

From Foxy Loxy to Grit and Moxie: Women Academics Challenging the Orthodoxy in Higher Education

Dawn C. Wallin and Janice Wallace

INTRODUCTION

Chicken Little was in the woods.
An acorn fell on her head.
She met Henny Penny and said,
“The sky is falling.
I saw it with my eyes.
I heard it with my ears.
It fell upon my head.”
She met Turkey Lurkey, Ducky Lucky, and Goosey Loosey.
They ran to tell the king.
They met Foxy Loxy.
He said he’d tell the king.
They ran into his den,
And they did not come out again. (Folk Tale)

D.C. Wallin (✉)
University of Saskatchewan, Winnipeg, MB, Canada

J. Wallace
University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB, Canada

Although, when we were children, the folk tale above rang resoundingly with the clear cautionary messages of “Don’t believe everything you see, hear or feel”, and “Be wary of following your friends just because they told you so”, as women faculty in the academic field of Educational Administration, we sometimes wonder if our first forays into academic life were very far removed from Chicken Little’s experience. Though many of us enter the academy believing that we are critical thinkers and that the academy should be a place of academic freedom full of opportunities to explore new ideas and to (re)create social realities, there is something that happens shortly after the transition into higher education that makes us feel that, like Chicken Little, a tree-full of acorns has just dropped on our heads. Not only do we feel that the sky might be falling, but we may even try to convince our colleagues to join with us in our endeavours to “fix” these problems. Surely we can do so, we may reason, if only we have the opportunity to “tell the king”. We wander down the seemingly clear paths of policies and regulations that have been paved by those with institutional power—the king, if you will—for us, and rely on the Foxy Loxies—those who have experience with and seem to understand how to “play” the institutional “game”—to help us navigate towards our academic goals. Some of us who crawl into the academic “den” succumb to its dangers and are never seen again. Some make friends with Foxy Loxy and maintain our careers at the cost of our ideals. Few actually meet the king, if he even exists except as a figment of our imaginations. If any do meet the king, they are generally too small in number or too traumatized by the trials along the path to be very effective in advocating for their cause.

One reading of the Chicken Little folk tale, therefore, appears to be that many in academia err in their judgment, are too easily led, and deserve their own demise if they trust too easily. Foxy Loxy remains well-fed, the kingdom carries on regardless, and the king never need bother himself with the locals, since the path is designed to feed those looking out for their own self-interest while, at the same time, weeding out of the kingdom those who would advocate for change. A Brothers Grimm tale, indeed. However, we wish to unsettle the narrative that this folk tale represents, because it offers only a structural, macro perspective on higher education, reducing individual agency to naiveté and folly, and perpetuating fear of the politics, traps and relational distance inherent within institutional bureaucracies. We wish also to disturb the perception that those who are not the “kings” or “Foxy Loxies” of the world have no power to

change it, that they hold only fanciful notions about the world, and therefore deserve to be gobbled up. We do not suggest that these characters and trials are not part of the world of the academy (in fact, they are only too real); however, this chapter unsettles a narrative based on the perspective of an all-knowing, all-wise objective narrator by (re)telling the story from the multiple perspectives of multiple voices that de-centre power relations and reveal new possibilities for higher education within the contexts of time, space, and social relations that exist in different historical moments.

STRUCTURE MEETS AGENCY

With the “discursive turn” (Corson 1995), some scholars have argued that administrative structures are created much like fairytales that exist as much in our imaginative frameworks and the discourses that construct them as they do in any “reality” that emerges from the consequences of that discourse on policy and practice (see Greenfield, in Greenfield and Ribbins 1993). We participate in, and perpetuate, the discourses in which we are a participant each day. By extension, we also have agency to change the nature of that discourse by changing the way we construct it and/or engage with it. Like KerryAnn O’Meara and Nelly Stromquist (2015), we understand agency as:

perspectives and actions taken by participants to achieve meaningful goals (Campbell and O’Meara 2014; Terosky et al. 2014; O’Meara 2015). Our definition recognises the need for both individual and collective action. Agency is area specific (e.g. agency undertaken for career advancement or for securing work–life balance) and is enacted in specific social contexts (e.g. fields, departments, and gendered universities). (p. 30)

O’Meara and Stromquist (2015) went on to argue that opportunities for agency are shaped by the gendered organizational structures in which women academics do their work. And so, while opportunities to change structures, ways of being, and thinking, exist, they are enacted in a context that is characterized by an oppositional gendered discourse that has the potential to swallow up those who dare enter the King’s chamber. While we acknowledge this possibility, our research provides another version of this story.

GETTING TO KNOW THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE STORY

Over the last few years, we have had the privilege of engaging in a research project funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) that examined the experiences and academic contributions of ten of the first female academics in programs of Educational Administration in Canada. Our research focused on institutional responses and/or resistance to women's participation within their academic institution, and their contributions to knowledge production in the field of Educational Administration over the course of their careers (Anderson and Williams 2001; Brooks and Mackinnon 2001; May 2008; Pierce 2007; Quinn 2003; Reimer 2004; Sagaria 2007; Superson and Cudd 2002; Thorne 2005). Using a critical, feminist lens informed by institutional ethnography (Smith 1987, 2005), we focused particularly on the effects of the introduction of women faculty members into Educational Administration programs, which, unlike other areas of inquiry in Faculties of Education, had been traditionally male dominated (Blackmore 1989).

