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Undisclosed stories of instructional design female scholars in academia

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ABSTRACT

In this critical autoethnography, we come together as female instructional design (ID) faculty and graduate students. We use self-reflection to explore, through our writing, the experiences of our lives as female scholars. This includes gender-related challenges, concerns, and experiences that shape our lives as researchers, instructors, and practitioners. The theoretical frameworks that guide this critical autoethnography are radical and intersectional feminism. Radical feminists practice consciousness-raising in which women come together to share their personal experiences with each other. Intersectional feminists acknowledge that the various aspects of humanity, such as class, race, sexual orientation, and gender do not exists separately from each other. Our stories provide a view into the gender inequalities experienced by women, from various cultural backgrounds, ranks, and roles, while maneuvering the socio-cultural norms ingrained in higher education institutions. Our intention is that these stories generate understanding of these issues and inform ways that higher education may be more inclusive and supportive of female academics in the future.

Introduction

In everyday life, we often have conversations about empowering women. Yet, there are many issues that continue to exist within social, cultural, political, and economic contexts affecting women all over the world. In higher education, in particular, women continue to lag behind their male counterparts (Euben, 2001; Misra, Lundquist, Holmes, & Agiomavritis, 2011; Valian, 1998). The inclusion of women in higher education is crucial as it would help lessen the positionality of the decisions about education policies, promotion criteria, student admissions, and so forth (Acker, 1992). The masculinist discourse of the dominant paradigms dictating scholarship practices can take multiple sexist forms that aim to further alienate and marginalize women in academia. However, as the number and the presence of women rise in academia, the voices discussing the inequity of access, pay, recognition, and promotion are getting louder. This has prompted a new epistemological approach that examines women's lives and experiences (Bell & Gordon, 1999), thus creating the feminist approach as an emerging paradigm that aims to vocalize the silenced voices by the hegemonic forces of the dominant paradigms (Hesse-Biber, 2012).

Being inherently political, the feminist paradigm in academia is still devalued and demystified as a scientific approach (Bell & Gordon, 1999). Normalization of the feminist paradigm in academia needs to go through a social and political legitimization movement. This draws on the Kuhnian framework (Kuhn, 1970), where we can argue that the skeptical doubts and the criticisms raised concerning the existing "shared belief systems that influence the kinds of knowledge researchers seek and how they interpret the evidence they collect" (Morgan, 2007, p.50) will require scientific revolutions at some point, within the dominant masculinist paradigm. Therefore, uncovering the subjugated knowledge about the gender biases in academic life will reveal the anomalies that do not fit in the existing assumptions and practices. This later will create tension and conflict between the scientists recognizing these anomalies and the scientists whose commitments adhere to the existing paradigm (Kuhn, 1970; Morgan, 2007). We aim to validate the existence of such anomalies within this masculinist domain of scholarship through a critical autoethnographic examination of our daily life experiences as female scholars. These narratives are as

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diverse as the women that wrote them. The aim of this paper is to describe and discuss key topics and experiences (issues, concerns, challenges, and accomplishments) that ID scholars have encountered in their day-to-day lives as female academics.

Literature review

In his famous book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Kuhn (1970) argues that scientific knowledge does not develop by a linear accumulation of individual scientific contributions but through alternating revolutionary and normal phases of scientific practices. This argument is grounded on a philosophical and methodological assumption that claims natural science needs to be situated in the social and historical contexts in order to ensure internal coherence and possible fit to nature (Kuhn, 1970; Zammito, 2004). Drawing from his view that scientific knowledge is accumulated through the practice of normal science; we could argue that the evolution of scientific knowledge in social science is subject to the research practices that are normalized and legitimized by social and political structures and dynamics of the dominant paradigms at a certain point in time. This argument is supported by Morgan's (2007, p. 50) definition of paradigms and suggests that social and cultural discourse dictated by the paradigms is biased as a result of gender, power, and context-sensitive knowledge created by the dominant socio-political forces. It is also noted as being a very strong tool to silence some voices while empowering the others (Vaivio & Sirén, 2010).

Subjugated knowledge, as described by Hesse-Biber (2012, p. 138), is “oppressed group's voices and ways of thinking that have been devalued by dominant, patriarchal, forms of knowledge and promoting social change and social justice.” It suggests that the way social communities are constituted forms a particular discourse that is socially-accepted and culturally-valued within that community. This discourse “allows certain things to be said and impedes or prevents other things from being said” (Purvis & Hunt, 1993, p. 485), because “discourses, by way of hegemonic closures, fix meanings in particular ways and, thus, exclude all other meaning potentials” (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 186). Within this context, the unsayable knowledge, determined by the dominant forces in the community, becomes the subjugated knowledge as it is suppressed, not mentioned and/or lacking systematic engagement. On the contrary, what is known, i.e. the discourse that is created, validated and normalized by the dominant forces, is acknowledged and legitimized regardless of the potential biases rooted in personal assumptions and beliefs.

