

## **Faculty Animosity: A Contextual View<sup>1</sup>**

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Professional conflicts and deep antagonisms within departments and colleges are common aspects of academic life. There are tales of long rivalries between academic titans—for example, Kant's dispute with the theological faculty (Carlson 2008)—and I suspect many of us lesser beings have observed or experienced the adverse consequences of professorial disputes. For some of us, interpersonal conflicts have grave consequences and the costs are high. This analysis examines faculty animosity from an interdisciplinary point of view, focusing on the social and organizational structures and processes that may foster the individual actions and reactions associated with interpersonal antagonisms. Animosity means ill will and/or resentment associated with hostility toward a target. As used here, faculty animosity involves bearing an explicit or latent antagonistic attitude toward one or more colleagues that leads to hostility, avoidance, and rejection. It may involve conscious and visible vindictiveness (enmity), or angry brooding over a perceived slight (rancor). The conflicts and animosities that arise within the academy are problematic because they diminish the quality of our professional lives, with adverse effects on students as well as faculty.

This analysis employs ideas from several fields to reframe the problem, offering some interpretive vantage points from which to consider the origins and consequences of faculty animosity. Part one examines the culture of academe as a whole, with its longstanding celebration of argument. Adversarialism has historical roots in the academy, as evident in the use of particular metaphors and instructional practices.

Part two describes how the structure of academic institutions creates a “hothouse” climate that may intensify hostilities, leading in the most extreme cases to social elimination (workplace “mobbing”). Shifting focus from the general to the particular, part three examines whether the professional culture of professors of education might itself engender contention. This section speculates that professors of education, by virtue of their unique status within higher education, may work in settings that have the potential to amplify interpersonal antagonisms. The article concludes with an analysis of the consequences of faculty antagonisms, offering some concrete strategies for change.

### **The Argument Culture**

Beverly Gordon, an associate professor in a school of educational policy and leadership, once described her intellectual research site as a “hood—a very dangerous place.”

You can be ambushed and assaulted. You can be robbed or have your possessions stolen. You can be shot in a “drive-by” shooting. You can get caught in the cross fire of different warring gangs. You are recruited and can even be forced to join these gangs for your own safety and protection, and yet you still have no real guarantee of safety. You can become a prisoner within your own dwelling because the streets are dangerous and the gangs are unrelenting, unforgiving, and revengeful. The gangs of the ‘hood have histories, reputations, and identifying attributes that demarcate the territories that they uphold and guard. Being a good citizen and trying to play it safe is not enough. (1999, p. 407)

The residents of Gordon’s ‘hood were middle class men and women employed in higher education—“The ‘hood I work in is the Academy” (ibid.). She noted that those who work in Academe are as vulnerable to attack as those who live in dangerous neighborhoods, observing

...your smile of recognition speaks volumes about the parallels of life within the Academy and life in the mean streets of urban American society. The metaphor works because you, rather we—those of us that live in this “academic ‘hood”—are as vulnerable as our urban counterparts, but in the university, instead of blood, there is an vacated/empty office, which more often than not is reoccupied before the corpse has time to cool. (p. 408)

Gordon’s image of university life is striking. Why is it that faculty who subscribe to noble ideals and high-minded principles, who have read Dewey, Friere, Noddings, Ladson-Billings, and Foucault, develop animosities toward one another and at times treat each so other badly? One possibility is that the university’s foundation in reasoned argument—its

valorization of argument as an ideal—creates a community of unequal and argumentative residents. Universities are located within a societal zeitgeist characterized by contentious, polarized public discourse. The “argument culture” valorizes debate over conversation, privileging those who take extreme positions and adopt aggressive stances toward those who express other points of view (Tannen, 1999). This fosters a hostile atmosphere wherein opponents seek and highlight each other’s weaknesses, ignoring strengths and oversimplifying complex issues. Deborah Tannen (1999) commented

Of course, it is the responsibility of intellectuals to explore potential weaknesses in others’ arguments, and of journalists to represent serious opposition when it exists. But when opposition becomes the overwhelming avenue of inquiry—a formula that requires another side to be found or a criticism to be voiced; when the lust for opposition privileges extreme views and obscures complexity; when our eagerness to find weaknesses blinds us to strengths; when the atmosphere of animosity precludes respect and poisons our relations with one another; then the argument culture is doing more damage than good. (p. 25)

While Tannen disclaimed any intention to do away with debate, she called for more emphasis on dialogue and “experimenting with metaphors other than sports and war, and with formats other than debates for framing the exchange of ideas” (p. 26).

