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Conceptualizing the Academic Life: Graduate Students' Perspectives

Envisioning a Faculty Life

A faculty member passes John R. in the hall during his sophomore year and remarks that John seems to have an academic bent of mind. Another professor, in addition to being a great teacher in the classroom, engages John in discussions in her office from time to time. John R., beginning to see himself in this role of faculty member, looks more closely at the life the faculty around him lead. He notes—and likes—the fact that he sees his professors coming and going as they please, determining their own daily schedules, teaching and advising now and then.

John R. enters graduate school with a very positive view of faculty life or, at least, of the possibilities a few professors embodied for him. However, he soon recognizes that his professors in graduate school lead a different life than that which he had imagined. He sees graduate faculty scrambling to find research funding and to publish. Although somewhat taken aback by this new information, John R. believes he can create a life for himself more in line with his undergraduate vision. John modifies his original vision only to the extent that he includes the reality of the research he has now begun to do, if he must.

Graduate education has been a topic of interest and investigation in higher education for the last 60 years (Baird, 1990; Berelson, 1960; Brink, 1999). Although researchers have consistently paid attention to

the issues associated with graduate education, the topic has lately been approached with new vigor. The reasons for this renewed enthusiasm are many and varied, ranging from lingering concern about the graying of the faculty and speculation about their replacements, to such perennial issues as overproduction of Ph.D.s who never land a tenure-track position. Added to this mix are questions stemming from the realities of a graduate education experience that produces individuals steeped in the world of research when a large number of faculty positions are at institutions that continue to reward teaching, albeit amidst growing commitments to research and receiving grants.

Much of the research focusing on graduate education (e.g., Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Seagram, Gould, & Pyke, 1998; Tuckman, 1991) has been concentrated on structural variables (e.g., time-to-degree) or on the factors (such as the presence of mentors, fellowships, or assistantships) operating in the lives of graduate students deemed to be successful, typically defined as those who not only complete their doctoral work but also land a full-time, tenure-track position in academia or, in the case of the sciences and engineering, a position in the private sector. A small but growing body of literature attempts to move beyond analysis of single, discrete variables in order to probe more fully the graduate school experience and its complexities. Anderson (1996), Conrad, Haworth, and Millar (1993), Golde (1998), and Lovitts (2001), among others, have provided insights into how students themselves experience graduate school. The work of these researchers takes us "inside" the experience, thus providing the context necessary for a more complete understanding of graduate education.

The concept of socialization has been the reigning paradigm for investigating the graduate student experience to date. The apprenticeship model assumes that a graduate student/apprentice will be socialized into the profession by a mentor in graduate school. We must note here that the prevalent view of the relationship between graduate mentor/master and apprentice is based on a model where the apprentice will become a master—that is, a scholar-teacher at a research university. When we began our research, we assumed that a person planning to embark on a faculty career would systematically seek information regarding both professional and personal aspects of the chosen career. However, our research has made it clear that the apprenticeship model does not account for many of the patterns we discovered. We have come to understand that the role of the graduate mentor is neither as central nor as all encompassing and influential as commonly believed.

Not all scholarly work on graduate education, however, derives from the socialization/apprenticeship paradigm. Gumport (1991) encouraged

researchers to employ other theories (e.g., systems theory, institutional theory, and conflict theory). Hackett (1990) utilized the concept of institutional isomorphism as set forth by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) to examine other important aspects of graduate education. Geiger (1993) contributed a historical perspective to the conversation. And though it remains strongly rooted in the socialization tradition, Lovitts's recent work (2001) represents an effort to bring several viewpoints to bear on our understanding of graduate education, particularly through her use of "cognitive maps" in their various forms. Despite these varying approaches, it is still the case that little attention has been paid to how the future faculty, while still in graduate school, perceive their future careers as faculty. Although some researchers, in particular those who have looked at graduate education more generally, include the general perceptions of faculty careers in their research (e.g., Austin, 2002; Golde & Dore, 2001; Lovitts, 2001; Nyquist et al., 1999), these researchers' principal focus is on graduate students' perceptions of graduate school experiences. Our work focuses explicitly on graduate students' views of their future careers. Further, we posit a theoretical perspective for understanding how these views might be formed and sustained. We suggest schema theory as a theoretical framework that can serve to augment what we have learned about graduate education from socialization theory as well as from other conceptual perspectives.

Theoretical Foundations

Schema theory provides us with a core critical framework and vocabulary for viewing graduate students' constructions of faculty life. Schema theory traces its twentieth-century roots to Piaget (1926) and Bartlett (1932). Wilkes defines schema as "symbolic representations that serve to encode our generic knowledge concerning objects, scenes, and action sequences. In each case, we induce the appropriate schemas from the regularities accompanying multiple exposures to the events in question" (1997, p. 44). The terms "mental model" and "mental pattern" are also used in studies concentrating on the mind's tendency to organize experiences and observations into patterns (Collins & Smith, 1988; Gardner, 1987; Gentner & Stevens, 1983). We use the term "schema" to avoid the possible confusion attendant on the large semantic field surrounding the words "model" and "pattern." Scripts are a simple form of schema that embody "knowledge of stereotyped event sequences" (Abelson, 1996, p. 67). Schema theory has been used to understand and facilitate student learning, especially that aspect of learning that involves the construction, modification, and extension of schema. Two

insights particularly salient for our purposes concentrate on the relative ease with which new material that matches or extends extant schema can be assimilated and on the difficulties encountered when attempting to substantially change an established schema (Redish, 1994). Schema have thus been linked to vagaries or "errors" of memory—in particular, the recollection of information not present in real-life situations as well as the absence of information that had been present (see, for example, the classic experiment by Brewer & Treyens, 1981). In this respect, errors related to imbedded schema recall on a smaller scale Kuhn's contention in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1970) that an established scientific paradigm fends off disproving data in various ways until a critical point has been reached. One such defense mechanism used by adherents of the old paradigm is to, perhaps unconsciously, ignore new, conflicting data.

