

WOMEN IN THE LEISURE SERVICE PROFESSION: A PROFESSIONAL/ PERSONAL COMMENTARY

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I am a woman and a leisure service professional. Other than those two facts, the information that I am going to share with you is quite new to me. More specifically, looking at these two facts as somehow being related and as having consequences for myself, for leisure services and for therapeutic recreation, is a new area of study for me.

My consciousness of the relationship between being a woman and being a leisure service professional was raised when Karla Henderson and Debra Bialeschki, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, brought the issue to the attention of the leisure service profession (and probably other helping professions) through their writing in journals, professional magazines, and textbooks. Three years ago, I was asked to discuss this topic in our graduate program's seminar class. I don't know why I was asked, since I had not expressed any particular interest or expertise in the topic. I believe now that it was assumed that I was in touch with the issue because I am a woman and a leisure service professional. But I know now that this is not a safe assumption to make.

Since then, I had not thought about the topic with any seriousness until Dr. Henderson's name came up again; this time as a possible keynote at the 42nd Annual Cortland Recreation Conference. She would serve as the leisure service professional whose message would become a permanent entry into the Metcalf Lecture Series. Then, Dr. Gerald O'Morrow (1991) published the results of an analysis of the therapeutic recreation profession which contained some interesting data regarding the numbers of women and men in the field of therapeutic recreation as well as the average salaries awarded to these therapeutic recreation specialists. I looked it over and filed it. More importantly are more recent happenings. First, as a result of a couple of scary and stress-related health problems that revealed themselves in me in the last year or two, I began counseling. Several issues surfaced through those months of counseling, but one repeated theme dealt with self-concept, self-esteem and the differences between women's and men's self-perceptions as well as society's perceptions of women and men. Second, I was having a chat with one of our recent graduates about a job that she was being offered. She wanted to talk aloud to me about her struggle between wanting the job and not wanting to settle into a routine schedule because she had some other dreams and didn't want them to become stifled by the 8 to 5 routine. So I listened and suggested that routine might actually help her realize some of the other dreams racing through her head because her days would have some structure to them, and then the time outside of work would basically be hers . . . blah, blah, blah . . . unless, I chuckled, you have to get a second job in order to pay the bills! Her non-verbal reaction



caused me to ask "What are they offering you?" "\$14,000", was her response. I lost it. I became so angry that I was absolutely useless to her from that point on. Here you have an agency seeking out a graduate of a program accredited in therapeutic recreation by the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) and the American Association for Leisure and Recreation, a graduate who is certified or eligible for certification through the National Council for Therapeutic Recreation Certification as a Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist, and someone with expertise and experience in leisure education; and willing to pay \$14,000 for all this and more! So all of these events and my reactions to them began to churn in my head and I kept wondering if somehow they may all be connected. Was there some common theme among them? What has been the fate of talented women in the helping and healing professions?

Then I found the book, Achterberg's (1990) *Woman as Healer*. The following statement is in the introduction:

Today over 80 percent of the workers in the health system in the United States are women. Without women, hospitals, laboratories, and social agencies could not operate. Nevertheless, women in general have limited professional independence and authority, and are, in some instances, legally constrained in practicing the skills associated with their training. For most of the history of the Western world, women who worked as healers in their own right have been exceptional people who defied custom in order to share their creative and intellectual gifts. More often, women healers have simply joined a large and exploited corps of handmaidens (p. 1).

So what we are talking about is the dissonance, the discord, the often harsh inconsistencies, between women's talents and women's fates as healers and helpers. Specifically, I will be sharing the following with you (a) a quick and very sketchy look at women as healers across time, (b) a simplified look at some attributional theory and self-esteem issues, and (c) some hope at a time of crisis in the health-care professions and of the re-emergence of feminine values.

Women as Healers Across Time

The author of *Woman as Healer* described the ancient cultures in which women worked as independent and honored healers; the persecution of women healers in the witch hunts of the Middle Ages; the development of midwifery and nursing as women's professions in the 19th century; and finally, the current role of women and the state of the healing arts. The following are selected passages from the book to help illustrate the dissonance, the harsh inconsistencies faced by women as healers across time.