### ***Military Metaphors and Classroom Life***

The language we use to describe academic activities conveys images of hierarchy, aggression, and control. We speak of “targets” and use other masculine metaphors (battles, arrows, tournaments, games, triggers, lines of attack). For example, a top university official asserted “Our leadership team does not go on retreats. We only *advance!*” The argument metaphor implies opposition and contestation between actors holding discrete, incompatible stances (or between theories that embody irreconcilable principles). Arguments are won or lost, and this is held to be natural and inevitable. “Two debaters or paradigms vie for dominance by marshalling evidence until the force of one position crushes its rival. The winner gains temporary ascendancy until a new challenge arises” (Scholnik, 2000). Academic authors employ the argument metaphor to characterize everything from scientific progress (Kuhn) to moral development (Kohlberg) to cognitive change (Gergen, Piaget). Hytten (2010) pointed out that in the field of education, social foundations scholars also employ metaphors of warfare, describing attacks, battles, threats, assaults, crises, and sometimes feeling “under siege” (p. 152). Referring to the intellectual context in which contemporary social

foundations scholars work, Eric Bredo (2005) observed "...it should be clear that there is an ideological battle going on between modernists and postmodernists, with each tending to define themselves in opposition to the other... both of these views are, in my opinion, noncollaborative at heart" (pp. 121-122). Of course, the use of military metaphors to describe academic life is not new. Here is how James Earl Russell described one interpersonal "struggle" that took place at Teachers College in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century:

The kindergarten was another center of discontent...No department had so many supporting friends and nowhere else was sentiment so influential in perpetuating slavish adherence to a system, even though its routine strained the eyes and hampered the natural growth of muscular energy. Moral suasion had no effect upon advocates of a system handed down *ex cathedra* and dominated by the personality of Susan E. Blow. It is to the lasting credit of Patty Hill that she dared meet the champion on her own grounds and in fair combat won the victory. The fact that for us it had been a struggle which lasted for ten long years testifies to the tenacity of inherited beliefs. (Russell, 1937, pp. 61-62)

Of special concern for higher education, is the negative impact that unexamined language practices might have on students.

One plausible concern is that the pervasiveness of the argument culture has a chilling effect on students' participation in the kinds of conversations necessary for democratic life. The absence of congenial models of public discourse may account for some students' resistance to engaging in productive classroom discussions. Cioffi (2005) described the difficulty of getting students to engage in the kind of productive arguments prized by foundational faculty members. He suggested that students resist the argumentative thesis because they associate argument with aggressive media figures (e.g., Al Franken, Stephen Colbert, Bill O'Reilly, Dr. Laura) engaging in "food-fight journalism" at the expense of civility. Clearly, students need to be taught how to think critically, to develop a sense of "courageous outrage" to use Pamela Smith's (2010, p. 149) apt phrase. However, they also must be taught how to disagree. Students cannot develop effective argumentative writing skills if their image of disagreement is inextricably linked to disrespect and interpersonal antagonism. Unfortunately, however, the impulse to attack is woven deep in the institutional history of the academy.

The association of the art of verbal warfare with intellectual prowess has ancient roots in the history of educational thought. The first universities were masculine institutions that subjected young, sequestered men to harsh discipline by their teachers. In the late medieval university,

Knowledge was gleaned through public oral disputation and tested by combative oral performance, which carried with it the risk of public humiliation. Students at these institutions were trained not to discover the truth but to argue either side of an argument—in other words, to debate. (1999, pp. 257-258)

Citing Walter Ong's *Fighting for Life*, Tannen noted that in Latin, the word school derives from the Latin word, *ludus*, which has military roots, as in training for military combat (p. 258). In the United States and Europe, schools and universities privilege the acquisition of formal logic and detached, "objective" knowledge over personal and relational knowledge (Lather, 1996; Lincoln & Cannella, 2004a; Lincoln & Cannella, 2004b). They also celebrate and sometimes demand the cultivation of verbal combat skills.