Personal schema and scripts are abstractions of an individual's lived experiences, whereas cultural schema and scripts may be seen as representations that reflect a broader sociocultural time and space. Most citizens of the United States, for example, have available to them as part of our shared culture a script that presents an abstract, schematic sequence of events dealing with the college graduation ceremony (marching into an auditorium, listening to speeches, receiving a diploma). Schemas serve many cognitive and social functions, among which are their ability to help us interpret events, organize experiences in memory, abstract quintessence from detail, predict the course of future events, and, indeed, act in the social world. Many students enter college with a cultural script sketching the first semester of college life, which most likely includes such events as attending anonymous large lecture classes, meeting a new roommate, dorm life, or fraternity rush. This script can help—or hurt—first-year students through their first semester, potentially influencing behavior in lecture halls, study habits, free-time choices, and so on. Colleges and universities recognize the power of these scripts and try to modify potentially destructive schema through early interventions such as orientation sessions, courses focusing on the college experience, and programs in residence halls.

In addition to cognitive schema theory, our work has been informed by scholarly investigations into autobiography and life narratives, investigations looking at both the general populace and the academic life in particular (e.g., Eakin, 1989; Popkin, 1999; Weiland, 1998). Recent life-narrative research tends to underscore the dynamic interaction between individual memory and its sociocultural, even symbolic, context in forming the reported narratives. Eakin sketches the basic assumptions concerning the relationship between the "self" and language:

> Whereas traditional autobiography is largely predicated on a belief in the autonomous self, the fully constituted subject who preexists the language into which he casts his story, Lejeune [a leading theorist] contends that this individualist ideology blinds us to the fact that both self and life story are culturally determined constructs. . . . The private speech of the individual engaged in the autobiographical act is, accordingly, derived from a public discourse structured by class, code, and convention. (Eakin, 1989, p. xxi)

Eakin's remarks can be recast in the language of schema theory: The life script constructed by an individual is intertwined with, even bounded by, extant sociocultural schema and scripts. The first-semester-of-college script available to an individual is structured by class, code, and convention, among other social variables. One can readily see that the script carried by a male legacy to a private elite college may be substantially different at critical points from that of a female first-generation student enrolled in a public comprehensive university. Our critical framework was additionally informed by various psychological concepts that deal with the self in relation to the world, such as self-representation, identity formation, expectancy theory, and attendant issues of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982; Gregg, 1991).

Our work was not driven by a desire to further investigate how graduate students planning to become professors explicitly perceive or experience their graduate education. We were not interested in exploring in detail the joys and satisfactions, challenges and disappointments that they face as graduate students. Instead, we focused only on their perceptions of faculty life; we chose to focus on what graduate students expect to find at the end of their formal education journeys. We reasoned that many individuals may not choose to be faculty members solely or even primarily as a function of unbridled intellectual interest in their disciplines. Rather, we assumed that individuals desire the end, a faculty position, and as a result of that desire, embark on the journey—graduate school— to help them achieve the desired end. We believe that, without understanding what individuals hope to see or to realize at the end of a journey, other research that probes the joys and challenges along the journey lacks a degree of necessary context. Thus, the following questions drove our research: How do graduate students who are seriously considering careers as faculty members conceptualize this entity called a "faculty member"? How do they come to hold their perceptions? How do they see themselves as faculty members? Which of the various work-related responsibilities do they plan to emphasize and why? Are there disjunctions (disjunctive moments?) between their abstract conceptualization of faculty life and their own lived experiences? As we worked with our data, we became increasingly interested in the mutability or

lack thereof in graduate students' perceptions, an interest that, in effect, led us to question the efficacy of current graduate school socialization processes.

Method

The basis of this work comes from interviews conducted with graduate students across a wide variety of disciplines. All of the participants came from three public research universities in the Midwest. The three institutions have long-standing commitments to research and graduate education: All three universities had been classified as Carnegie Doctorate-Extensive institutions, and each was classified as a Research II university in the 1976 Carnegie Classification. One is a long-standing member of the American Association of Universities (AAU), another its state's flagship institution and a land-grant university, and the third, an urban institution, will soon be celebrating its bicentennial. In all, we interviewed 37 students (22 females and 15 males) in disciplines that included, among others, biology, English, several fields of engineering, economics, geology, and communications. Because our work was investigative and exploratory, and because we were not seeking to generalize our results, we were comfortable with a small number of interviewees across a large number of disciplines. The age range of our interviewees varied from roughly 25 to 50 years of age; similarly, our participants' length of time in graduate school varied tremendously. Some were just starting their graduate programs (typically doctoral programs, although we did interview three master's students), while others had defended their dissertations and were actively on the job market. In all, 32 of our interviewees were in the latter stages of their coursework (i.e., were in at least their third year in doctoral programs) or in the early throes of their dissertation research. We decided to limit our analyses to the 34 doctoral students in order to obtain a more uniform sample.