Our discussion in this chapter is based on our multi-staged research design, which was comprised of personal interviews with ten women who were among the first female academics in departments of Educational Administration in Canada—two in British Columbia, two in Alberta, one in Saskatchewan, two in Ontario, two in Quebec and one in New Brunswick.¹ The personal interviews explored the participants' individual experiences, both personal and professional, at different points of their faculty careers: (a) before graduate school; (b) during their graduate work; (c) securing their position as one of the first female faculty members in their respective departments; (d) the time between securing the position but before tenure; (e) the time after tenure but before thoughts of retirement; (f) nearing retirement; and, if applicable, (g) after retirement. We chose these periods because they represent particular points of time where the individual's engagement with institutional practice and knowledge construction is likely to shift.

Following on the interviews, we conducted two series of focus groups—one in Alberta and one in Quebec. All the interviews and focus groups were videotaped and videos were produced around emergent themes that formed the basis for the next stage of the research. For example, video themes from the interviews were presented to the group of participants and formed the basis for their response in the first series of focus groups over a two-day period in Alberta. We have also collected curriculum vitae

as a source of data and conducted a comprehensive review of the participants' research production and participation in national Canadian academic organizations. While the women in the study were not exhaustive of the entire population of first women in programs of Educational Administration in Canada, they collectively represent the major programs of Educational Administration across Canada and were, and continue to be, highly influential female/feminist² voices in the discipline. Their stories provide both individual and collective demonstrations of agency within organizational structures that, at least partially, offered a more hopeful narrative than the one in Chicken Little's tale.

ENACTING AGENCY WITHIN ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES

In one of the papers based on our research, we used David Dill's (1982) model of academic identity formation as a framework on which to layer a feminist analysis of our participants' identity development in higher education (Wallace and Wallin 2015). We found his description of the cultures at play in higher education particularly interesting and useful in understanding the persistent narratives that worked to exclude women academics in Educational Administration. Dill (1982) argued that academic identity is shaped by "ideologies, or systems of belief, [that] permeate academic institutions on at least three different levels: the culture of *the enterprise*, the culture of the *academic profession at large*, and the culture of *academic discipline*" (p. 308, emphasis in original). The *culture of the enterprise* is reflected in the rites of passage in the academy that were conceived in the patriarchal and medieval religious roots of these institutions. The *culture of the academic profession* codifies expectations for acceptance (i.e., tenure) and protection of free inquiry through academic freedom premised on quasi-scientific practices consistent with a value-rational organization and masculinist rationality (Blackmore 1989). Last, the *culture of an academic discipline* is a "culture with its own symbols of status and authority in the forms of professional awards, research grants, and publications, its ritualistic behaviour at professional meetings, and its distinguishing articles of faith" (Dill 1982, p. 310). Any shifts within academic disciplines can set off a clash within the disciplinary field that "dramatizes the value system at work beneath the surface of the field" (ibid.).

Given the patriarchal and medieval influences on the cultures at play in higher education, it is not surprising, therefore, that, as women entered male dominated departments of Educational Administration, they faced

trials and tribulations along their career paths in the academy. The chilly climate (The Chilly Collective 1995) may be too winsome a metaphor for some, but it does evoke the cold and unforgiving spaces that protect the castle (academy) from those who would attempt to scale the castle gates, even from the inside. In this narrative, then, the competing discourses of structure and agency seem particularly skewed, given a context that is so dominated by male norms (See Acker, 1999, 2008). However, Anthony Giddens' notion of structuration (Giddens 1984) is somewhat helpful in considering how women who were in positions of significantly less power than their male counterparts during much of their academic career, were able to effect change in the academic field of Educational Administration. Giddens argued that structure and agency are interactive and it is in the enactment of agency—whether replicating or challenging structural norms—by social subjects that structures remain static or are changed.

We found strong evidence that the women of our study successfully challenged the structural discourses of the academy in ways that (re) shaped and transformed the higher education milieu of Educational Administration in Canada. The individual and collective agency they brought to their work enabled them, at certain moments in time and by different means, to destabilize the powerful discourses that otherwise may have gobbled them up along their career pathways. Though they faced recurring instances of discrimination, structural impediments and personal setbacks along the way, they charged forward with adventurous spirits, a strong sense of purpose and a commitment to “writing themselves in”³ to the discourses of equity that shaped their academic and institutional work. As one woman noted, “grit” and “moxie” characterized how she navigated the masculinist pathways of her career. Each of our participants' ways of being, though highly individual, could be characterized similarly.

ADVENTURESOME SPIRITS

All the women in this study had adventurous spirits. Many of them moved across countries, continents or institutions, left family behind and made huge career changes for the sheer joy of learning something new, or engaging in a new challenge. Instead of being wary of these moves, our participants framed their decisions with comments such as “I thought, ‘Why not?’”, or “I thought of this as an exciting run for it”, or “It was sort of our western adventure”. As one woman noted, she “Sold the house, sold the car, separated from the husband, sent the two children off to

be with their father for a couple of years and I went to [UNIVERSITY] and started that process". Another woman acknowledged that she was "just desperate to move out of my old life and into something new and wanting to learn, wanting to be, wanting to have the educational experience". Each and every participant indicated that most of the career moves they made occurred because ahead of them lay yet another "interesting opportunity". As they sought adventure, however, the paths they followed proved challenging.

