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COMMENTARY

Yes…But: Footnotes To Sage Advice

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Abstract In this commentary, I assume the role of a footnoter to the contributions in this special issue devoted to the development of educational psychologists. In those footnotes, insights and recommendations forwarded by the contributors are extended, clarified, or occasionally countered. Topics of dialogue include advice on defining a research program, supporting the professional development of women and underrepresented populations, achieving balance in one's life, discussing reasons why academics publish, building collaborative relationships, and considering the mentor–mentee relationship.

Keywords Research program · Women and underrepresented population · Balance · Academic publication · Mentor–mentee relationship

I have been given the somewhat daunting task of providing commentary on the words of wisdom provided to future or newly-minted educational psychologists by highly-successful and well-established scholars in our field. Those words of wisdom have seemingly covered the professional terrain—everything from publications to pregnancy. So, what can I contribute that would further inform or enlighten the readers of this special issue? What could I possibly say that has not already been touched upon within this volume dedicated to the next generation of educational psychology scholars?

After weighing my options, I have chosen to place myself in the role of *footnoter*. As I learned from colleagues in history and philosophy, footnotes within those disciplinary writings serve a valuable role. They allow the historian or philosopher to provide useful explanatory, descriptive, sourcing, or even contradictory information without disrupting the flow of the primary text. So, that is what I intend here: to extend, clarify, or even counter some aspect of the authors' central message without distracting from its principal argument or advice. Further, as the title of this commentary suggests, I have cast these ancillary

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remarks as "yes…but" footnotes. That is to say, they have been so named because I will begin each response with a statement of concurrence ("yes...") before diverging from the authors' explicit messages ("but...").

Defining Your Research Program

*I could not agree more...*with the contributors to this volume that the path toward tenure and subsequent promotions within research-intensive and research-extensive institutions is largely predicated on having a well-articulated and discernible research program. That principle appears in multiple guises throughout this special issue. For instance, as Mayer (2008) outlined critical steps for conducting a successful research project and bringing it to closure, he emphasized the necessity for a guiding theoretical model and research questions that allow one to "contribute to a research base" (p. 22). In keeping with Mayer's argument, many an article submitted to *Contemporary Educational Psychology* during my tenure as editor has been rejected in part due to this lack of an overarching theoretical frame that not only ties the pieces of the manuscript together but also establishes its contributions to the existing literature.

Yet…the qualities Mayer thoughtfully outlined for study design and manuscript development would be far easier to accomplish if young faculty were researching within a well-defined niche and had carved out a line of inquiry that carries their thinking (and thus the field) forward. Said another way, it is not just the well-conceived and well-crafted manuscript that matters, but how one manuscript is part of a coherent program of research and leads theoretically and methodologically to the next. Of the many productive scholars I know, few match Richard Mayer in his ability to do just that—to see the next logical step in a program of inquiry.

I also appreciated…McCormick and Barnes's (2008) articulation of steps that new faculty might take to establish the type of research program into which Mayer's systematically crafted manuscripts would fit nicely. Among those recommendations, these authors talk about explicitly searching for collaborators once young faculty have arrived in their new academic homes, learning about their colleagues' research, and "attending research seminars, looking at websites and conducting Internet searches" (p. 10) as potential sources of suitable lines of inquiry and viable collaborators. They also talked about using conferences as tools for networking and expanding one's base for collaboration.

Nonetheless…I would like to sound several cautionary notes about the insights that McCormick and Barnes forwarded. Fundamentally, I am not convinced that young faculty should seek positions under the assumption that they have the luxury of exploring a line of inquiry suitable for them upon arrival. Within research-intensive and research-extensive institutions, young faculty have precious little time to formulate their research focus or conceptualize a program of inquiry. In many institutions, preliminary decisions about a young faculty member's likelihood of success occur within the first 3 years of appointment. Thus, when we search for new faculty we look for someone who already demonstrates the beginnings of a productive research career, as evidenced by their record of publication, presentations, the timeliness of their research topic, and the like. At a minimum, the dissertation should signal the candidate's potential and should translate into one or more significant publications. In fact, for our doctoral students there is the expectation that the dissertation will *not* be their first research endeavor but rather an extension of the focus they have already begun to articulate.