Most of the individuals in our convenience sample came from rolls of students who had participated in at least one of their institution's programs aimed at preparing future faculty.[1] This approach, in conjunction with the advanced stage of doctoral preparation of the vast majority of our interviewees, ensured that our participants were considering a career as a faculty member. Our study participants were solicited in different ways at the three institutions. At one university, individuals were specifically identified after completing a preparing future faculty (PFF) course that was taught on their campus. At the other sites, the director of the PFF program was contacted and asked to provide a list of names of PFF students (either previous or current) whose participation in our project

might be solicited. The balance of our interviewees had not been part of any formal faculty preparation program. In order to identify these individuals, we contacted departmental directors of graduate study and asked them to provide us with a list of individuals considering a faculty career. Of the 34 participants on which our analyses are based, three had not taken part in any formal PFF activity.

All of the interviews were conducted by either one or both of the principal investigators of the study. Each interview lasted approximately one hour, was audiotaped, and then transcribed for analysis. We structured each interview in a similar manner: We began by asking a set group of demographic questions pertaining to the individual's field of study, undergraduate institution, and the like. We introduced the main set of questions pertaining to faculty life by telling the students that we would begin by asking questions about past events, then present perceptions, and would conclude with questions pertaining to our interviewees' projected future lives as faculty members. We anticipated that the interviews would be free-flowing and change as needed (Mason, 1996) because our interviewees came from very significantly different backgrounds and were experiencing different phenomena (e.g., graduate programs in different academic disciplines). After each question, we asked follow-up questions if needed in order to gain as much information from the interviewees as possible. The questions were broad-based in order to be thought provoking and to assist us in entering, capturing, and documenting our interviewees' life-world (Glesne & Peksin, 1992). We felt that the groundwork necessary for establishing genuine rapport (Glesne, 1999) and empathic linkage (Mullen, 1997) with our interviewees was achieved due to our personal histories as former graduate students, as individuals who have had extensive interaction with graduate students both as faculty in graduate programs and as administrators with sundry responsibilities for graduate students, and as individuals who had been involved in the PFF initiative.

It was our hope that our general questions would elicit narratives from our respondents that would provide insights into the respondents' worlds (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Denzin, 1989; Riessman, 1993). Throughout the course of our analysis, we were cognizant of the fact that we were dealing with self-reported data. These were the stories, the self-representations, that our interviewees wanted to tell and wanted us to hear. We recognize that a system of values and constraints comes into play whenever one represents oneself to another. We recognize that the experiences recounted were of necessity filtered through the interviewee's memory, both personal and cultural, and were modified by the very act of narration. Since our analysis was aimed primarily, but not exclusively,

at ascertaining perceptions of life as a faculty member, we concentrated on discovering the more abstract scripts and schema underlying individual memory and narration of experiences. We were also in search of patterns that might be linked to disciplines, undergraduate experiences, and the like. As part of our analysis, each researcher read and reread each transcript. We followed the path suggested by Wolcott (1994) when we transformed the data in three specific ways: description (staying as "close" to the data as possible), analysis (establishing emerging relationships or patterns in the data, i.e., coding), and interpretation (making sense out of the codes with an organized and valid interpretation). In ongoing meetings**,** we described, analyzed, and interpreted several themes. Our initial analyses led us back into the data. We reexamined our data along 22 dimensions such as gender, undergraduate research opportunities, and academic field, among others.

Themes

Several themes emerged out of our analyses of the interviews. We begin with themes derived from descriptions of why students first became interested in a faculty career and how they gathered the information that informed their views. Other themes reflect how our interviewees reported wanting to spend their time and energy in future faculty positions. We conclude by considering the commitment our interviewees demonstrated to the "ideal" image that they had constructed of faculty life, a commitment seemingly unshakable even in the face of the often-mentioned "politics" they saw swirling around their departments.

The Personal Was the Attraction

Perhaps one of the most intriguing findings from our study is the extent to which graduate students viewed faculty life on a personal, almost emotional, level. Their responses suggest that they were not initially drawn to a faculty career by the intellectual aspects of their discipline. Almost to a person our interviewees responded to our probing regarding the origins of their decision to become a faculty member with a specific event or series of events involving an "up-close," personal view of faculty life. Our respondents talked about baby-sitting for a faculty member as undergraduates, working in a department office as a work-study student, being friends with the children of professors, talking briefly with a special professor in the hall, or having the chance to serve as a tutor for other students. Consider the following from Megan (history; all names have been changed):

> Yeah, I had another one [faculty member who encouraged her while still an undergraduate to consider a faculty career] that I worked as his secretary and did a lot of grading for him and multimedia presentations, I was in charge of doing some programming for him. And that, too, I got to do some of the kinds of things maybe as a professor I would eventually be doing and that was attractive as well.[2]

Megan also recalled how she was

> undeclared for actually two years, went through all kinds of different majors, didn't know what I wanted to do. And I took several history classes and this one particular faculty member, the one I baby-sat for, really kind of—I don't know, I went in and everyone was telling me, "You're just a number, no one will know who you are," and he really kind of singled me out in his general, big, entry-level history class and said, "I think you should join the honors program." And through that I guess I felt a connection to history and through honors a lot of the honors faculty were history teachers so I started taking a lot of history classes. I had always liked history, but I had never as a high school senior thought I was going to be a historian.

Our interviewees reported seeing faculty as human beings above all, not as authorities in a discipline. The impact of the person and personal is reflected in the following statement by Donna (geology):

> And the teacher who became a sort of a mentor for me over the next couple of years was a really nice guy, who wasn't, as I look back right now, it turns out that he really wasn't a great teacher. But he was really a nice person. And he took interest in his students and the course was interesting because I never had it before. . . . I could imagine that I would have followed him doing biology [instead of geology] just because he was interested in students and just because of his personality.