A DIFFERENT FIT

Almost all the participants in our study acknowledged that their backgrounds positioned them differently for positions in Educational Administration than was the norm. In most instances, the hiring focus privileged individuals who applied with backgrounds in line positions of Educational Administration (Kim and Brunner 2009), typically principals or superintendents who were almost always male. These women entered into Educational Administration with interests in leadership, organizational theory, or policy work, but from very different experiential backgrounds. For example, some of them had backgrounds in non-profit organizations, some with backgrounds in music, and others with backgrounds in adult education, curriculum, sociology, policy studies or interdisciplinary studies. Only one of the ten participants noted that she moved into Educational Administration because it was "what I really wanted to do". As a consequence, one woman suggested that their positioning left them "undefined in the conventional ... [Educational Administration world] ... and the boundaries of that". Although such positioning provided them with much broader, interdisciplinary interests in leadership and administration, it also meant that their work was perceived to be on the "fringe" of the dominant discourses in programs of Educational Administration.

Those who were also positioned as feminists often faced additional hurdles, particularly when it came to accessing positions. As one participant noted, "the guys on the committee tried to close the search down because they didn't want me, they didn't want a feminist ... there's this time period where I became known as the feminist, so that was really difficult". Another participant noted that, after working as a feminist for a number of years and dealing with the fall-out of that positioning during her career, she found herself warning other young feminists that "you know, this is not the kind of thing that will get you a job. You should

be aware that it may be the thing you care about the most but it is not going to make you employable.” They fit, but they did not fit. However, our findings demonstrate that their slightly awkward positioning from the very beginning of their academic careers in large part provided them with “insider-outsider” perspectives that leveraged their future efforts (Wallace et al. 2014).

CHALLENGING STRUCTURES

Perhaps partly because they recognized the differences in how they were positioned as academics, the women of our study were unafraid of challenging academic orthodoxy. Because of their different backgrounds and routes to Educational Administration programs, some of their first challenges were to the academic discipline of Educational Administration. Their academic research, writing and scholarly work began to challenge notions of leadership and the “canons” found within that discourse. As one woman decried the content of a current (and still much used) text found within most programs of Educational Administration, she noted that it “was incorrect, it was simplistic, it was mind numbing Later I realized that it had no critical content whatsoever, and that was the dominant lens through which most people were looking at educational admin.... let’s bring life to this ... what is leadership? Let’s redefine it”. These women spoke of the scholarly influence of critical theorists who, at the time, gave them a platform for challenging the structural-functionalist discourses of Educational Administration. One woman unapologetically acknowledged her challenging persona by suggesting that “I was argumentative and confrontational because, even though [scholars of Educational Administration] were my seniors, I was bringing a challenge, in some cases, to their life work, which was difficult.”

As they moved through their careers, they spoke of the fact that, just as their own research and writing had “gone against the grain”, so, too, had their leadership practices in their academic institutions. They spoke of reaching out to other “challengers”, often other women in scholarly associations such as the Canadian Association for the Study of Educational Administration and the Canadian Association for the Study of Women and Education, or scholars from other countries, so that “we began to get those of us who were doing this kind of work together, thinking we really could make an impact, we really could challenge the discipline of Ed Admin”. Another of the participants, however, touched on the cost of

being a feminist challenger, saying, “You can’t imagine, you know, what it cost to be an outspoken woman. To raise any kind of feminist concern and to be patronized and dismissed and belittled and, you know, even have people angry with you ... I just ... it was bad, it was not good in my day”. They all learned the hard way that their challenges had consequences.

A STRONG SENSE OF PURPOSE VERSUS INSTITUTIONAL CONSTRAINTS

The women of our study faced institutional constraints along their career paths, even though they approached those careers with ambition, energy and a clear sense of purpose. Some of them broke free from institutions that would have perennially kept them hired as part-time sessional instructors without benefits. Others decided to capitalize on their interdisciplinary backgrounds and move into academic positions outside of Educational Administration where their scholarly work would be taken more seriously: “People were calling it airy-fairy and flaky and you know, so it wasn’t as much fun anymore. So I did kind of sidestep and became the director of the women’s studies program.” One woman moved to another institution in order to avoid being forced to retire. Others, however, were caught up in institutional constraints and were unable to access favourable situations. For example, one woman had aspirations to move into a number of administrative positions but, in her words, “there was absolutely no room ... it wasn’t just that I couldn’t see the opportunities. They simply weren’t there for me, you know, to move into administration.” Others knew that they had been passed over for positions either within their institutions or in other institutions to which they had applied, largely because of their reputations as challengers (or feminists).

Because of the constraints they faced, these women learned to develop negotiation skills that could help foster their academic goals. Some women negotiated leaves to upgrade their academic or career skills. Others were able to negotiate tenure when they moved across institutions in order to protect their positions. A third negotiated research time into her dean’s contract to ensure that she would be able to balance her research agenda with an administrative position.

