

Early Career

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As a graduate student, I distinctly remember having a dream. That was to be a full professor at Berkeley. It was partly the caliber of the university, partly the San Francisco area, partly the liberal orientation that I believed favored justice and equality. Perhaps most of all, I liked the idea of a public university as it provided a vehicle for social mobility. Some 15 years later, that became a reality. In 1977, I came to Berkeley as a full professor in Social Psychology and headed up the area.

That dream and the road to Berkeley was not a straight line. It came via a lifetime of bucking expectations and knowing that the playing field was not even for females and that prowess was not necessarily valued. These experiences, along with an interest in social influence, fueled my research interest in how minority views persuade but it eventually led to a focus on the larger value of dissent.

Arriving in Berkeley in 1977 as a full professor with tenure at age 35 was a dream come true. Here I believed I could speak “truth” to power and be protected from repercussions for that speech. That belief was only partially true.

Berkeley had few women in Psychology those days; some, while remarkably talented, had the misfortune of being married to a faculty member and were denied positions.

One might think that, as a full professor, discrimination would be less or even nonexistent. However, I soon learned the old lessons. In some ways, it was more difficult because it was couched in nice rhetoric from well-meaning people. Much as elsewhere, being a female meant I was expected to “go along and get along”, to phrase opinions in vague ways, to be careful not to offend or too direct. However, my research told me that minority views require consistency; they also stimulate thinking and benefit the quality of decision making. I wanted to do both.

At Berkeley, much “business” was conducted in informal settings and alliances were formed that way. I had married in 1979 and living in San Francisco meant that I was unable to partake in many social gatherings. Further, many such settings were “all boys”, playing basketball or poker. Did I dare challenge them to a game of “horse” when I had played Varsity basketball for 4 years? I also had 2 children by 1983.

In those days, there was no university help. I worked up to one week before delivery each time and was relieved of 1 or 2 months of end of semester teaching by colleagues who offered to cover for me. I was back full time the following semester.

The culture was also changing towards a kinder, gentler department. But that sometimes made it harder to see discrimination directly. Sometimes, it took the form of condescension. Sometimes, it was pressure –unmistakably a message they would not be pleased should you question or challenge them. Sometimes it was more overt. Repeatedly, my pay trailed that of

people I hired who were 10-15 years younger. As with many organizations, merit increases benefited from “sympathies” or alliances.

Part of the pay inequity was due to my reluctance—I think shared by many women—to play the “one foot out the door” strategy. I had committed to Berkeley for the long haul and had set down roots. I didn’t pursue outside offers and declined invitations to be considered. I was intent on building the best area, the best department, the best university. It seemed disingenuous to pursue other offers when I had no intention of leaving. Yet, I watched male faculty members do this regularly. And they were rewarded with stepped up promotions, more perks and income—sometimes without having an actual offer. This resulted in my moving only 8 steps after 36 years. A career assessment at retirement was not granted.

During the past 40 years, there have been many attempts to create equity and to support and encourage those in minority categories, not only by many female faculty-and staff-but also by many of our white male faculty who enjoyed privilege but were stalwart defenders of the rights of others.

Today, we have many more female faculty but, only recently, have they served as Chair. There has been progress on pay equity but it remains under discussion. Perhaps more subtle but disturbing is that many female faculty members still feel a pressure to “go along and get along” and remain silent even when a faculty or staff member has been disparaged or bullied. The department has come far but it is still “in progress” towards full equity and inclusion.