Several of our interviewees reported that a kind word or a gentle nudge by an undergraduate advisor or mentor started them along the path toward graduate school and a potential faculty career. And, remarkably, little of this has anything to do with a substantial, intellectual link with the specific discipline. As Karen (history) explains:

> And then as I got farther along he wasn't my advisor anymore once I had declared history as my major, but he was one of those people that would grab you in the hall and say, "Are you still on track, are you still doing what you need to be doing?" And he always encouraged me toward graduate school; he just thought that would be a good idea for me. Which was also interesting because he was the only person at [undergraduate institution] without a Ph.D. He was there with a master's degree, which was very unusual at [undergraduate institution], so I always found it very interesting that he was always the one asking me, "Have you taken your GREs yet? Have you done this, have you don't that?"

We found that our interviewees' personal glimpses into the world of academe did not always happen within the context of a specific discipline or within the context of a formal mentor-protégé relationship. Moreover, such contact often, though certainly not always, happened well before they arrived at graduate school. Thus, while graduate school and the apprenticeship model most programs adopt for graduate education may have either solidified or modified the students' view of faculty life, these experiences by no means represented the first time our interviewees considered faculty careers.

Privileging Teaching over Research

The majority of those interviewed sketched their image of a faculty member as one who, primarily, teaches and mentors. Given that our respondents told of being first drawn to a faculty career by personal, not intellectual events, it is not surprising that these graduate students privileged teaching over research. On the subject of research, we heard a vocabulary indicating only a half-hearted commitment and a neutral valuation. Many alluded to the fact that, as part of their graduate school experience, they had come to learn that research was "not so bad" and that they "sort of liked it." The following quotation from Karen (history) captures this sentiment:

> The simple fact is regardless of where I go, what kind of school I go to, I will be teaching and that's what I want to do. That's what I enjoy. The research is fine and it's nice, and I like having it done when it's done, and actually sometimes enjoy it when I'm doing it. But regardless of where I am, I am going to be able to teach, and how much research and what kind of pressure is going to be there, that's the variable I think. And coming out of a research-I, I jolly well better be prepared to do the requirements of a research-I. And I think if that's the case, then I'm going to be able to fit in wherever I have to fit in.

Only those science students who participated in an undergraduate research experience articulated something different. Unlike their colleagues in the social sciences and humanities, who typically do not have undergraduate research experiences, this group's image of faculty life— their own future life and that of other professors—included a positive view of research. Indeed, this small subset valued research very highly. We postulate that by working in the lab, they had had the chance to interact with faculty whose commitments clearly involved teaching, working with undergraduates, *and* research. The story told by Mary (biology) is illustrative. Her story is similar to that of the undergraduates planning to pursue a Ph.D. discussed by Robinson and Golde (1999). Mary highlights the importance of undergraduate research in her life:

> But I did get to do some [research] and it was at that point that I fell in love with the research and I wanted to be at a research I or II university where I could do a lot of research and still teach at the same time.

Although undergraduate research experiences correlated with a more positive outlook toward research, especially in the sciences, we found that such experiences did not in and of themselves relate to a high level of commitment with respect to pursuing a faculty career.

It is noteworthy that the personal remains the dominant factor in Mary's interview even when she specifically talks about research. She told us:

> I think my conception of going to a large university was that the faculty there actually did research, that they were really an active part of the laboratory, they were in there on the bench, they were right there side-by-side with you. . . . You know, I guess I'm really an idealist because I always expected that the grad student and the mentor would have this really close relationship and they would always be talking about science, and they would be excited. . . . And I don't really think that's necessarily the case. Because in my experience, they're not in the laboratory. My experience is that they don't get excited about any results that you get, and my experience is that they don't really want to be that big a part of the graduate student's life.

The love of research Mary discovered as an undergraduate is coupled with a strong personal element to it, as it was for others in this group. Her script includes a mentor-student relationship characterized by strong connections. When asked about the genesis of her ideas and "idealism," Mary responded that she did not know, adding

> unless it was, you know, whenever you're learning introductory biology stuff and like in genetics and stuff, you learn about so-and-so was this person's student, and that just seemed like that was the way it was, you know. That they worked close, side-by-side, and they made important discoveries, both of them together, and they both got the credit for it. Maybe that's where it came from.

Interestingly, Mary links her ideal—a close working relationship between professor and student—to the "standard" narratives encountered in introductory course textbooks, thus linking the personal with a prevalent sociocultural schema.

When envisioning themselves as faculty members, our respondents were obviously interested in interacting with students both inside and outside of the classroom—as advisors and mentors as well as teachers. One international student in chemistry said that "teachers are not just teaching you in the class but they actually know you. . . . So they are more like second parents and I like that." Teaching and mentoring are

important to these nascent faculty members in that these endeavors allow them to connect with others in a personal and meaningful way. As Karen (history) put it:

> Relationships with students, I think, is what I'm particularly interested in. . . . It's so rewarding to have them come in and talk with me, to have them grappling with these ideas that they're having so much difficulty with. And when they can come up with something that's a good point, just watching the light in their eyes when something clicks, when something makes sense all of the sudden, it's just tremendously rewarding, and it's worth all the other crap that goes with it.

The Lifestyle of a Professor

We repeatedly heard our interviewees characterize the life of a professor in terms of flexibility and personal autonomy. These characteristics often appeared in a discussion of the benefits of a faculty career, especially when interviewees spoke of trying to integrate professional demands with family life. Laura (kinesiology) noted that being a professor was "conducive to allowing better family structures, especially with children. You can plan your hours." Dennis (biology) reported:

> I do think that's one great thing about a faculty person's life, and my mentor and his wife are both faculty members in the department and they have two young children. And sometimes I'll come in and his kids will be there, running around the lab, you know. You know, and he will have had to come in and do something real quick, the kids were sick or whatever, so they came with him and then he was going to go home and his wife was going to come work for a while, then he was going to come in. Tremendous flexibility. And that's really neat, to see that he could do it. And you know, that he's able to do things with his family by virtue of his flexibility. . . . You don't have many other jobs where you set your hours.