In addition to developing negotiation skills, the women of our study developed their political acumen in order to work with the “Foxy Loxies” of the institution. One woman acknowledged how she became intimately familiar with the collective agreements of the institutions she served to

ensure she understood her rights and responsibilities and did not leave herself vulnerable. Another participant spoke of building strong networks with provincial organizations to call on supports when she required them in the academy. During times when attempts to access positions were being blocked, these networks of supporters would engage in public and/or private lobbying for these individuals, providing social and political support and, sometimes, a public moral accountability for inequities that were being perpetuated. As one woman noted:

When I came for my interview here all the women from the other department came out to the presentation and sat in the front row and smiled. And apparently that was very deliberate because there was all that buzz going around that there was this [feminist] woman coming in and we've got to make sure that she gets the job.

Some of the participants spoke of building relationships with other women who were new to their institutions in order to support each other as their careers unfolded. One woman ensured that her interdisciplinary program remained truly interdisciplinary by instituting rotating chairs so that, when attacks to the program ensued, she could call on a network of program areas for support rather than having a single individual face the brunt of disciplinary acrimony. Others spoke of ways of accessing research funding or course releases that allowed them to focus on their research productivity. Many of the participants worked strategically to find out information about hiring committees and institutional foci when applying for new positions. Unfortunately, some learned the hard way:

I didn't realize how small our field is and how much impact people who weren't at your institution could have on your career. I think again maybe a lack of mentoring in that way—career mentoring—may have given me a false sense of security and of the space in which I could do those things. I mean I didn't take on people at the [UNIVERSITY] who were going to be deciding directly on my promotion and tenure for instance.

Given some of the difficulties these women experienced, they learned how to protect themselves within the informal power networks of academic culture. One woman noted, "I knew it was really important to make good strong interpersonal relationships with everybody, not join any 'groups' [said with quotation mark gesture] and not bad-mouth anybody". Another woman learned, "that you do not go into any meeting

with someone in authority without a witness” and “never, ever write anything without copying someone else”.

Even the conversations recorded for this study were not without a reflexive awareness of the need for self-protection. As one participant noted, “Basically what I’ve told you today is what I would call the cover story. It’s the story for public consumption. I did go deep down and some elements of detail are not public ... but I gave you mainly the cover story”.

Along with developing their political acumen, these women learned how to work within the system to change the system. They worked with supportive colleagues to access influential individuals, to “learn the ropes” of the system, to procure placement on influential committees, and/or to access research opportunities. Others learned to take the counsel of powerful people on campus before jumping too soon into opportunities (e.g., tenure or promotion), even if they thought they would be successful. Most learned to “slow down”, but not to stop, their desires for change because they recognized that the timing would not be conducive to their efforts. They learned to listen to powerful individuals within the institution so that they “understood what was valued at a university”. Rather than compromising their ideals, they learned how to navigate *within* the system to achieve their goals:

I understood the path that I had to follow. I accepted to follow that path and, as there was always the problem of obtaining my job security, it was not to my advantage once again to lose my way or do things that may interfere with becoming assistant professor or obtaining tenure. So I’ve always made sure that I respected university requirements. In that respect, I was absolutely not delinquent! I do not want to offend those who do not follow that path. But given my situation, I chose to comply.

As a final strategy for navigating their work, these women learned how to deal with conflict when it reared its head. They learned to initiate private conversations with individuals who would otherwise block their efforts in order to minimize overt conflict and to deal openly with issues that arose. Others were quite comfortable with the tensions that occur within institutions. As one participant noted, “I am a fighter ... I don’t mind conflict and that’s my view of organizations: that there will always be tension, there will always be conflict”. When colleagues made inappropriate, de-legitimizing, or misogynist comments, these women found ways of drawing attention to their inappropriateness either directly to quell them immediately, often with humour, to discourage their continued use. Finally, perhaps because

of their backgrounds in Educational Administration, these women were aware that leadership is not about pleasing all the people all the time:

I don't think administrators can go into administration because they want to be popular or well-liked. And it's not our job as leaders to please everybody and you really can't if you buy the notion of conflicting perspectives and equity I don't know any good way of doing it without making friends as well as enemies at the same time But I can also sleep at night knowing that I've tried to do the right thing and not just to please somebody.

In their view, it was more important that one dealt with conflictual situations equitably and with a sense of moral purpose than to simply acquiesce.

GENDER DISCRIMINATION

Although there are some who might suggest that the days of dealing with gender issues in higher education are over, ongoing challenges at many universities struggling with appropriate responses to issues such as sexual harassment have demonstrated that gender discrimination remains a very real presence in higher education in Canada (e.g., Dalhousie University in Canada, *CBC News*, 2015). Our participants acknowledged a plethora of acts of gender discrimination that occurred over the course of their careers. Issues of gender discrimination were faced in their interactions with the “old boys” culture of Educational Administration within their graduate student experiences, as they accessed or navigated through their positions, within their teaching assignments, in tenure and promotion practices, in interpersonal relationships with colleagues and within the scholarship of Educational Administration.