### ***Celebrating Argument***

In many disciplines, university professors place a high value on adversarialism: attacking, critiquing, and defending ideas. For every argument, there is a counterargument. The newcomer's career may be established by challenging the work of well-established scholars. Researchers seek evidence supporting new interpretations of observed phenomena. New theories arise and new theoretical insights presumably grow from the ashes of work subjected to the flaming dragon of intellectual interrogation and critique. University classrooms remain adversarial and contentious, encouraging students to demonstrate their competence through aggressive or at least active verbal questioning and critique. After years of schooling in the importance of impersonal knowledge (and the irrelevance of subjective experiences, cultural traditions and/or relational wisdom), those who go on to graduate and professional study find themselves in disciplinary "boot camps" where they are taught to demonstrate intellectual prowess by formulating and responding to oral attacks (Tannen, 1999). Graduate students are expected to *defend* their theses and dissertations in formal *defenses* attended by those who ask challenging questions in order to evaluate their scholarly mettle.

With respect to faculty animosity, one might conclude that interpersonal antagonisms could well arise from the culture of critique that characterizes university life. Reflecting the wider media environment beyond university walls, the culture of academe breeds factionalism and interpersonal animosities. According to Thomas Benton (2006), one of the "7 deadly sins of professors" is anger:

Married without the possibility of divorce, angry faculty members exhaust themselves in petty battles over ancient personal resentments that pretend to be principles. And, conversely, because professors become

so invested in maintaining the appearance of ideological commitment, it is impossible to discuss matters of principle without the risk of giving personal offense. Instead, professors often choose to cultivate their disagreements in silence or among small clutches of allies who have little more in common than dislike for one powerful person. (p. C1).

In one department, a professor refers to his colleagues' theoretical orientation as "a dead letter." The colleague later labels her attacker "a gadfly who subscribes to colonialistic and patriarchal research practices." Perhaps things simply get out of hand when proud, accomplished individuals confuse agonistic and adversarial performances of intellect, or different disciplinary values and points of view, with imputations of personal inadequacy.

How is it that we are not consulted in matters of grave national importance? If the world will not come to us for wisdom, then we will stand aloof and make a world for ourselves where we can torment each other, like Milton's vision of hell, while the rest of the world goes about the business of living, unconcerned with the petty disputes that cost many of us any possibility of happiness. (Ibid.)

Although we tend to rely on vague psychological explanations for this sorry state of affairs (e.g., "big egos" and "personality conflicts"), there are other contextual perspectives to consider.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Hothouse University**

Universities are hierarchical organizations (bureaucracies) whose residents compete for resources within a political economy that reifies marketplace values (Armstrong, 2010; Gilde, 2007; Sahlins, 2008). In many organizations, managers deal with "personality conflicts" between employees by transferring one of the adversaries to another unit (or firing them). In universities, faculty lines reside within departments. Faculty members typically remain within the departments that hired them, and involuntary termination of employment is rare. This may create a "hothouse" environment that intensifies rivalries and interpersonal conflicts. Like *Star Trek* combatants from obverse universes, faculty rivals may spend decades trapped in inhospitable work environments of their own making. In the hothouse department, people may have long memories and short fuses. Newcomers confront the daunting task of mapping this complex and potentially hazardous interpersonal terrain.