Dennis's emphasis on a faculty member's flexibility reflects the oft-repeated desire to combine a career with a family or at least a modicum of a personal life. This same desire surfaced at times in a negative appraisal of the lives of some faculty, in particular those at research universities who "have to work all the time," as Carla, a graduate student in nutritional science, noted. She said bluntly, "I hate their lives." In this case, Carla's observations and desire to create a life for herself that includes time for her family caused her to explore options other than the life she perceived a researcher in a medical school led.

Lifestyle issues were clearly immensely important, to Carla and many of our other respondents. As Mary (biology) noted:

> I will occasionally take off an afternoon to go play golf or do something that I want to do. And that's, I guess, one easy thing about academia is that if you

need to take off during the day, you can do that, and then work that night. It's not something that you have to do, it's something that you have the freedom to do.

Seeing is Believing

Our respondents' narratives reveal how they privileged personal observation as a means of gathering information; they created their script of a faculty member's life by literally observing faculty. Our participants frequently spoke of "seeing" faculty members do this or do that. Although they repeatedly underscored the value of personal connections, very few reported ever having approached faculty specifically in order to ask them about life as a professor. This held true when they spoke of their undergraduate mentors/advisors as well as graduate advisors. Instead of in-depth conversations, it appears that interaction often consisted in faculty commenting to students that they "have what it takes." An international engineering student noted that

> just seeing the way they work has influenced me a great deal. And they have certainly talked, and my advisor influenced me a great deal because he told me that I would be well suited— I don't know how he came up with that— but he told me I would be well suited for the academic profession rather than industry because I like exploring different things, doing things independently without constraint.

This student heard the words of his advisor but did not report asking his advisor follow-up questions about what it means to be a faculty member. Rather than systematically researching the various aspects of a faculty career, our respondents seem to have woven together images based on moments— often brief—in a hallway or classroom or laboratory. This haphazard collage comes to capture the intricacies of faculty life for them.

Mary (biology) noted that she first became interested in a faculty career while an undergraduate when she enrolled in a science class taught by a woman who was "a little bit of an idol for me. . . . And she kind of led me towards that kind of lifestyle." When asked if she had spoken to this professor about a faculty career, Mary said, no, she had made her decision merely by "sitting in class." Similarly, Carl, working on his doctorate in the department of Hispanic Studies, said succinctly, "I'm watching people all the time."

We noted scant evidence that our participants had thought about aspects of faculty life that cannot be "seen." Paralleling what Austin (2002, p. 109) discovered in her interviews with graduate students concerning advising, institutional service, and public outreach, our interviewees had very little to say in response to questions regarding faculty

involvement in institutional governance and even less to say regarding questions of future challenges for the professoriate. Indeed, most of them could not conceive of themselves as part of a larger professional group, whether within an academic discipline, an institution, or a profession. If our participants could not see it, literally, then they were at a loss to consider it a part of the faculty landscape. They reflected a casual reliance on whatever happened to pass before their eyes or to be said to them when creating their ideal of faculty life. Golde and Dore stated that their "data reveal that many (graduate students) seem to have entered the pursuit of the doctorate blindly" (2001, p. 29). Their observation reflects the situation reported by our sample—by relying only on "seeing," students can, ironically, be blinded. Our sample's lack of systematic inquiry into the profession, coupled with a schema created from limited—primarily ocular—data suggests the likelihood of future disappointment with one's career, especially in those cases where the created ideal is at a noticeable remove from the realities of faculty life.

The Script of the Ideal Faculty Life

In this section, we return more specifically to the concept of the "script of the ideal faculty life" as voiced by our interviewees. We are particularly interested in the script's extraordinary resilience and staying power. The highly stylized vision of faculty created by our respondents is closely aligned with the prevalent sociocultural construct of the nurturing teacher. The socialization presumed to take place during graduate school did not seem to attenuate this construct for our group. Dennis (biology) told us:

> The faculty I want to be is that first image I had. The teacher who I went up to ask him a question and he just engaged me in a conversation about the possibilities [suggested by that day's lecture]. And treated me at a personal level where I thought, "This teacher wants to teach me and he really cares." And I thought, someday I'll have a life of my own. You know, that's where I want to be.

Dennis's description of his ideal includes factors often found in our respondents' interviews: nurturing, the personal, and engagement. It is worth noting that Dennis explicitly links his ideal image to the "first image" of a faculty member he had. We repeatedly saw how early images were very important in forming the enduring schema.

Overall, our respondents hold faculty members and a faculty career in very high regard—within the realm of their schema, which is not to say that they hold in high regard all, or even most, individual faculty members whom they have met. Repeatedly our participants spoke of undesirable qualities they had witnessed in faculty around them, especially in

graduate school. They were, however, either adamant in their projections that they would never display similar behaviors or adamant about not putting themselves in a situation where living their ideal would be impossible. Mary (biology) commented:

> And whenever I see someone who gets tenure and then stops working in the laboratory . . . and doesn't really consider the grad students and how important it might be for them and their career. And I think it's a little bit negative and I keep thinking to myself, "I don't want to be that type of faculty person—that's not something I want to do." And so I always want to remember how I felt in those situations because I don't want to treat my people that way.