During ancient Greece there were several women serving in the medical profession, independently and with honor. Several actually published books on a variety of topics, specifically gynecology, uterus, stomach, and kidney disease. These books served as references for fifteen or sixteen hundred years. Later their works were attributed to male writers.

Christianity brought with it some interesting beliefs in regard to women as healers based upon accepted theology and science. Women were credited with knowing their business and with having powerful secret remedies. However, because they were women –



not men, nor philosophers, nor priests, nor physicians - performing any of their healing practices was deemed as the work of demons. Women were routinely tortured and killed during this time period.

The actual number of women murdered in the name of Christianity will never be known even though there was no attempt to cover up the burnings. There was not only no shame felt, or at least none expressed by the church and civic organizations, the numbers burned were also a source of ecclesiastic pride. We are talking about thousands and thousands of women. So many that some small towns were left with one woman or no women at all.

The 19th century brought about a bit more acceptance of women as healers as long as they didn't heal in public places. For the most part their education was ignored. They were not considered comparable to men with even less education. Some managed to sneak into college programs in preparation for involvement in the healing profession. Other women referred to them as warriors. But upon graduation the women worked under the orders of males with less knowledge in their field.

Also, during the 19th century, women began the practice of midwifery. Some men would actually dress up as women so that they could become familiar with the process. Once they did, it was decided that women could continue to practice midwifery, but that the difficult cases would be referred to men. I wonder if that is why John Lombardo, a friend and colleague in the Psychology Department at Cortland College, is consistently challenged and most always turned away by his women colleagues when he tries to enter sessions at professional conferences that address women's issues? I wonder if the women inherently "know" that once men become familiar with these issues, then men will become viewed as the authorities and the "difficult cases" would be referred to them?

I read in a recent publication put out by my undergraduate alma mater, Appalachian State University, a more contemporary statistic but one with a very similar "no women at all" sound. The author stated that if "you were to distribute the total number of women administrators equitably among all American colleges and universities - department chairs all the way up to chancellors and presidents - you'd wind up with exactly one female at each institution" (p.4).

Attribution Theory and Self-Esteem

Let's look at what may be another piece of the picture - a simplified version of an attribution theory - a theory that attempts to explain possible factors or variables to which people attribute success or failure. Would you consider yourself a success? Do you know why? To what do you attribute your successes and failures? How do you explain it to yourself or to others? The theory suggests that individuals attribute outcomes to internal (personal) factors such as effort or ability, or to external (situational) factors such as luck or difficulty of task. Research across time and settings indicates that men tend to attribute success to ability which is consistent with society's high expectations of men. Women tend to attribute success to luck, effort, and ease of task which is consistent with society's low expectations of women. The following is an example of such research, shared with me by a colleague (Lombardo, 1992):



Four women and four men were given similar tasks to complete and were asked, prior to attempting the task, to indicate whether or not they thought they would be able to complete the task successfully. In general, men said they would succeed; women said they wouldn't or they weren't certain. All subjects succeeded. Then they were given another similar task and once again asked if they thought they would succeed. Same results. The men said yes; the women said no, or I don't know. All subjects succeeded. And then Round three and Round four and finally Round five with the same expectations expressed by the men and the women prior to attempting the task and again all subjects succeeded. Successful women still unsure of themselves, still attributing their success not to ability as did the men, but to luck, effort, or ease of task.

Here's the problem or what I call "the kicker": **If one attributes success to ability, he or she reaps the maximal effect in terms of self-esteem and self-image.** How many times have you heard yourself say, after successfully completing a major or even minor task, things like:

"Just lucky, I guess. Right place, right time."

"Boy, I guess I pulled that one off."

"Well, I appreciate your comments, but it really wasn't that difficult of a task.

Anybody could do it, really."

"Worked hard."

"Busted my ole patootie"

"Just got down with the ole nose to the grindstone and stuck with it."

Last fall I was chatting with one of our recent graduates at the Cortland Recreation Conference. She was a returning adult, non-traditional student. We were chatting about a presentation that she and a colleague had made that morning. This was her first conference presentation and it dealt with the use of an expressions program with adults with chemical dependencies. With my own presentation (this one) on my mind, our conversation went something like this:

I asked, "So how did it go?"