Supporting Professional Development

Without question…the reality of Halpern's (2008) explanation regarding the professional trajectory of women in academia is stark but undeniable. As she writes: "The reasons for the slow progress of women, especially when research demands are high, lie in the fact that faculty positions can be all-consuming in their time demands, which can make it very difficult to manage family-care responsibilities and a research-intensive academic career" (p. 59). Later Halpern admonishes institutions of higher education to rethink the prevailing culture of practice.

> One way to help young faculty succeed is to change the workplace culture and rules so that they are supportive of valuable employees who also want to have children or to care for others….There is good evidence that family-friendly workplaces are more productive and offer substantial returns to the employer. (p. 62)

There are personal reasons why I find Halpern's portrayal compelling. For one, while I was on faculty at Texas A&M University I chaired the Committee on the Status of Women and remember the findings of an intensive study we undertook that revealed the lack of progress in moving women and underrepresented populations into the higher ranks of academia. In fact, there had been almost no appreciable change in the 10 years of data we gathered across colleges and disciplines. That was almost 15 years ago, and the pattern in data shared by Halpern (2008) and Mason and Goulden (2002, 2004) still reveal little progress.

However…I would like to extend discussion of those disturbing trends. Recently, I have become invested in understanding expertise development broadly and more specifically for those from underrepresented populations. This research experience led me to consider the power of *fragile competence* or *fragile expertise* in undermining the progress of women, especially in scientific and mathematical fields.

In concert with Halpern's recommendations, there is reason to assume that blatant discrimination of the type discussed in the "Glass Ceiling" cannot be held primarily accountable for the academic stagnation we are witnessing. Rather, it would seem that more subtle barriers, what I perceive as "academic undertows," can pull promising scholars down and stymie their progress. Certainly, family-care responsibilities would be one of those major academic undertows with which women must deal.

My reason for referring to this phenomenon as *fragile expertise* is to emphasize that young scholars' professional development is still in a precarious state when they exit their graduate programs—even if well trained. What is required is continued support and guidance as these scholars cross the threshold from graduate student to faculty member. Not only are new skills and knowledge required of young academics, but those competencies already formed in graduate school must also be further reinforced and solidified.

Let me offer one additional side comment with regard to this call for continued nurturance of our young faculty. In my work as a faculty mentor at the university level, I have found that the demands on women can be even greater in certain academic domains than others, not only due to the culture of the department, college, or university, but also due to the nature of the field itself. As a single parent and young faculty member, I faced late nights and long hours trying to be productive while giving my child the time and care he deserved. Still, I had the benefit of working within a department and college that was more female-oriented and more sensitive to concerns of psychology and human development. I could also work from home when the need arose.

Today, I work with women in fields where they are clearly minorities at all ranks and where it is impossible for them to take their work home. Consider the relatively small number of female faculty in Chemical Engineering, for instance. In order to conduct their research, these women must spend many hours in their labs without the ability to take the work home or bring their children into that work environment. I do not mean to suggest that the life of women and underrepresented populations is easy in educational psychology, just that it could be even harder.

Seek Balance

It seems commonsensical…to say that balanced faculty will be more productive than those whose academic lives are out of kilter. Indeed, several of the contributors to this special issue admonish young faculty to find the balance not only between the facets of the professoriate but also between their lives in and outside the academy. Throughout their article, for instance, McCormick and Barnes (2008) outline strategies they perceive as useful "for balancing the multiple, and sometimes competing, demands and expectations" (p. 5). Those strategies extend beyond a consideration of writing and research, which represents the bulk of this dedicated volume, and address the dimensions of teaching and service that often get less attention in young faculty's preparation. I applaud McCormick and Barnes's foray into those less trodden, but still critical, dimensions of the professoriate.