While the majority of women acknowledged support they received from male colleagues, many also noted times when they were told that certain (often feminist) women “would never get a job in academia”. Another suggested that the old boys’ culture no longer retains the influence it once did, even as she noted:

Every now and then I encounter a situation where I am reminded that you are a woman ... your voice, your opinion doesn't have the same weight as his Just as women you know how we have learned to try not to be too emotional, to be so neutral and objective when we speak so that we are taken seriously.

During their graduate work, participants noticed that they were often not viewed as “real contenders” for some of the administrative positions that opened up in the field or within the university. One woman spoke of not being treated in the same way as the men in her cohort “unless we insisted on it and that’s another time when we just had to struggle”. They spoke of sometimes being the only woman in their administration courses, and having to fight for voice and status, while conversely being ostracized if they were too vocal in their views. The privileging of the public over the private domain in institutional life was poignantly evoked when one participant, who was a new mother during her doctoral work, had to bring her child to class one evening and observed that, based on her colleagues’ and professor’s reaction, “I only did it once, but it was enough”. Another woman spoke of the behind the scenes socialization that went on within programs of Educational Administration that was highly gendered, exclusive and tended to favour or be accessible to males more than females. They also spoke of the fact that the majority of their professors in Educational Administration were male and that “women’s issues” were generally considered to be taboo or trivial.

As they navigated through their academic positions, the women of our study faced silencing, resistance, less legitimacy for their contributions and discrimination. Some faced overt sexual discrimination. As mentioned earlier, some women were blocked from obtaining positions because of their reputations as feminists. Others recognized that, although there have been many changes that support women academics, the overarching culture still privileges male appointees:

We’re still hiring more men than women. The men are hired into more senior positions. We have a Canada Research Chair who is male. When we have faculty members who are hired at the same time, it has been the case that the men come in with higher salaries. All of this is very recent history. So it’s another one of those stories where we have been able to make some shifts, and yet at the same time, the domination by men and by masculine values and points of view is still very much a part of Ed Admin, of the department, of [THE FACULTY], of the University.

One of the participants suggested that, although women “do all their homework”, when attempting to access positions, she had observed that “women pull themselves up, men are pushed”. Others recognized that, although they had demonstrated hard work and excellent scholarship,

their colleagues and professors would make assumptions about their desires to work in higher education, particularly if their husbands were accomplished and it was perceived that the woman “didn’t have to work”.

Some of the women noted that they had been given inequitable teaching loads, including classes of up to 80 students compared with much smaller numbers for male colleagues teaching similar courses. Others spoke of high supervision loads or teaching loads, or being told they could not reduce their loads for workload or research issues, while knowing that their male colleagues had been granted those reductions. One woman spoke of working with other untenured female professors who had difficult times accessing tenure when, from her perspective, the male colleagues who moved forward at the same time demonstrated less merit but had no trouble receiving tenure. A third woman articulated that men are still more able to access research chairs or become “stars of their field”. In her view, many younger women have the same goals, but because they also assume primary responsibility for their families, “they are not able to get there or they crash, they get so burned out. I have colleagues with very small kids Sometimes I am scared for their health because it’s so much”.

Some of the women had to deal with issues of sexual harassment, either from students or colleagues. Unfortunately, they were often made to feel that it was their behavior that was problematic, and that their insistence on having the issues dealt with institutionally, rather than through silence or in “underground” ways, turned them into the institutional “problems”. They spoke of the annoyance or embarrassment others evidenced when they asked for support or public consequences for these kinds of offences. But they also refused to be silent, and they couched their responses by suggesting that they had to come forward in order to ensure that other women did not have to face these issues in the future, or to ensure that the instances could not be used publicly (or insidiously) against them.

Finally, the participants of our study noted that their views of scholarship were heavily influenced by gender and/or feminism. Most recognized during their graduate work that the majority of leadership studies included male participants only. These women decided that their own work needed to include the experiences of women as well as men if the leadership scholarship was to be relevant to the field. Others wanted to include more diverse theoretical perspectives that would challenge predominant structural functionalist scholarship, such as critical, post-modern/post-structural, aesthetic theory, perspectives that would redefine what constituted the

discourses of leadership. Many of our participants had never had access to female authors or feminist scholarship during their graduate coursework (at least in their Education Administration programs), so they decided that they would teach differently in their own institutions. Their work often had a more interdisciplinary focus on leadership issues, and often centered on equity issues. They recognized the danger of essentializing women's experiences, and worked towards more nuanced understandings of feminist theory vis-à-vis leadership studies. And yet, long after their careers were established, most of our participants still wondered about the extent to which their scholarship was acknowledged in the "canons" of Educational Administration in Canada:

I think we're still fighting, as Canadian scholars, women in Ed Admin, a lot of people don't know about us. And they don't know of our twenty years of publishing and work, and the international contribution. We're better known when we go to international conferences ... I'm sure there are people in Manitoba or in BC who don't know anything about my work.

As the old adage suggests, some of these women still feel that they are never prophets in their own land.

PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL CONSEQUENCES

Clearly, challenging institutional and/or academic discourses does not come without personal and professional consequences, regardless of how much moxie and adventurous spirit one demonstrates. The time commitment alone for these positions leads to imbalances in personal and professional lives. One woman noted, "I haven't really had very much of a life outside academia since I became an academic." As graduate students, these women worked around their family needs to juggle coursework and research. They also recognized that assumptions were made about their abilities, scholarship and potential employability, often based on their gender or political assumptions related to their supervisors and/or research interests. As faculty members, women spoke of working in faculties where dysfunctional cultures necessitated overt measures of self-protection and led to high levels of stress:

I was so anxious about all the bad things that these people could do, that every time that I gave a course, I had an evaluation done on my own, even

if it wasn't planned. At least that way, nobody could say anything ... There would be records ... Every time I did something, there was a record, a trace. At the end, I had very thick records full of evidence ... But when one is reduced to doing that, when one has to keep very detailed records, it is time consuming and a lot of stress.

Eventually, this woman changed institutions to escape this dysfunctional and oppressive climate.

Many of the women were very protective of their private lives. As one woman indicated, "I've always made a very distinct difference between my personal life and my work life." Other women acknowledged their feelings of guilt for bringing their work stress home in ways that likely damaged their relationships with their partners. Another acknowledged that changes in her personal circumstances drastically shifted her career priorities: "In the year that I had off after my chairship, my partner had cancer and so I spent all of that year being a caregiver. And that has been a very emotionally and physically draining experience for me." One woman spoke of the fact that her own health had now become a significant issue in relation to career ambitions. Others were settling into family life circumstances where care of ailing parents was becoming an important and competing consideration.

At some point, many of the women in our study noted that they "just couldn't take on any more", figuratively and metaphorically. Many of the women felt isolated as scholars in their own institutions, even though they had networks across the world. Most became exhausted with the workload they were asked to complete; the roles they took on (willingly or feeling pressured to do so); the constant challenges to their positioning, either in their work roles or theoretical positioning; and the number of students they supervised because they were considered by students to be the "only" person in Educational Administration who conceived of leadership "differently". As one woman noted, "my energy isn't there anymore. I've learned all of the hubris I had about being able to make huge changes because of what I was able to understand about how organizations work has fallen by the wayside". Another woman noted, "women pay for their presence. For me, in any case, at the beginning, they test you, give you a lot of work and give you a lot of trouble ... [male colleagues] had much more credibility than me." A third woman acknowledged that female students in current programs of Educational Administration did not always recognize how much influence early feminists had on the privileges they now enjoy, or the ways in which gender issues are played out in different

ways in today's society. In the view of our participants, many of these young women have been co-opted overtly to marginalize feminism and the need for it in scholarship and practice:

Probably one of the most interesting things in my later teaching when I was teaching the master's research course, for example, was the ways in which the women ... that would be mid-30s to mid-40s probably in age, maybe early 30s, had taken in and taken on some of what we all worked for in that they were, they had these full blown careers going on and they had families and they sometimes had supportive husbands So there was a real shift but it was certainly not a real feminist consciousness and they certainly wouldn't want to have anything to do with being associated with [feminism] ... that was pleasing and puzzling at the same time, you know? ... but to still not understand the new iterations of those phenomena.

Further, this woman described her mixed feelings when she did have opportunities to work with feminist students. With the hindsight of her own career, she recognized the danger of doing feminist work, and knew that in perpetuating feminist work with other students, she would inadvertently be setting them up for future difficulties: "I was setting them up for some really tough encounters and decisions in their own lives and indeed that did happen in some cases. And so I was very conscious of this".

WHAT HAS CHANGED?

The introduction of the first females in Educational Administration programs in Canada, precipitated to some degree by their lack of fit within "the culture of the enterprise" (Dill 1982), did prompt significant changes in higher education, not only in the academy, but also in its professional practices and the disciplinary content of Educational Administration. Using their own experiences of triumph and oppression within the academy, these women have actively worked to transform institutional practices and the normative discourses found in Educational Administration. As researchers, each woman's scholarship is reflective of equity issues and interdisciplinary understandings of leadership in one form or another. As faculty members, they have worked to diversify the student body, program areas and the theoretical breadth of scholarship in academic programs. As institutional administrators, they have worked to change policy and practice to ensure more equitable practices are enjoyed by faculty, staff and students, and that marginalizing experiences are dealt with appropriately.

They have deliberately positioned themselves organizationally so that they could act as strategic partners for those in authority who are seeking to change institutional practices.

One of the greatest collective accomplishments for some of the women was their role in the creation of the Canadian Association for the Study of Women and Education (CASWE)

In terms of legitimating, I can't overemphasize the importance in my career of CASWE and of the groups of us who came to know one another, [originally] through CASEA [Canadian Association for the Study of Educational Administration] actually ... I would never want to say there was a single most important thing but that was a way that we, a collective of us, changed something in Canadian scholarship—especially for English speakers—and it was an organizational initiative.

CASWE and CASEA have become the Canadian scholarly “homes” for many of these women, even as they often challenge the discourses that are perpetuated within them. Although most of these women critique institutional discourses within their scholarship, they also recognize that they are complicit as institutional representatives:

There is a dilemma right? I mean, the choice to participate in existing institutions is the choice to face the institute's expectations or patterns or culture. And it is in a way by participating and doing the things that [another participant] talks about [i.e., ask the critical questions at public meetings and so on] that we seek to change the institution we are a part of. So it remains a dilemma because if you don't change the institution [here she refers to an example of an inequity she had observed] ... it doesn't remain ours somehow.