"It was great! She did a super job!" "It was lots of fun and they both did an excellent job of presenting. They worked really well together." "The energy in the room was obvious. People seemed to enjoy getting involved and she made getting involved safe." "I heard really great things. Sure wish I had gone to it." (These were all comments from some of the folks at the table who had attended or at least heard about the session, friends of ours, a small group of folks who are comfortable being honest with each other.)

I addressed the question again to her (slightly altered since it was an expressed consensus that it was good and she did great), "How did you do?"

She responded, "Well, it went pretty well, I guess. Most folks seemed to be enjoying themselves."

(Slowly and deliberately, in a matter-of-fact tone of voice I repeated my question)

"How did you do?"



(She's caught on, but was still unable to re-program her comments.) "It was very well received."

(Gently, knowing that she knew what she had to say and it was not going to be easy!) "How'd you do?"

(Big smile, a couple of nods) "I was good! I was really good."

"Were you successful?" I asked.

"Yes, I was successful!"

(But we're still not finished, because for the self-esteem to "reap" we have to ask the follow-up question.) "And to what do you attribute your success?" (Fully aware at this point that I am working her through a process discovered while preparing for my own presentation, she responds.)

"I am a talented woman. I have abilities in the use of music and self-expression as a therapeutic tool and as a speaker and motivator."

YES! The reaping of the maximal effects! And it was contagious! All of us somehow felt better about ourselves by just watching and listening to her. I'm sure we all had many scenarios that raced through our heads at that time. Perhaps the effects in terms of self-esteem are even reaped by those around.

Professionally speaking, I have completed my BS, my MS, and my Ph.D; six years of experience as a Therapeutic Recreation Specialist and 13 years as a college professor with two teaching awards from Penn State. I received the Lehman Research award for my first data-based research. The first manuscript that I have ever submitted was accepted for publication, and I was just recently awarded tenure. Would you call that successful? Me too, (maybe!). But to what do I attribute it? I have never looked back and said, "I'm good at what I do" or talented, or capable. By not responding to myself in this manner, I do not feed my self-esteem, and do not enhance my self-image.

Rosemary Agonito, recently featured in the Syracuse Herald (Hirsch, 1993), has written a book with a single premise: Nice girls finish last! In her book, *No More "Nice Girl": Power, Sexuality and Success in the Workplace* (1993) she says that "women can't just talk themselves into a stronger sense of self-esteem. Rather, one builds self-esteem by taking steps to change" (p. BB3). The first step, according to Agonito, is to "recognize that women as second-class citizens face obstacles on and off the job. The second step is to tackle external and internal barriers that keep women mute when co-workers steal their ideas, overload them with low-profile projects or try to coerce them into bed" (p. BB3). Agonito explains the barriers in this way:

The external barriers are older than Methuselah. A "nice girl" never complains. She puts everyone else's needs first and her needs last. Above all, she wants to be liked. Society also tells girls: women are weak and emotional, petty and vain. Irrational, illogical and indecisive, they make rotten leaders. Find a man who will protect you.

The internal barriers are even tougher to crack. Low self-esteem. Guilt. Fear of taking risks. Dependency. Refusing to take responsibility for your life. (p. BB3)

Agonito believes that this conditioning goes deep, that it has been happening since we were little. It has become a part of who we are and how we react to things.



Let's look at some general statistics regarding gender differences in careers, status and earning from Barth's (1993) article "All Things Being (Un)Equal":

1. In 1955 a woman brought home 59 cents for every dollar a male earned; despite a short surge to 64 cents in 1986, that number once again hit 59 cents in 1988. Currently, the average total life earnings for an American male with a high school diploma will exceed those of a female with a bachelors degree, no matter what field it is in. (p. 4)
2. Women are hired in larger numbers to fill less desirable entry-level jobs, laid off in larger numbers earlier, paid on average lower starting salaries, and promoted less rapidly than their male counterparts - even when they have the same abilities and perform equally well on the job. (p. 4)
3. Fewer women now achieve high-paying positions than they did a decade ago. In other words, despite some modest work place gains made during the late 1970s, most working women once again find it difficult to succeed, even when their training and expertise indicate that they should. (p. 4)

