

Junior female faculty in academia often can find themselves in positions where they feel the need to go along regardless of their values or belief systems. An example might be the recommendation to simply put each other's names on

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articles or add senior faculty to their presentations in an attempt to put lines on everyone's vitae, rather than being true to their own research agenda. The junior female faculty may simply acquiesce for fear of reprisal and therefore may not be authentic in the relationship. From an RCT perspective, the mentor would provide support and direction on how to respond in such situations in a manner that would allow the mentee to remain authentic to her beliefs, values, and identity, without sacrificing her chances at promotion and tenure. Unfortunately, in the current power-over dynamics of academia, this is not always possible, but, in the relational model, the mentor would attempt to help the mentee walk the fine line that is often necessary to maneuver. As Jordan (2002) asserted, "there are times when discernment allows individuals to decide when 'protective inauthenticity' may be called for" (p. 6), and this is also an opportunity for the mentor to help the mentee travel that road: "Authenticity is a complex process of assessing one's own risk and gauging the impact of certain truths on the other while respecting the needs of the relationship" (Jordan, 2002, p. 6).

Strategy 4: Listen Into Voice

In the process of creating a growth-fostering relationship inspired by mutuality and authenticity, a fourth relational mentoring strategy would naturally flow—that of listening each other into voice. Although the mentor is in a position of experience and power, as previously discussed, from an RCT perspective, both parties have the power to influence each other and the relationship. In the traditional hierarchical and patriarchal environment of academia, both the mentor and the mentee are seeking avenues to find their voice. As the relationship develops, opportunities to support and encourage each other in the relationship will arise. As Hartling (2005) indicated, listening each other into voice "creates a context of collective curiosity and collaboration" (p. 2). This is explained further by Lindner (2012), who credited Hartling with defining this concept as follows:

> The expression "listening into voice" draws our attention to the fact that human communication is a bi-directional experience. It is a phrase that encourages us to attune to the fundamental relational nature of speaking. It reminds us to look beyond the individualist myth that speaking is a one-way experience in which the speaker is solely responsible for communicating effectively. Speaking is interactive. It is a two-way experience in which both (or all) people participating in the relationship can choose to listen and engage in a way that will help others to effectively express and clarify their ideas. (pp. 167–168)

When the female faculty members are not provided the opportunity to be listened into voice, they are silenced and quite possibly isolated. This also

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models behavior that they, in turn, may model in their classrooms and in possible future relationships with other faculty, including junior faculty when and if they obtain promotion and tenure themselves. A prime opportunity for this strategy is during service on university and school committees. As indicated by Wasburn (2007), "frequently, women faculty are asked to serve on committees that need a woman's perspective" (p. 58). By truly providing the space for the female faculty members to share their expertise and opinions, they will be encouraged to do so in other environments. They begin to feel that, regardless of their status on campus, their voice matters and is valued. If, instead, a woman is on a committee as a "token" female and her comments are met with silence or disregard, then she might have the tendency to remain silent and not grow or learn from the experience; just as important is the loss of her contribution to the mission and purpose of the committee.

Strategy 5: Build a Sense of Community and Connection

In the process of listening each other into voice, another relational mentoring strategy is realized—the building of a sense of community and connection. As Jordan (2004) stated, "existing privileged models of success and competence, which are characterized by defensive armoring and disconnection, are not working" (p. 25). By building a system of connection and collaboration, the mentor helps to confront possible feelings of isolation and fear. The mentoring relationship can be an optimal opportunity to contribute to the growth and development of another, who, in turn, will contribute to the life of another. Jordan shared a story in her work that is helpful in understanding this sense of community and connection that is created:

> A woman at a meeting recently asked me if I knew what gave the giant sequoia trees their strength. When I admitted I didn't know, she said they actually have very shallow roots but the roots of nearby trees intertwine and support one another. These biggest and oldest of trees, these images of power and strength, literally hold each other up. (p. 25)

One of the advantages of viewing mentoring through the lens of RCT is the opportunity to create networks for support and guidance. According to Hartling and Sparks (2008), this networking is important as it creates an opportunity by "forming communities of allies to encourage and foster relational practice in the situations in which we work" (p. 185). There are some preexisting structures in professional counseling associations with which mentors can suggest that their mentees connect. These networks can serve as touch points for developing relationships with others, particularly those interested in the field of counselor education and supervision. In addition, junior faculty have been found to have the lowest levels of wellness (Wester, Trepal, & Myers, 2009), so

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it may be especially important to encourage pretenured faculty to join established, supportive networks such as the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision's New Faculty Interest Network. The mentoring relationship provides an opportunity for growth for all parties and, in return, growth for students, departments, and the profession.

Finally, Hartling and Sparks (2008) called for a process of norming, where individuals "call attention to the organizational norms that are not relational, norms that do not enhance the effectiveness of individuals, the services provided in the organization, or the organization" (p. 185). When the academic environment is toxic, particularly for female faculty, these organizational norms should be brought to light. They are not effective for the faculty or for the core mission of the department.

DISCUSSION

At the heart of relational mentoring, the desire is for growth-fostering relationships. As mentioned earlier, in these relationships, Miller (1986) proposed that people experience the five good things: zest or a sense of excitement and vitality; sense of worth or value in the relationship; clarity of purpose; productivity or energy; and a desire for more connection. If a growth-fostering mentor relationship is established, perhaps the five good things would appear as follows: Zest would translate to an excitement about the profession and the possibilities of what is to come; sense of worth would manifest in the mentee's view of her worth not only in the collegial relationship but also to the university and the profession; clarity would be seen as a clear sense of the direction in which the faculty member's career is developing along with her position in the system itself; productivity would be directly related to the areas of teaching, research, and service; and there would be a desire to produce more as a result of the energy and clarity experienced in the relationship and because the mentee sees her own value in contributing. Finally, the faculty members would experience a desire for more connection in their own mentoring of students and with new faculty who come into the field and department after them.

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