And so, the adventurous spirits of these women have been tempered somewhat by the situations they have faced over time, but their passions and sense of responsibility to their work and to others has not waned. They do not see themselves as passive victims of the orthodoxies of higher education; instead, they view themselves as agents of change whose efforts have significantly altered the complex cultures of the enterprise, of the academy, and of the discipline of Educational Administration (Dill 1982):

I think it's about being clear to identify not just where we reacted, or were constrained, but really, what we have changed. It's really about agency, and

the kind of ... propulsion out. It's the things that made us uncomfortable also led us to make certain changes. So I think that's important.

These women have learned that transformative spaces in organizational structures open and close and that, ultimately, if one is open to and prepared for opportunities as they arise, changes do occur in the short and longer term. As one participant somewhat wryly noted:

I don't think we can be transformative forever ... I was able to shift some things while I was in that [administrative] position ... [using] the power we have, and also don't have, in a larger institution. So I think we can make some difference for a period of time, and that has to be enough.

While these women faced the remnants of the patriarchal culture operating in higher education that often positioned them on the outside of it, their desire for change was evident in the complex interplay between agency and structure. They did not naively assume that, as individuals, they had the power to overcome all of the normative discourses at play in higher education, but they did know that their efforts, often in conjunction with networks of supportive others, could certainly shift or change those discourses, even for brief moments of time. Over the course of their experiences, they had grown more comfortable with themselves as scholars, faculty members and women. They were proud of their accomplishments and the impacts of their work that were acknowledged locally, nationally and internationally. And yet, even after all their successes, some still wondered about their need to prove themselves:

I know how to do this stuff with my eyes closed and one hand tied behind my back. There are still ways in which I feel like I still need to prove myself ... I think that gender dynamics are alive and well. I think that I'm read in a very complicated way, and I have a hard time myself simply doing what I am doing and getting on with it. So for a period of time I took on a huge number of graduates, doctoral, supervision, to be able to prove that I could do that ... And I don't really know where I stand. I don't know how well supported I am, I feel sort of like the lone ranger ... On the one hand I feel like academia is the best home that I could ever have ... but I also have to recognize that it's a bit lonesome.

Although these women recognize the normative (and) gendered discourses at play in higher education, and they recognize their own agency

and the complex interactions that allow for change and renewal, they still find themselves caught up in those discourses in ways that impact on their sense of self and confidence in their ability.

CONCLUSION

Reconsidering Chicken Little

In an alternate version of “Chicken Little”, Mary Beth Stephens provided a “happier” ending to the story:

Just as Chicken Little and the others were about to go into the fox’s hole, they heard a strange sound and stopped. It was the king’s hunting dogs, growling and howling. How Foxy Loxy ran, across the meadows and through the forests, with the hounds close behind. He ran until he was far, far away and never dared to come back again. (Stephens n.d.)

In this, and other versions of the story, we never actually see the king, and Chicken Little and/or her pals are saved by forces outside of themselves. The participants in our study would never agree to such an ending; for them, these endings would not be satisfactory at all, because they are left without a sense of their own agency to effect change.

If the story were rewritten based on the experiences of the participants in our research, it would read quite differently. Chicken Little would have recognized the reality that acorns were acorns and would have worked to initiate policies to protect others who were being hurt by them across the kingdom. In her efforts to facilitate these policies, she likely would have walked through the woods to her friends’ homes, had coffee, talked about the latest egg laying conference and asked if her friends would support her in getting the acorn situation sorted out with the Foxy Loxies of the kingdom. Likely, they would have agreed on some strategy, such as developing a cooperative to gather and distribute the acorns equitably across the land so that the animals could use them for food, rather than being hurt by their over-ripe fall on unsuspecting citizens.

As the group organized themselves to achieve their policy goals, on their peace walk towards the kingdom, they would have strategically decided to stop at Foxy Loxy’s den because they knew he could be highly influential if he supported their endeavours. They also knew that he would

be interested in the distribution of acorns, particularly as it would fatten up some of the animals he might like to enjoy for a tasty dinner. They would have never entered his den, but would have made the strategic decision to ask him to come along with them, both to keep an eye on him, and to ensure that he could provide them with an audience with the king.

A less pragmatic but more ideal version of the story might continue to motivate them to continue to work towards changing organizational structures in which the kingdom would have a queen who had managed, by hard work and determination, to gain the respect of the people in the kingdom with her equitable rule. Or why not eschew the notion of a kingdom altogether and, in its place, work together to build a thriving democracy in which Chicken Little might prove her worth as a trusted voice supporting equity for the animals across the land.

A more likely scenario, however, is that, being pragmatic, strategic agents of change where the ideal is set aside for the possible, if Chicken Little and her friends did manage to get an audience with the king, they would argue for the implementation of an equitable acorn resource and allocation policy with passion and knowledgeable persuasion, using the king's own laws and his need for satisfied and healthy subjects who are essential for the kingdom's prosperity as arguments for their position. Should Chicken Little and her friends not be successful, they would have gone home to regroup their efforts, to rally the local animals in the kingdom and, in order to demonstrate the problem, try to ensure that a few acorns managed to drop on the heads of the king's chief administrators. In time, the practical utility of their work, the political acumen of the group and the theoretical persuasiveness of their ideas would lead to changes in the kingdom, even if Chicken Little had long since moved on to lead the battle against Colonel Sanders. Such is the complex interplay of individual agency and structure in changing the discourses of higher education.