From Wimbush and Talbot's (1988) *Relative Freedoms*, in the chapter on women in leisure service management we find some statistics from the leisure services profession:

1. Male managers represent 10% of all men in employment, women managers represent 5% of all women in employment. (p. 148)
2. It is depressingly true that even when women outnumber men in a profession - as in health administration, teaching or banking- men occupy the bulk of the managerial positions. (p. 148)
3. The major differences illustrated by research are in status and salary. (p. 150)
4. Both men and women managers believe that "successful managers" have characteristics, temperaments, and attributes most commonly attributed to men. (p. 150) This suggests that if women are to become successful in managerial positions, they must become "more like men."
5. A bank manager said: "The only way we could place the same kind of reliability on a woman as on a man is if a woman came to us and said she had been sterilized, that would prove that she was really serious about her career"(p. 156).

Is There Any Hope?

So what can be done? Is balance possible? Is it possible to alter the ways society perceives men and women? To alter the ways in which men and women perceive themselves and each other? To alter the harsh inconsistencies between women's talents and women's fate as healers and helpers? Women management theorists are now suggesting that "managers who develop a combination of masculine and feminine behaviors will be able to employ a full range of management styles as they work to develop and empower as well as to lead and evaluate employees" (Wimbush and Talbot, 1988, p. 151). Others, trying to get at the root of the problem, blame the polarity of the myth of the masculine and feminine which cuts across cultures and across time. The suggestion is that perhaps a single list of traits is more appropriate, more whole (Achtenberg, 1990). Social Psychologist Carol Tavris,



author of *The Mismeasurement of Woman*, and also featured recently in the Syracuse Herald (Hirsch, 1993), makes the following suggestion: Women are bound by the myths of what it means to be a female. One classic example: Women are more helpful than men. By expecting women to be nice and supportive (and punishing us when we're not) we overlook and discourage women's capacity to be tough, competitive and rational - qualities that great achievement requires.(p. BB3)

Dr. Dan Dustin (1992) strongly suggests that within the leisure service profession our attention should be directed toward the "areas of human relationships, concern and caring for other groups of people and other life forms, and compassion for, and compatibility with, people whose ideas differ from ours." (p. 329). He goes on to express the following:

What better values to guide us in that effort than those traditionally considered to be feminine - love, nurturing, compassion, sensitivity to others, mercy, and supportiveness? For if indeed we are all of this world, does it not behoove all of us to act in concert with it? (p. 329)

He closes his discussion by reflecting back on the thinking of Aldo Leopold when he spoke of returning again and again to the same starting point to begin anew our quest for understanding. When confused, return again and again to the same starting point. If the leisure service profession would return again to the same starting point, we would find a profession which grew out of social concern, a need for support for individuals who were somehow at a disadvantage and we would find a group of people who founded the Playground Association of America (now the NRPA) and we would find eight women and eleven men. Perhaps closer to a balance than we have been since that time,

The solution seems to be in an integration of what has been traditionally known as the masculine myth and the feminine myth so we can move towards a human-centered health and healing system. Suggestions from Karla Henderson and Deb Bialeschki in the March 1993 issue of the *Parks & Recreation* magazine include the following:

1. Admit that a concern exists, that not all equity issues have been solved,
2. Develop an intolerance for inequity.
3. Take a closer look at what is going on around you.
4. Seek support from other men and women.
5. Talk, read, visit.
6. Learn from those before us - women, women as healers, women as therapeutic recreation specialists.
7. Serve as role models to nurture young males and females. Teach/Model values of love, nurturing, compassion, sensitivity to others, mercy, supportiveness.
8. Address the issue of self-esteem. Recognize your successes and the successes of other women and attribute the successes to talent and to ability.

I would like to offer these thoughts and encourage you to embrace them as truth: women can know power and compassion; women can, like the women healers and helpers of the past, be gentle warriors. This is not incompatibility, but wholeness. One final note for the "little girl" in each of us as well as those young warriors who will be reading our histories. Remember "sugar and everything nice .. ? Here's a different, more whole version:



Sugar and Spice and everything fun and intelligent and passionate and athletic and creative and strong and tender and firm and soft and wild and wonderful. . . that's what little girls are made of. (Taken from Brush Dance Cards)

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Global Therapeutic Recreation III

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