Every department is a social experiment in which a cluster of people who regard themselves as underpaid and underappreciated are trapped together for decades, forced to endure each other's annoying eccentricities and utterly predictable habits of mind. Every department is a stew of

resentments stretching back at least as far as the careers of the oldest senior professor. Every department meeting—topics, words, inflections, facial expressions—is as rich with historical reference as a monologue from *Absalom, Absalom!* (Benton, 2006, p. C1)

The hothouse university is walled-off, segmented, specialized, self-serving, and profoundly conciliatory to those in power (government agencies and big corporations). The enclosure of the university has produced reward structures that magnify faculty inequalities and antagonisms while supporting the proliferation of new programs, specializations and revenue-generating faculty stars. As noted above, the nature of career success is ill-defined and contested: research, scholarship, grant-writing, teaching, advising, mentoring, administrative leadership, community service....What *really* counts? A friend at a midwestern university concluded, “It doesn’t matter what you do, NOTHING is rewarded here.” Echoing this sentiment, another colleague concluded “those of us who do research are *punished*.” Her assertion is at odds with others who insist that those who *teach*, particularly those who teach undergraduates, are most at risk of career failure.

Complicating matters still further, in many academic institutions salary compaction can produce disjunctions between seniority, rank, and levels of compensation. Salary compaction results when new faculty members are hired at competitive salaries but rapidly lose ground in the salary distribution as they gain experience. This may have a chilling effect on faculty collegiality, resulting in ambivalence and resentment on the part of senior faculty expected to mentor well-paid newcomers. We tend to assume that senior professors are more contentious, but it is hard to say whether this is actually the case. They have a longer timeframe in which to accumulate grievances against one another. However, they also have had more time to outgrow the arrogance and sense of self-righteous superiority to which some new and mid-career scholars are prone. They (senior professors) may simply be less reticent about expressing their opinions, whereas their less experienced (and less secure) colleagues may be more circumspect.

There is a need for rigorous empirical studies aimed at identifying the risk factors for incivility in various fields. The group dynamics within service-oriented fields (education, medicine, counseling) might well differ from those in the humanities and the social sciences. The “hothouse” effect may pertain to some fields more than others. Yet even time-honored and widely employed (but relatively recent) practices like peer-review may have eroded collegiality and self-confidence. A retired colleague at another institution wondered about why he formed so few genuine friendships with departmental colleagues over the years. He

speculated that the introduction of peer review for tenure, promotion, and merit at his university in the 1960s changed forever the character of academic life. Passing judgment on one another in the peer review process probably does little to foster a sense of genuine collegiality, and it might do much to erode trust, openness, and authenticity.

### ***Workplace Mobbing***

Passing judgment is at the heart of one of the most disturbing iterations of faculty animosity: mobbing. Mobbing is a form of social elimination whereby faculty and administrators single out one individual who is perceived to be problematic, eventually driving this person out of the organization (Westhues, 2005, 2006). It is a grim, irrational, and well-documented aspect of bureaucratic life.

Workplace mobbing is the collective expression of the eliminative impulse in formal organizations. It is a conspiracy of employees, sometimes acknowledged but more often not, to humiliate, degrade, and get rid of a fellow employee, when rules prevent the achievement of these ends through violence. It is a shared outpouring of irrationality upon the mundane, bureaucratic landscape of modern work. (Westhues, 2006, p. 42)

The German psychologist Heinz Leyman used the term “mobbing” to capture the experiences of people who were humiliated, attacked, and/or lost their jobs when their co-workers turned against them (Grais, 2006). Workplace mobbing results in exceptionally high levels of post-traumatic stress. Drawing on a survey of Lutheran pastors (who interviewed family members who had lost loved ones), Leymann ascertained that 10-15 percent of Swedish workers who killed themselves had been subjected recently to mobbing at work (Westhues, 2006, p. 42). Mobbing most often takes place in settings in which job security is high, where there are few concrete measures of successful job performance, and where employees experience conflicts between their loyalty to the institution and their commitment to other, superordinate goals. Not surprisingly, Leymann and other researchers have found that mobbing is more common in universities than in other bureaucratic organizations. Whereas bullying involves an attack by an individual, those who are mobbed are isolated, harassed, falsely accused, and driven out *by a group*. Mobbing victims typically experience serious psychological and physical consequences: post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, heart attacks, strokes, suicide (Bultena & Whatcott, 2008; Duffy & Sperry, 2007; Keim & McDermott, 2010; Hecker, 2007; Rosen, Kapustin, & Morahan, 2007).