In a similar vein, an international student in chemistry avowed:

> Most of the time when I meet some professor that I feel I don't like the way he teaches, I don't like the way he talks, most of the time I tell myself that when I become a professor I am not going to be that way.

Examples of behaviors that ran contrary to the ideal of a faculty member these students had scripted did not cause the students to abandon or modify their ideal. Such behaviors were not seen as reflecting a reality of faculty life; instead, they were coded by the students as negative examples, ways of being that they would avoid.

A microbiology student, Dan, consciously compared his early scripting of the ideal faculty life with the information he was gaining as a graduate student:

> Now as a graduate student, when I interact with my mentor, I see that half of his day is spent writing, filling out papers, meeting with people, and then he squeezes in the other stuff, it seems like. And so I guess my image now has been reversed, now that I have a closer view of what's going on. And it's harder for me to see myself—it's hard for me to see myself in that role here, at a research institution. Because the image I had was just of teaching, just of being a mediator between the class and the students, interacting with students, and that's how I saw myself. I didn't see myself researching, writing papers, managing six or seven students and technicians. So, I don't know how I would assimilate myself into a university like this.

Dan does not ignore the differences between his ideal and the realities of life at a research university. The differences, however, do not cause him to modify his ideal; on the contrary, they cause him to doubt his ability or desire to work at a research university. They cause him to reject putting himself in a setting that would endanger his ideal.

What is important to recognize regarding this "script of the ideal" is its enormous resiliency and staying power once it has been put in place and imbued with sufficient ego investment. Regardless of any evidence to the contrary that our respondents might have observed as part of their

graduate school experience and training, the ideal that was initially scripted remains intact and virtually unassailable. They want to be the caring, nurturing mentor-teacher. For the majority of the students, the positive vision remains.

This vision of faculty life is surprisingly similar to that held by the general public, at least as reported by our interviewees. During our interview sessions, we asked our respondents to describe how they think the public sees faculty life and the work faculty do. We were not interested in why perceptions were held, merely the perceptions themselves. We wanted to compare these descriptions with our respondents' own views of faculty life. The 25 individuals reporting a high level of commitment to pursuing a faculty career tend to describe their own vision of faculty life in terms similar to those used when describing how the public views faculty life. Many also reported having been mentored as an undergraduate. These correlations puzzled us at first because we had assumed that individuals with mentors would hold a rather nuanced view of faculty—at least more nuanced than that which they report the general public holds. On further reflection, we realized that the view our respondents held as undergraduates, one principally based on teaching and, to a lesser extent, advising, is similar to the view that they characterized the general public as holding. The teaching and advising aspects of faculty life that were in the foreground of their relationship with an undergraduate mentor are still the aspects of faculty life that fuel their strong desire to be a faculty member. Interestingly, 17 of the 25 respondents reporting a strong commitment to a faculty career do not tell of having a close relationship with a graduate mentor, yet lack of a mentor in graduate school seems not to have affected their career goals.

These correlations lend further credence to our contention that the "ideal script" of faculty life, once it has been cobbled together during the undergraduate years, exhibits a remarkable tenacity, overcoming such "obstacles" as lack of a graduate mentor. As detailed earlier, this script often does not expand to include research even after years in graduate school. Indeed, only three of those respondents with a high commitment to a faculty career see a research university as the only type of institution at which they hope to work. The influence of a graduate mentor foregrounded in the apprenticeship model of graduate education simply was not a dominant presence in the stories told by this group. The reigning model may well need to be rethought in order to include a more nuanced and complex nexus of graduate student profiles and aspirations—in particular, to include the significant number of graduate students who see themselves as teachers and advisors first and foremost.

Politics and Faculty Life

A term that we heard regularly in our interviews was "politics." We did not anticipate this issue when we designed our protocol; however, politics emerged as a clear theme in our subsequent analyses. Not until then did we realize that our interviewees used the term often, but very loosely, with no clear definition being provided or suggested. Consequently, we decided to investigate further to see whether there were other variables associated with perceived politics. We began our examination by breaking our respondents into two groups—those who did not talk about politics in the academy and those who did. We then looked at this second group along two further dimensions—whether they talked about politics "in general" and/or as part of the tenure process.

One of the first trends that emerged from our subsequent analysis was the fact that of the large subset of our respondents (25) who reported having either a graduate or undergraduate mentor, three fourths of those who stated they had had a mentor as part of their undergraduate experience also talked about politics in the academy. Since this group of students consistently equated having an undergraduate mentor with having a personal connection to, and thus an enhanced view of, faculty and faculty life, we assume that these mentors would have given them an entrée to the less public aspects of faculty life. For example, the students may have had the chance to see faculty interact with one another or hear about interactions among faculty from their mentors. The fact that so many of those with a mentor claimed to have seen politics at work led us to wonder whether what the students thought of as politics is anything more than simple personality differences among faculty. Peter (history) helps demonstrate the blurring around this point:

> I have to say that I've encountered some problems in terms of personal character or some other things either said or done. . . . I wouldn't say immoral but improper and then it's kind of dismaying because these people are already on tenure and there's nothing to do about it. And that is upsetting because then the question becomes what happens if I am in a department with someone like that, how am I going to negotiate? Because you just can't let it pass. I know I can, but I know that will be difficult. And that is something I've already seen. Or just to play no politics. I don't like politics and never will. I want to be respected as a colleague.

