

Gender Equity Project Colloquia and Workshops Leadership and Social Networks

Topic Discussion and Activities

We learned from the workshop on “Power and politics” (19 November, 2003) that academic life is often full of challenges that, although not directly related to research and writing, can interfere with one’s work. Sometimes these challenges may be dealt with at the individual level, but other times effective solutions require group effort or institutional change. We learned from the workshop on “Entitlement and negotiation” (03 December 2003), that often times fulfilling one’s academic needs requires bargaining with, and enlisting the help of colleagues, department chairs, and administrators. We now want you to reflect on how to transform the problem solving and negotiation skills you have acquired from these past workshops into leadership and social networking skills. Both will provide you with important tools for career development. Exerting leadership can increase your power within your department and your field, as well as place you in a stronger position to negotiate with your department chair and others. Similarly, social networks can offer valuable assistance when navigating especially difficult challenges and supply crucial allies in high stakes negotiations.

Read: *Women connecting with women: Networks and mentors* (O’Leary & Mitchell, 1990)
Discusses the barriers women face to being included in traditional “Old boy’s networks” and the importance of networks as strategies for successful careers.

Why so slow? (Valian, 1999) pp. 125-133
Discusses how and why women and men are evaluated differently as leaders.

Gender effects on social influence and emergent leadership (Carli & Eagly, 1999) pp. 204-208, 217-220
Discusses some of the characteristics commonly associated with leadership and reviews the theoretical explanations for gender differences in leadership roles and social influence. [This piece is somewhat technical and may be skimmed.]

Activity 1: In a group of 3, discuss the problem outlined below. Consider both the problem itself, and the most effective solutions to the problem. Do you need allies to get what you want? If so, who are the best allies to help reach a solution that you find desirable (fellow faculty, department chair, dean, etc.)? How can you convince these individuals to help you get what you want or need? What can you offer them in return for their assistance? Does the problem present an opportunity to create a new social network or strengthen an existing one? (Think of a social network here simply as a group of allies who can help you achieve a specific goal.) Will employing the assistance of a network help you get what you want or need? What specific assistance can a network offer? How can a network help you achieve your goal? Report back to the entire workshop on how you decided to address the problem, whether or not you decided to use a network, and if so how you expect the network to be helpful.

Problem: Your department just completed the search for a new assistant professor and has narrowed the candidates down to three choices. You are not particularly interested in the first two potential hires, but the third has caught your attention. Dr. G does research in the same area of your field as you do. Your research interests are similar enough so that she could be a valuable colleague to you (e.g., you could split cost on certain equipment and materials, you

could share data analysis programs, she could provide useful feedback on your work, etc.), but distinct enough that competition between the two of you would be unlikely. You think that having Dr. G in the department would help to advance your research and want to get her hired. What you know:

- The decision will be made at the next faculty meeting
- Potential hires are rarely discussed at the meeting before the final decision is made
- Dr. G will not seem to be an obvious or beneficial choice to other faculty in your department
- A few faculty members seem to have already made a definitive decision about who should be hired, but most others are still undecided
- To get Dr. G. hired you must convince the undecided faculty to vote for her at the faculty meeting

Activity 2: Being recognized as a leader can be a valuable tool for career advancement and self-promotion (more on this at the May 5th workshop). However, leadership can be hard to define, making it difficult to determine how one goes about exerting leadership and being perceived as a leader. Remain in your group of 3; discuss the characteristics that you think define a leader (Carli & Eagly, 1999 will be helpful here) and fill out the “What makes a leader?” chart. Try to include both characteristics that are typically thought of as innate (e.g., outgoing, charismatic, confident), and skills that can be considered learned (e.g., organized, persuasive, focused). Why do you think these are the qualities of a leader? How do these qualities contribute to leadership ability? Why are these qualities useful to leaders? Report your answers back to the entire workshop. We will discuss each group’s list and some ideas about how to develop leadership potential. We will also discuss how to build and improve one’s own leadership skills.

References

- Carli, L. L. (1999). Gender, interpersonal power, and social influence. *Journal of Social Issues*, 55(1), 81-99.
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- O’Leary, V. E., & Mitchell, J. M. (1990). Women connecting with women: Networks and mentors. In S. S. Lie, & V. E. O’Leary (Eds.), *Storming the tower: Women in the academic world* (pp. 58-73). New York: Kogan Page.
- Valian, V. (1999). Evaluating women and men. In *Why so slow?* (pp. 125-133). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.