### ***Mobbing in Academe***

Sociologist Kenneth Westhues' primary focus has been on administrative and faculty mobbing in universities. In *The Envy of Excellence: Administrative Mobbing of High Achieving Professors*, Westhues (2006) analyzed professor Herbert Richardson's high profile elimination from the University of Toronto, documenting the extremes to which reasonable people will go when they unite against a colleague. He noted that one of the signs associated with mobbing in academe is "the eliminators' focus on the person, rather than the allegedly offensive act" (Westhues, 2006, p. 28). Attacks on the identity and dignity of the person and failure to distinguish between the offense and the presumed offender suggest that social elimination is underway. Writing in *Educational Forum*, Keim and McDermott (Keim & McDermott, 2010) observed that

Academic mobbing victims are depicted in case studies and news reports as those whose viewpoints, actions, or affiliations are not supported by the majority of the department or the university administration. Their "minority" stance or "outlier" opinion, while not incorrect, is seen as embarrassing or threatening to the perpetrators rather than viewed as a valued contribution in an environment of intellectual freedom and questioning. (p. 168)

When mobbings take place, a group gangs up on one person, who is isolated, intimidated, and threatened. The mobbing target becomes the focus of gossip and rumor. Mob members typically show little emotion. In contrast, *bullying* "refers to a single aggressor (who tends to be cruel or mean) acting alone in attacking someone or with the assistance of political allies" (ibid.). Joel Westheimer (2002) wrote about being denied tenure at New York University after providing expert testimony to a regional National Labor Relations Board hearing supporting graduate students' rights to organize a labor union. His detailed account of this experience captures many aspects of how social elimination is enacted in the academy. He was fired, despite strongly positive recommendations of two promotion and tenure faculty committees. As he appears to have had the support of colleagues, his case seems to have involved administrative bullying rather than workplace mobbing. His analysis points to another source of strain in the academy: the growth of corporate values among administrators whose actions, along with the erosion of faculty governance, undermine academic freedom.

Based on case study analysis of hundreds of such events, Westhues (2006) noted a number of "clues" that a mobbing is underway or has already taken place:

A popular, high achieving target

Lack of due process  
Odd timing  
Resistance to external review  
Secrecy  
Unanimity  
Fuzzy charges  
Prior marginalization of the target  
Impassioned rhetoric, and  
Backbiting and malicious gossip  
Retaliation by the target

As noted, one of the striking aspects of academic mobs is that their members may not express any ill will toward the target. They believe they are acting in accordance with essential and reasonable values and bureaucratic procedures. Routine conflicts among faculty can escalate into scenarios in which one individual is “voted off the island” after a long period of fuzzy accusations that ultimately lead to public shame, humiliation, and exclusion. Tenure affords no defense against colleagues, should they decide to gang up on you.

It might be helpful to visualize a continuum of social exclusion with mobbing at one end and indifference or mild “put-downs” at the other. All of us are at risk of becoming targets—of being convicted of inadequacy in the court of collegial gossip without benefit of due process. All professors experience the existential fear of exclusion to varying degrees. It is a part of the background noise of academic life. Even choosing *not* to participate in communal gossip might increase the odds of becoming the next victim of social exclusion and collective critique. Administrators depend on the goodwill, or at least cooperation, of faculty members to get things done. Why would they *not* tend to see things from the group’s point of view? This administrative inclination puts individuals at even greater risk of victimization.<sup>3</sup>

### **Faculty Animosity in Schools and Colleges of Education**

For as long as there have been professors of education, there have been those who have lamented our divisiveness. Philip Jackson (1975), Barbara Finkelstein (1982), Douglas Simpson (1994), Tierney et al. (2001), and David Labaree (2004) have described the deep divisions that characterize faculties of education. Our origin stories afford narratives that point to complex and countercultural professional roots (Bredo, 2005; Katz, 1966; Noblit, 2002; Oakes & Rogers, 2001; Pope & Stemhagen, 2008; Russell, 1922; Russell, 1937; Wisniewski, Agne, & Ducharme, 1989). One of the issues raised by my analysis is whether “ed profs” are more contentious than other faculty members. On the one hand, I have

not found empirical studies that focus specifically on professors of education. On the other hand, professors of education grapple with unique and daunting professional challenges. They inhabit an uncomfortable position within the academy, and this could potentially increase interpersonal conflict. Conversely, facing adversity together might produce higher levels of group cohesion and constructive collaboration among faculty in schools of education. As noted, there is a need for comparative research on this question—studies that compare work climate and the quality of interpersonal relations across different fields.