While McCormick and Barnes focus their lens on life within the academy, Halpern (2008) turns her attention to the precarious balance between one's professional calling and one's personal existence. As she puts it: "Everyone has a life outside of work, and although we often talk about work and family (or, as some prefer, work and life) as separate constructs, real people live one integrated life, not two" (p. 58). For that reason, Halpern considers factors that could well disrupt this integrated life and suggests proactive steps that could moderate their influences on young faculty, especially those with primary family-care responsibilities.

But…how can I quibble with these calls for balance or for the strategies that may permit one to negotiate the competing demands of the professoriate or life within and outside the academy? I certainly believe that we function best and can sustain our professional lives when we give all facets of our professional and personal lives the attention they merit. Yet, we cannot presume to dictate or standardize balance for any one individual according to some abstract criteria. Balance has a variable character not only across individuals but also within individuals across their professional careers. That is why women of child-bearing years may face unique challenges (Halpern 2008) or why faculty from underrepresented populations may require special mentoring arrangements (McCormick and Barnes 2008).

Still there are other factors that can shift the balance for individual faculty even at similar points in their careers. For instance, certain faculty find the demands of designing and reporting studies more onerous than others, while particular faculty see teaching as a more effortful, time-consuming, or unrewarding part of their job. Still others find the political and social demands of the professoriate counter to their personalities or more exhausting than do their colleagues. Certainly, if someone were to examine my life they would question its balance; but what represents balance to me, especially at this stage in my professional and personal lives, bears only slight resemblance to my life in the first years of my career. I would not expect anyone to use me or my work style as a model of balance but I would argue that this level of effort both within the professoriate and across my personal life have suited me well—a balanced imbalance, if you will.

Why We Publish?

*I acknowledge...*Nihalani and Mayrath's (2008) argument that we engage in scholarly writing for multiple reasons. In their overview of the observations and recommendations of editors for leading educational psychology journals, these contributors begin by offering four important functions that scholarly publications serve for academics. Those four functions are as follows:

> First, publications serve to help a new Ph.D. get a job at an institution right away upon graduating….Second, salary, promotions, and tenure weigh scholarly productivity more than any other factor—namely teaching and service….Third, the ability to change jobs is almost totally dependent on the professor's publication record….The fourth function of publications is that recognition and prestige are a direct function of a professor's scholarly publications. (pp. 30)

Nihalani and Mayrath's litany of reasons for publishing are certainly pragmatic ones, and I have no doubt that most professors would agree on their analysis.

Yet…I must say that the primary reason why I conduct research and seek to publish that work does not appear at all among Nihalani and Mayrath's listings. In fact, I can say quite honestly that the driving force in my scholarly writings has never been to get a job, gain tenure, move institutions, or achieve recognition. It is quite true that I have certainly enjoyed all those benefits. But I have always perceived them as positive residual effects for being passionately committed to improving the educational experience of learners and to the ideas and interventions that I believe can bring about such improvement.

Call me altruistic, but those are the compelling forces that led me out of the classroom and into the university in the first place. Sharing these ideas and interventions with others whom I believe are equally committed to the academic development of all learners is why I publish. It could be that Nihalani and Mayrath took altruistic reasons for publishing as givens and, thus, concentrated on the more pragmatic. Nonetheless, I feel it is important to explicit such intrinsic reasons in our advice to young faculty. That is because I believe that if the ideas about which young faculty write have more power in and of themselves than the external rewards they may engender, then it will be easier to devote the incredible time and energy required to bring those written ideas to fruition.

Collaboration

Rightfully…In his examination of productive authors in educational psychology journals, Mayrath (2008) noted that: "Although productivity studies are important, perhaps more important, at least for beginning authors, is the need to examine why these authors are so productive" (p. 42). Toward this goal of ascertaining the keys to productivity, Mayrath also highlights the merits of collaboration, drawing on the sage advice of the late Michael Pressley, one of our field's most productive authors, to support this contention. The value of collaboration was also echoed in the comments solicited by Mayrath in a survey of 22 highly productive educational psychologists.