"Politics" may be used simply as a catch-all word for any interaction that is not totally harmonious. Such an attitude was expressed by Karen (history) when she observed "that it's going to take far more patience to deal with just the politics of a department than I necessarily thought." Stephanie (Spanish/Portuguese) was dismayed as an undergraduate when she "realized that there are a lot of political battles going on and

even the people I had really respected were involved in things going on, this kind of political issue." While perhaps more philosophical than most, Sean (communications) viewed politics in a similar vein: "[E]verything is, inherently, political and so, therefore, you just gotta accept that and focus on, essentially, positives. And certainly trying to refocus on those things rather than letting the negatives overwhelm you."

We also examined the presence or absence of "politics" in our respondents' conceptions of faculty life with respect to their expressed level of commitment to a faculty career. We found that those who said they have seen politics are *more* committed to pursuing a faculty career than those who did not mention politics. We explained this temporarily surprising correlation by recalling that many of those in the group who spoke of politics also reported having had a mentor. Thus, it might be the case that, even though those who are "mentored" as undergraduates may indeed see the politics associated with faculty life, they may also feel they have an "inside view" and thus know that there is more to faculty life than *just* the politics. They may thus feel that one is able to maneuver through the politics—after all, their mentor was most likely successful.

We are still struggling with a question relating to this general issue of politics: Why do those we coded as having relatively low levels of commitment to a faculty career not report seeing politics around them? One hypothesis that warrants further exploration is that those who do not see the politics also do not see the "good" things that are part of faculty life. Since many of these individuals reported having had neither an undergraduate nor a graduate mentor, they may be at such a distance from the academic life that they do not see the perils and nastiness associated with politics; however, this same distance may mean that they do not feel intimately connected to the academic life. They do not report having an inside view; their relationship to academe—and life as a faculty member—seems tangential.

Of those who did talk about politics in general but not in connection with tenure, most of them (5 of 7) reported feeling confident that if they could ascertain and then follow the tenure guidelines, they would get tenure. We hypothesize that this group of graduate students is aware of politics around them in general in the academy, but at the same time conceptualizes the tenure system as sufficiently rational and rule-driven to keep politics at bay. This same group was coded as being highly committed to pursuing a faculty career. Thus, this group seems to believe that the individual can be efficacious when it comes to tenure: If I follow the guidelines, I will be fine. These students believe in tenure as a rational process, which consequently allows them to believe in their own powers to influence events.

Of the 10 respondents who reported seeing politics at work in tenure decisions, only three saw tenure as a set of objective rules. The other seven believed that getting tenure was an outcome that involves dimensions other than just the quality of one's work; their responses suggest that they conceptualize the process as one in which the individual is at the mercy of the political winds to some extent and thus there are limits to self-efficacy. It is important to note that this group demonstrated a high degree of commitment to a faculty career. If they saw limits to their self-efficacy, why would they so readily see politics around them and still be highly committed to an academic career? The comments this group made when answering our question concerning the effect that being denied tenure would have on them provides a partial answer. It became clear that for this group, being denied tenure would not affect their self-esteem in devastating ways since they believe the system is political and arbitrary. If they were to be denied tenure, they would not take this rejection as a reflection on their professional worth.

Conclusions

Beyond the contributions that this project may have for our understanding of graduate students and their conceptualizations of faculty life, our work also has practical significance. In particular, it can contribute to institutional decision-making when new faculty are being hired. By suggesting several issues and areas to probe during the interview process, our work may be able to help better identify those applicants who possess a reasonable understanding of what their work-life will be like. We also want to provide some data and insights for graduate students (or potential graduate students) who are contemplating a career in academe. The course of our discussion will make it clear that many graduate students hold unrealistic views of faculty life. We hope that by identifying and discussing some of these views, we will stimulate graduate students to become more active and involved in their own career preparation. Finally, we hope that knowledge of these (mis)conceptions can form the basis for change in graduate education in those institutions that disproportionately prepare graduate students for careers in academe, especially wherever preparation of an informed, next generation of faculty is desired. In particular, we hypothesize that (mis)conceptions can be modified by consciously calling forth an individual student's embedded schema. We suggest that the unspoken must be actively called forth, since the narratives we heard convinced us that merely seeing graduate faculty at work was not a strong enough corrective to modify extant scripts.

We especially want to underscore the fact that the few graduate students who reported that they highly valued doing research also told us that they had close and fruitful relationships with graduate mentors. These few are the few whose paths most closely adhere to the apprenticeship model. For the vast majority of our participants, however, this state of affairs seems not to be the case: Our participants are either not being fully socialized or they are resisting socialization into a profession defined by their graduate faculty in terms of the prevailing paradigm that focuses on research productivity at a university. Paraphrasing Rice's (1986) work, Austin comments that the graduate experience itself "appears to socialize aspiring faculty primarily to a vision of faculty work that has dominated the academy for at least four decades" (2002, p. 108). Put into the context of our study, this statement suggests that there is a disconnect on two levels. The first level is that socialization "appears" to take place. Our work provides evidence that despite appearances, effective socialization is not taking place; individuals are not internalizing the values and attitudes their graduate school advisors presumably hold regarding the primacy of research. The second level concerns the goal of graduate student socialization itself. Ostensibly, graduate students are being socialized to the "vision of faculty work that has dominated the academy"—that is, a vision of research productivity. Some of our respondents recognize that they are not necessarily what their graduate mentors are trying to create; yet these students persevere. We contend that the image of the teacher/advisor that we have seen to be primarily rooted in the undergraduate years seems to be powerful enough to sustain our interviewees. Given our interpretation, we have pinpointed several areas for improvement in graduate education. In that many of our respondents and, presumably, many others in graduate school today do not themselves want to become graduate faculty, they may not be receiving (or asking for) the kind of graduate mentoring that would assist them in achieving their particular goals. Conversely, if creating the next generation of scholar-researchers is a vital goal for a given graduate institution, then more attention needs to be paid to the sort of socialization that will effectively produce scholars.