This section offers a brief overview of some of the difficult challenges faculty of education face as educators and culture workers within the academy. It is intended as a necessarily speculative survey of factors that *might* be risk factors for divisiveness and contention among professors of education. It is also intended for those who might be new to the field and for those who work in other fields. As discussed in more detail later in the article, understanding the historical and social contexts within which we work may be one way to cultivate the kind of mindful tolerance of professional diversity necessary for collaboration across differences. The discourse on education offers numerous pithy and sometimes patronizing accounts of our collective plight. Referring to schools of education, particularly those affiliated with elite universities, Clifford and Guthrie (1990) worried about the adverse effects of being “ensnared” in academe.

They are like marginal men, aliens in their own worlds. They have seldom succeeded in satisfying the scholarly norms of their campus letters and science colleagues, and they are simultaneously estranged from their practicing professional peers. The more forcefully they have rowed toward the shores of scholarly research, the more distant they have become from the public schools they are duty bound to serve. Conversely, systematic efforts at addressing the applied problems of public schools have placed schools of education at risk on their own campuses. (p. 3)

Larabee (2004) devoted a whole chapter to “Status Dilemmas of Education Professors.” Summing up, he observed,

Because of their location in the university and their identification with the primary and secondary schools, ed schools have had no real choice over the years but to keep working along the border, but this has meant that they have continued to draw unrelenting fire from both sides. Professors dismiss them as unscholarly and untheoretical while school people dismiss them as impractical and irrelevant....On the one side, ed school research is seen as too soft, too applied, and totally lacking in academic rigor; but on the other side, it is seen as serving only a university agenda and being largely useless to the schools. (p. 205)

Although the discourse on “ed schools” often turns to themes of status insecurity, it is unclear whether today’s professors of education spend as much time as their predecessors fretting about their status within the academy. It does seem clear that those who work in schools of education experience unique stresses and strains. Such pressures may well amplify negative emotions. Writing about incentives for scholarship in education programs, Mary Kennedy (2001) observed,

Teachers prefer craft knowledge, knowledge that is learned in the doing and is justified by experience. The tension—some would say incompatibility—between knowledge warranted through formal research methods and knowledge warranted through personal experience has always plagued education programs and has made it difficult for them to fit comfortably into institutions of higher education. On one side, they face constituents that prefer craft wisdom, and on the other they face their institutional homes: colleges and universities that value warranted knowledge. (2001, p. 29)

Even when professors of education struggle to maintain high standards with respect to the production of warranted knowledge, this can be a difficult ideal to maintain. Among potential barriers to the open exchange of ideas is the tendency within all academic communities to “manipulate the free exchange of ideas through moral judgment, a form of social condemnation that is particularly dangerous to academic freedom... Within the field of education, we find moral certitude permeating arguments about teaching reading, about sex education, about teaching evolution, and about how to represent Thomas Jefferson ... in our curriculum” (Kennedy, 2001, pp. 39-40). Education is “inherently” a moral, utilitarian, aesthetic, “cultural, social, and political enterprise” (p. 46).

Education faculty cannot function realistically without considering these criteria when evaluating education ideas.... Yet once they enter these value-laden arenas, they tend to splinter into groups that reflect different moral stances rather than different areas of specialization. Their disagreements quickly turn into disapprovals. And to the extent that they shun scholars or ideas because they *disapprove of them*, they distort the supply and demand for ideas in the marketplace and create social forces that threaten their own academic freedom and that can threaten the already-vulnerable regulative ideal of the larger academic community. (p. 46, *emphasis in original*)

Professors of education are multidisciplinary, representing fields as diverse as philosophy, history, anthropology, economics, and psychology, and they produce different kinds of scholarship using different methods. Some disputes among faculty members occur because “it is not uncommon for education researchers to criticize others’ research methods on moral

grounds, not just on evidential grounds” (p. 47). There are many different discourse communities within education, and this might increase the odds for miscommunication and misunderstandings [See, for example, Covaleskie (2002)]. The fact that educational faculty are engaged in reforming education may increase the odds that we sometimes (often) not only disagree with, but also *disapprove of* one another (Kennedy, 2001). Thus, while we lack empirical evidence that educationists are more contentious than our colleagues in the arts and sciences, there is little reason to think we are less so.

