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Piecing Together a New Identity’’: Uncovering 1st year Women Doctoral Student Socialization through Quilting and Stories

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This roundtable session explores a narrative study of 1st year women doctoral student socialization. Stories unfold both visually and verbally through student created quilt imagery, interviews and journal entries. Using arts based inquiry and the traditional folk art of quilting, participants access and express the affective component of initial academic socialization.

Graduate school socialization is an essential component of academic success (Austin, 2002). Unsatisfactory social integration (Tinto, 1993), dissatisfaction with advising (Golde, 2005) and departmental isolation (Golde, 2005; Austin, 2002) are all reported as factors in attrition. For the past 50 years, doctoral attrition statistics have been estimated between 40-50% (Bair & Haworth, 1999). Nearly a third of doctoral attrition occurs the 1st year (Golde, 1998), in spite of selective admissions processes.

However, attrition and retention statistics provide only a partial picture of successful graduate student socialization. Negative or inadequate socialization experiences not only impact students who leave their programs, factors that spur attrition may also negatively impact persisters (Golde, 2005; Nyquist, Manning, Wulff, Austin, Sprague, Fraser, Calcagno, & Woodford, 1999; Austin, 2002).

Graduate student performance, satisfaction and success depend on socialization (Nettles & Millet, 2006; Austin, 2002). Women doctoral students take longer to complete their degrees (Kerlin, 1997; Nettles & Millet, 2006), are less productive than their male colleagues during their programs, and report being less satisfied with faculty relationships (Nettles & Millet, 2006). Literature suggests (Kerlin, 1997) women experience academic socialization differently.

Socialization is not only key to success as a graduate student, but provides a foundation for professional success by integration of the values, norms and expectations of the academic community (Austin, 2002). Success and productivity as a scholar is initiated by values and behaviors developed through doctoral socialization.

Women are less likely to get hired in higher education research institutions and continue to be paid less than their male colleagues (Banerji, 2006). Women are also concentrated in lower faculty ranks and in less prestigious institutions. Although women comprise 47 % of the tenured faculty at community colleges, their presence in tenured ranks drops to 33% for baccalaureate and masters institutions and diminishes to 25% at doctoral institutions. According the AAUP Faculty Gender Indicators Report 2006, the average pay of women across all ranks and institutions was 81% of the salaries of their male colleagues, a discrepancy which remained unchanged since the 1970’s (Banerji, 2006).

Greater understanding of the socialization experience of 1st year women doctoral students can inform doctoral program improvements to support and enhance womens’ scholarly productivity. Improving initial academic socialization of aspiring women scholars could help ameliorate persistent gender inequities in higher education.

The study participants were recruited from women in their 1st year of doctoral study in the disciplines of education and psychology at a state university. Three semi-structured interviews during the first year focus on relationships with faculty and peers, availability and adequacy of information and resources, and the affective adaptation component of 1st year

socialization. The participants create three quilt squares, one for each term of study, representing their lived experience visually. Participant journal entries are also collected. Triangulation of these three types of student data collected over the 1st year of doctoral study will be used to illuminate issues of 1st year socialization for women doctoral students.

This roundtable will discuss: a.) the initial socialization needs of women doctoral students, b.) the institution's responsibility for socialization, c.) possible interventions to assist aspiring women scholars.

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