That being said…I wanted to note that the manner in which productivity is sometimes defined actually may run counter to the call for collaboration voiced by Mayrath, Pressley, and others (e.g., McCormick and Barnes 2008). Specifically, as Hsieh *et al.* (2005) argued, higher ratings for productivity in previous studies (e.g., Smith *et al.* 1998, 2003) were awarded when the faculty solo-authored, had few co-authors and had high author placement

in those publications than when they shared authorship. Thus, collaboration even with one's doctoral students would reduce perceptions of productivity in those cases. This was one of the reasons that Hsieh *et al.* (2005) conducted their re-examination of scholarly productivity data previously reported by Smith and colleagues.

The problem of collaboration may also become a matter of concern in judgments pertaining to promotion and tenure decisions. Young faculty must demonstrate the ability to work independently as well as collaboratively, and to lead projects as well as participate actively in them. It must become evident to those gauging individuals' productivity what role contributing authors played in collaboration, along with the unique contributions of young scholars to a particular line of inquiry. So, collaborate but do so wisely and when the projects warrant such partnerships.

Mentoring

In concurrence with McCormick and Barnes (2008), I see it as nearly impossible for anyone to make it in academia without the support or guidance of others. Therefore, the reflections of McCormick and Barnes on the importance of being mentored struck a chord. Within this discussion of the characteristics of good mentors and mentees, the authors also address the importance of serving as a mentor to others or participating in a co-mentoring relationship. They conceptualize co-mentoring as a contemporary model that "reconstructs the traditional notion of mentoring by stating that the mentoring relationship between two (or more) people is nonhierarchical thus making the relationship more egalitarian, reciprocal and mutual" (p. 9). They further suggest that this reciprocal relationship might be useful among new faculty members.

Where I differ with…McCormick and Barnes is in their concern over the differential power structures associated with traditional mentor–mentee relationships. As they wrote:

> The traditional mentoring model has been criticized for creating power imbalances, for being hierarchal, and for creating the illusion that knowledge can only flow from the sage (mentor) to the dilettante (mentee/protégé; p. 9).

Interestingly, while the differential knowledge between mentor and mentee is cast in potentially negative terms in this discussion, it is my experience that many young faculty look forward to having a more "sage" person offer guidance and support during this period of adjustment. There may be times and places for peers to come together in a supportive group, but I am not sure that such groups should be confused with mentoring.

In my view, it is hard enough for young faculty to navigate the demands that come with a new position, new place, new responsibilities, and new colleagues. It would seem almost inhuman for new, untenured faculty to be held responsible for providing guidance and support for their more senior colleagues. In truth, I am not sure how I would even feel if I were approached by a faculty member new to the professoriate and to my university who offered to guide me in my professional development. I am not even certain that I would perceive the offer in a favorable light. Then again, perhaps I am just too "old guard" to see the merits of co-mentoring.

Short-Term–Long-Term Perspective

Finally, for all the outstanding insights and ideas provided by the contributors to this special volume, there is one essential piece of advice that was not forwarded. As I have reminded

gatherings of advanced doctoral students and young faculty, it is important to think not only about the short-term goals of getting a job and making tenure. It is also critical to take a more long-term view of one's life in the academy. Those first 5 years can be extremely challenging and the learning curve terribly steep. However, those first 5 years can represent just a fraction of professional lives for those who will spend 20 or more years in the academy. Certainly, if the academic vitae of the most productive faculty are any indication, longevity in the profession matters. Thus, even as young faculty take steps to put their careers on the right path, they must also take care to nurture those characteristics and conditions necessary to maintain their well-being and sustain their professional growth for decades to come. If it was passion and commitment to the development of others that initially drew me to this life as an educational psychologist, it is that same passion and commitment that will see me through.

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