### Consequences

The problem of faculty animosity has consequences for individuals. Minimally, these include stress, anxiety, demoralization, alienation, distraction, and absenteeism. More severe consequences include depression, drug and alcohol abuse, illnesses requiring medical leaves, and suicide. Costs are not limited to faculty members. Families and partners are affected as well (Hyde, 2011). Conflicts among faculty impact relational networks, with potentially serious consequences compounding the costs for individuals whose sources of emotional support may or may not stand up to the challenge (Duffy & Sperry, 2007). At the institutional level, rivalries undermine already tenuous institutional loyalties. Capable faculty who become targets of faculty animosity or workplace mobbing take positions elsewhere. Faculty embroiled in conflicts, or stressed out by proximity to them, may retreat from students and community, seeking security in traditional, narrowly focused scholarship. As factions form, prospects for collaboration diminish and stress levels rise. Conflict undermines focused concentration on important tasks. Time spent on antagonistic skirmishes and blaming others is time not spent on more useful tasks, e.g., teaching, mentoring, scholarship, governance, and service.

For students who get caught in the middle, faculty conflicts increase the already stressful experience of going to college. This may create interpersonal dynamics that result in student cynicism, anxiety, and bullying of other students. First generation college students may simply not understand, misreading interpersonal and departmental politics and assuming themselves to be at fault. Adversarialism may add to the stresses women and minorities experience in academe, leading to disidentification (Antony & Taylor, 2001) and failure to advance in rank (Glazer-Raymo, 2001). Promising students and faculty members may flee to other institutions or find other less contentious occupations outside the academy.

***Strategies for Change***

Although I have argued that faculty conflicts are primarily a byproduct of institutional structures (rather than personalities), individuals *can* and should take steps to reduce the frequency with which these skirmishes occur. There are a number of concrete strategies we can take to reduce faculty animosity, build academic community, and create more just educational institutions. All of them require a degree of mindfulness, personal resolve, and adopting a “confident but sensitive mediational role” (Bredo, 2005, p. 132). For example, we need to monitor our own habitual responses to interpersonal challenges and confront those who play the game of constant critique without considering its adverse institutional and moral consequences (Hall, 2007, pp. 7-12). We need to do a better job of distinguishing between technical and moral errors, disagreeing without disapproving of one another. For some of us, valuing our own professional contributions might be a first step toward fostering a healthier work climate.

A mistake that many of us make is to think that our teaching, our research, and our work in our communities are not important or sufficiently consequential. That diminishment of our work (either overtly expressed or simply covertly felt) leads us to envy others, provides an easy excuse for procrastination, and feeds inertia, bitterness, and a sense of failure. (Hall, 2007, p. 38)

Humanizing the academy will require setting ground rules, insisting on civility, learning about and from one another, and becoming “each other’s most attentive students” (p. 104).

When disputes arise, putting students and communities first might help us keep things in perspective. Miscommunication and mistakes are normal and inevitable in complex organizations. There are also many different professional cultures in education, each of which constructs and conveys to students particular rhetorical and instrumental practices. Looking toward the future, we need to prepare students for effective collaboration with others by moderating the adverse consequences of specialization (Quantz & Abowitz, 2002). There is, as I see it, a central role for interdisciplinary study in a professional education curriculum geared toward fostering collaboration. History and philosophy of education, as well as the social sciences, the arts and humanities, offer insights and perspectives that can operate against disciplinary xenophobia and other barriers to collaboration across differences.