NOTES

1. It is important to note that these women cannot easily be attached to a particular geographical location in that, over the life span of their careers, most have lived, studied and been faculty members in various locations and institutions in Canada.
2. Most, but not all, of the participants explicitly identified themselves as feminist.

3. The notion of “writing themselves in” was introduced by a participant and is reflective of Cixous (1976) who wrote: Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies—for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement.

REFERENCES

- Acker, S. (1999a) Caring as work for women educators. In E. Smyth, S. Acker, P. Bourne & A. Prentice (Eds), *Challenging professions: Historical and contemporary perspectives on women’s professional work* (pp. 277–295). Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Acker, S. (2008). Gender and the chair. In A. Wagner, S. Acker, and K. Mayuzumi (Eds.), *Whose university is it, anyway? Power and privilege on gendered terrain* (pp. 173–183). Toronto: Sumach Press.
- Anderson, P., & Williams, J. (Eds.) (2001). *Identity and difference in higher education: ‘Outsiders within’*. Aldershot, Hampshire, England: Ashgate.
- Blackmore, J. (1989). Educational leadership: A feminist critique and reconstruction. In J. Smyth (Ed.), *Critical perspectives on educational leadership* (pp. 93–130). Sussex, UK: Falmer Press.
- Brooks, A., & Mackinnon, A. (Eds.) (2001). *Gender and the restructured university: Changing management and culture in higher education*. Buckingham, England; Philadelphia, PA: Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University.
- Campbell, C. M., & O’Meara, K. (2014). Faculty agency: Departmental contexts that matter in faculty careers. *Research in Higher Education*, 55(1), 49–74.
- CBC News. (2015, January 5). *Dalhousie suspends 13 dentistry students from clinic amid Facebook scandal*. Retrieved from <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/dalhousie-suspends-13-dentistry-students-from-clinic-amid-facebook-scandal-1.2889635>
- Cixous, H. (1976). The laugh of the Medusa. *Signs*, 1(4), 875–893.
- Corson, D. (Ed.) (1995). *Discourse and power in educational organizations*. Toronto: OISE Press.
- Dill, D. (1982). The management of academic culture: Notes on the management of meaning and social integration. *Higher Education*, 11, 303–320.
- Giddens, A. (1984). *The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration*. Oxford: Polity Press.
- Greenfield, T., & Ribbins, P. (Eds.) (1993). *Greenfield on educational administration: Towards a humane science*. London: Routledge.
- Kim, Y.-L., & Brunner, C. (2009). School administrators’ career mobility to the superintendency: Gender differences in career development. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 47(1), 75–107.

- May, A. M. (Ed.) (2008). *The 'woman question' and higher education: Perspectives on gender and knowledge production in America*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar.
- O'Meara, K., & Stromquist, N. (2015). Faculty peer networks: Role and relevance in advancing agency and gender equity. *Gender and Education*, 27(3), 338–358.
- O'Meara, K. A. (2015). A career with a view: Agentic perspectives of women faculty. *Journal of Higher Education*, 86(3), 1–26.
- Pierce, J. (2007). Traveling from feminism to mainstream sociology and back: One woman's take of tenure and the politics of backlash. In H. K. Aikau, K. A. Erickson, & J. L. Pierce (Eds.), *Feminist waves, feminist generations: Life stories from the academy* (pp. 109–139). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Quinn, J. (2003). *Powerful subjects: Are women really taking over the university?* Sterling, VA: Trentham Books.
- Reimer, M. (2004). *Inside corporate U: Women in the academy speak out*. Toronto: Sumach Press.
- Sagaria, M. A. D. (Ed.) (2007). *Women, universities, and change: Gender equality in the European Union and the United States*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Smith, D. (1987). Institutional ethnography: A feminist research strategy. In *The everyday world as problematic: A feminist sociology* (pp. 151–179). Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.
- Smith, D. (2005). *Institutional ethnography: A sociology for people*. Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press.
- Stephens, M. (n.d.). Alternate version of chicken little. Retrieved from <http://uuman.org/pdf/ChickenLittle.pdf>
- Superson, A. M., & Cudd, A. E. (Eds.) (2002). *Theorizing backlash: Philosophical reflections on the resistance to feminism*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Terosky, A. L., O'Meara, K. A., & Campbell, C. (2014). Enabling possibility: Women associate professors sense of agency in career advancement. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 7(1), 58–76.
- The Chilly Collective (1995). *Breaking anonymity: The chilly climate for women faculty*. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.
- Thorne, M. E. (Ed.) (2005). *Women in society: Achievements, risks, and challenges*. New York: Nova Science Publishers.
- Wallace, J., & Wallin, D. (2015). The voice inside herself: Transforming gender identities. *Gender and Education*, 27(4), 412–429.
- Wallace, J., Wallin, D., Viczko, M., & Anderson, H. (2014). The first female academics in programs of educational administration in Canada: Riding waves of opportunity. *McGill Journal of Education*, 49(2), 437–458.