Building upon these axiological, ontological, and epistemological assumptions, one could assume that the inherently biased and gendered social and cultural norms are shaped under the hegemony of certain groups of people, and used to oppress other groups of people. Radical and intersectional feminism underline this notion. Radical feminism seeks to abolish patriarchy by challenging existing social norms and institutions. At its core, *radical feminism* aims to “overthrow the oldest, most rigid caste system in existence, the class system based on sex. A system consolidated over thousands of years, lending archetypal male and female roles an undeserved legitimacy and seeming permanence” (Firestone, 1970, pg. 15). According to radical feminism, sexism is the first, most widespread, and deepest form of human oppression. This feminist theory insist that one of the most fundamental oppressions is men's control of women's sexual lives, reproductive lives, self-esteem, self-identity, and self-respect (Tong, 2009). Radical feminists practice consciousness-raising in which women come together to share their personal experiences as women with each other. It proclaims that women's fate are profoundly linked (Tong, 2009).

Intersectional feminism theory considers the various aspects of humanity, such as class, race, sexual orientation, and gender. It acknowledges that these aspects do not exist separately from each other, but are complexly interwoven, and that their relationships are essential to an understanding of the human condition. According to Tong (2009), intersectional feminist theory (also referred to as multicultural, global, and postcolonial feminism) recognizes women's diversity. This feminist movement goes beyond abolishing patriarchy. The intersectional feminist theory challenges female essentialism (Tong, 2009). It states that all women are not created or constructed equal, instead all women will experience her identity and status differently. These experiences will be based on race, ethnicity, sexual identity, gender identity, age, religion, level of education, occupation, marital status, health condition, and other factors.

This literature review draws upon the radical and intersectional feminist theory to outline a range of gender-related problems and issues faced by female academics. To begin with, the social and cultural norms shaped under the hegemony of male-voice formed the gender roles for women in academic life. These roles depict an image of weak characteristics with low self-esteem, low ambition, male-dependency, and failure to achieve high status especially in certain fields for women (Acker, 1992). The normalized roles dictated to females through education, and the insufficient investment in building the “woman power” created biases against the capabilities of women as a quality labor force, which in result limits the academic positions women can and are expected to have (Acker, 1992; Bell & Gordon, 1999). The lack of innovative interventions to eradicate the enforced gender roles has made the inclusion of women into the academy very challenging (Su & Gaughan, 2014).

It is still uncommon to see women in high-ranking leadership roles in institutions of higher education and, at many campuses, women continue to be paid less and promoted slower than their comparable male colleagues (Euben, 2001). According to Valian (1998), data from various sectors (social psychology, sociology, and economics) show that men and women receive unequal returns for equal investments. Annual reports, through the years, on the Economic Status of the Profession indicate that women faculty receive a percentage of what their male colleagues are paid. The gender-based wage disparity in academia appears alive and well (Euben, 2001).

Another area in which gender plays a significant role in the professional growth of women in higher education is institutional service. The male-dominant culture in higher education and their monolithic power in the decision-making process raise skeptical doubts concerning the objectivity and credibility of the evaluation of female academics' achievements, competence, and promotion decisions (Bell & Gordon, 1999; West, 1994). According to Misra et al. (2011), women at the associate level feel particularly pressured by full professors to do service and in the process, experience difficulties in attaining promotion. Today women are earning more doctorates, taking more academic jobs, and earning tenure more frequently. Yet, research shows that after tenure, women hit the Ivory Tower glass ceiling. When it comes to promotion, men hold more than three quarters of full professorship in the United States (Misra et al., 2011).

Studies have shown that men focus more on research than do women. While men are not necessarily more productive than women, men tend to be more protective of their research time. However, tenured women focused on activities that may be seen as building bridges around the university but in reality hold less value in promotion cases in many institutions (Misra et al., 2011). Those duties generally entail inter-personal, student-oriented activities, teaching less-important lower-level service courses offered to the students outside of the domain, and departmental and institutional affairs about race and diversity (Acker, 1992; Bell & Gordon, 1999; Davies, 1996; Griffin, Bennett, & Harris, 2011; West, 1994). McKinley-Jones-Brayboy (2003) referred to this situation as “hidden service agendas.” This is also often the case for faculty of color who are marginalized with cultural taxation when tasked with building race and diversity programs to enhance institutional culture (Padilla, 1994).

Studies of work-life balance in academic careers also reveal significant gender differences. Female academics report lower levels of job satisfaction; more difficulty balancing teaching, research, and service

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