Academic mobbing requires participation by numerous faculty members as well as administrators. The best way to limit the collective eliminatory impulse is to refuse to participate. Academic administrators

can take steps to resolve faculty conflicts before they get out of control. If signs of social elimination are spotted, university leaders can draw the line and interrupt the process. Faculty can choose to support marginalized colleagues. We need to respect colleagues' diverse developmental trajectories, avoid rumination, and let old wounds heal. Faculty members who become mobbing targets should increase their participation in professional associations, maintaining relationships with supportive colleagues *outside* the workplace (Rosen, Kapustin, & Morahan, 2007). For some, reading the literature on the problem (workplace mobbing) may provide useful insights, if not simple solutions.

One might well ask whether it is politically prudent to engage in critical analysis of professional life in higher education at a time that presents us with so many *external* challenges and threats. In turning the analytical gaze inward, I do not mean to diminish the importance of rethinking the university's relationship to the world beyond itself. Getting our professional house in order will enhance, rather than diminish, efforts to deploy university resources to foster democratic educational practices and to better meet community needs. Achieving social justice and more democratic educational practices—aspirations many professors share—will require new modes of collaboration and consultation. Disagreement over educational aims in a democratic society is inevitable and essential (Covaleskie, 2002), but faculty animosity does more to limit democratic conversation than to foster it. Therefore, just as we train students to be mindful of their own cultural biases and (potential) shortcomings, we need to be willing to confront our own. Given the apparent scale of the problem and its adverse consequences, there may never be a better time to recognize our enmeshment in systems that can have mixed and sometimes very negative effects on human relationships and well being in the academic workplace.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>I would like to thank the many colleagues who have encouraged me to pursue this path of investigation. I set out to write a whimsical piece, poking fun at our profession in the manner of Benton's (2006) discussion of "The Seven Deadly Sins of Professors." But as I pursued the research on faculty animosity, and reflected on my own experiences and observations, it became clear that this is a problem for the profession that requires some fresh ideas. Therefore, while I have tried to include some comic elements, I have written this article in the spirit of "cultural reciprocity" (Armstrong, 2010, p. 64), whereby professionals need to be willing to look critically at their own taken-for-granted assumptions and practices, because their power to do good in the world can also do unintended harm. *Disclaimer:* In my estimation, the colleagues with whom I have worked over the years are

not contentious beyond the norm. Further, I realize that there may be places characterized by unbridled collegiality where everyone gets along well.

<sup>2</sup>This issue warrants more attention than I am able to give it here. Kanter's (1977) classic *Men and Women of the Corporation* offers useful insights into how context creates psychological and behavioral phenomena. See, for example, her chapters on "managers" and her discussion of "opportunity structures." Andrea Hyde (2011) has written about the impact of academia as a "totalizing institution" on faculty well being and intimate relationships. Although beyond the scope of this article, Foucault offers another way of conceptualizing the perennial jousting among rivals that characterizes institutional life (Hall, 2007, p. 46). Deborah Tannen (1986, pp. 121-123) drew upon Gregory Bateson's (1935) "schismogenesis" construct to explore gender differences in conversational styles. Bateson's early theoretical work gave rise to the term schismogenesis—social processes associated with interpersonal conflict and breaking apart or fragmentation within groups. Bateson pointed out the importance of understanding the obverse of unity: rivalry. He also highlighted the adverse consequences of dominance for subordinates (e.g., class struggle, oppression) (Bateson, 1999). This work expresses early 20<sup>th</sup> century functionalist aspirations, seeking ways to understand the nature of the social glue that produces social unity.

<sup>3</sup>Sociologist Roger Gould (2003) makes the case that social conflicts result from situations in which people are uncertain of their rank or are equal or close in rank. Fights occur more often between friends, coworkers and spouses than between bosses and subordinates. Symmetry in rank breeds more social violence than hierarchy. If Gould's thesis is correct, efforts to equalize power differentials (among students or between students and faculty members) may serve to *increase* the potential for conflict and animosity rather than reduce it. One of the implications of this line of reasoning is that the relatively nebulous leadership roles that many of us hold in academic institutions—roles that afford a good deal of responsibility, but very little actual power—may help to account for the ubiquity of faculty skirmishes, turf battles, verbal aggression, brooding, anxiety and status-insecurity in academe.

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