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Mentor's Introduction

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mentor's introduction

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Carole Woodlock describes the process through which she and her students negotiate a pattern of communication in the classroom. She works to actualize her own vision of feminist pedagogy that emphasizes community, room for every individual voice, shared learning, and multiple modes of understanding. She cites feminist ideals she includes in her vision: moving "away from oppositional stances such as theory versus practice, and masculine versus feminine," valuing the whole and achieving "harmonious integration" (Collins 1977, p. 54); living both content and practice concretely (Lewis 1992); and fostering empowerment, community and leadership through classroom interaction, with the objective of transforming the academy (Sandell 1991). Carole Woodlock concurs with Garger and Gaudelius who work to give up some of their power as "masters of the discourse," to assure that students can become subjects, not merely objects, in the classroom (1992, p.27).

One can relate Carole Woodlock's interest in negotiation to the comments of Statham, Richardson and Cook who consider the traditional patterns (stereotyped roles) of women as structural pressure. "But," they say "we can decide whether to accommodate to those pressures, or to negotiate with our role partners to reject them outright or to modify them in part" (1991, p.3). They see the role of university professor as an excellent position from which to conduct this negotiation.

> Attaining a university professorship is a true mark of distinction that can override normative expectations for gender-appropriate behavior. Such an accomplishment imbues the woman with a certain amount of authority and power that is not ordinarily present in our sex-graded society. The extent to which a women can use these attributes successfully to negotiate acceptable and empowering self-definitions and to convey them to her colleagues and students will affect the extent to which those role partners value her (1991, pp. 4-5).

They point out that this is such a strong phenomenon that "the passive, intellectually subordinate professor might appear 'deviant,' regardless of sex" (1991, p. 5).

Statham, Richardson, & Cook relate feminist interest in negotiation of gender roles and contextual views of gender to symbolic interaction role theory. They consider the principles of role negotiation and subjective reality as "determinants of social life" to be "the essential underpinnings of the entire symbolic interaction framework" (1991, p.3). They ask about the processes role partners use "to define their role relationship and the need to alter it" (1991, p.144). This is the question Carole Woodlock asks, and the objective she works to actualize.

Related questions about roles and their negotiation were asked by the members of the Research Center for Group Dynamics begun at MIT by Kurt Lewin in 1945. In 1946, then graduate student Morton Deutsch joined the Center that became renowned for its creativity, social values and contribution to social psychology. Some forty years later, Deutsch described the continuing influence of the Research Center group on his selection of graduate students. As have the researchers mentioned above, he recognized the potential social value of research . He said his program selects students with "tough minds and tender hearts," because they want to train students who will conduct research that has practical value "for a variety of social issues such as war and peace or justice: (Deutsch 1988, p. 94).

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