The disconnect between the prevailing apprenticeship model and what students appear to want from a career as faculty members as described in our interviews is substantial. We have reason to think that the discrepancy we describe captures reality more fully than assumed and that our sample in this study is not unique with respect to its priorities. Results from a survey distributed in 1998 to 209 new faculty employed at the University of Kentucky suggest that our interviewees, most of whom elected to take part in PFF activities, do not form an anomalous

group skewed towards teaching (Worley, 1999). The new faculty at the University of Kentucky graduated from doctoral programs from all across the country and had been hired within 3 years of the survey. The response rate to the survey sponsored by the Teaching and Learning Center was high—158 (75.6%) responded. When asked to rate on a 6-point Likert scale how important each of 32 professorial activities was to the new faculty personally, they rated most highly teaching-related activities (assessing student work fairly, teaching well, developing own teaching style, interacting with students outside of class, and lecturing well). These results corroborate generally the results that Golde and Dore (2001) obtained from their survey of graduate students.

On the other hand, when asked how important each of the 32 activities was to their career advancement at the University of Kentucky, research-related activities monopolized the top five spots (publishing, conducting research, presenting research at professional settings, applying for grants, and interacting effectively with colleagues). The survey responses demonstrate a disjuncture between what recent graduate students personally value and what they believe their employing institution values. Moreover, when this group of new faculty was asked how well their graduate training prepared them to engage in the various activities, the highest rated activities were those related to research, not teaching. All told, what we learned in our interviews corroborates and extends the information gleaned from the survey: Graduate students (and newly minted Ph.D.s) have very strong interests in and commitments to teaching. The new hires had, however, learned enough to know that their personal priorities (their personal ideal script of a faculty life?) did not correlate with the perceived priorities of a Research-I institution. That is, the socialization that took place seemed to be on the order of a lesson learned—how to be successful at a research university—rather than a fundamental adoption, internalization, and commitment to the norms, values, and attitudes associated with a research university. The apprenticeship model of doctoral education, in its current incarnation, does not seem to take the personal interests and commitments to teaching into account, nor does it provide a model for those who will secure employment at institutions with priorities different from those of a doctoral institution.

The academic discipline itself and the desire to contribute to the knowledge base of the discipline did not surface as the main motivating force cited by our interviewees when describing their decision to become a faculty member. We draw a connection between this fact and the cultural schema (often found in the general populace) that revolves around the teacher-advisor aspects of faculty life and that positions

faculty more like "teachers" rather than "researchers." As such, it is largely unsophisticated and uninformed with respect to the contemporary influences and demands on college and university faculty. Our interviewees were unable to articulate at any level of detail an understanding of faculty life that was distinct from their characterization of how the general public sees faculty. This suggests that graduate students have been so influenced by the prevailing cultural schema that emphasizes and embraces nurturing and teaching that they hold on to this view rather than adopt another extant script that emphasizes the university professor as heroic researcher who extends the boundaries of knowledge. We speculate that the heroic script looms larger in researchers' and graduate faculty's own constructions of faculty life than it does in those of most of their graduate students.[3]

We would like to underscore that it is not true that our respondents are uninterested in their disciplines; the opposite was demonstrated repeatedly. Our respondents are enthusiastic about the chance to *teach* their disciplines. While it would be an exaggeration to characterize them as willing to teach "anything" for the opportunity to teach, it is nevertheless clear that for many of them, teaching is what they want to do. It just so happens that they will be teaching discipline A instead of discipline B.

A final conclusion that we draw from this study is that graduate students gather information prior to making a career choice in a manner that can be described as very relaxed and casual, perhaps even haphazard. We come to this conclusion by recognizing that our respondents gathered information from three main sources. First, they literally saw and watched what faculty do. Second, they reported having snatches and tidbits of conversations with faculty as an undergraduate, sometimes during a scheduled meeting in the faculty member's office but more typically in chance meetings, such as in the hallway after class or on the way to the cafeteria. Third, they did the work of faculty in graduate school, most typically as a teaching assistant and occasionally as a research assistant. Of these three data-gathering avenues, the one mentioned by far the most frequently was that of "seeing" faculty do something. Noticeably absent from our interviews was mention of systematic data gathering regarding the profession; our respondents simply did not report actively asking career-oriented questions. Hence, what they have come to know about faculty life, even as late as being advanced doctoral students in their programs, tends to be limited to what they have seen or heard, often second-hand, especially regarding the ubiquitous "politics" of higher education. Said differently, the lack of effort demonstrated by graduate students to learn about faculty life in a systematic way results in a lack of information; the absence of compelling information in turn

makes it easier for them to fit what they see and hear into the preexisting scripts and schema of faculty as teachers and nurturers. Perhaps if our interviewees would have taken the chance to study and investigate thoroughly faculty careers and higher education more generally, they might have come to know some of the tensions, pressures, and satisfactions associated with the career beyond those that are rooted solely in teaching. Thus, they might be more prepared to identify some of the missing lines in the "script of the ideal."

This last conclusion is particularly noteworthy in light of the fact that the vast majority of our respondents had been part of their university's variation of preparing future faculty initiatives. Their participation, however, did not seem to create a view of faculty life appreciably different from those who did not participate in PFF. Whereas the PFF programs in which our graduate students participated may have succeeded in providing opportunities for thinking about teaching roles at various institutions, the programs seem neither to have been able to dislodge earlier schema nor to illuminate the full range of faculty responsibilities for our respondents. They did not indicate that they fully appreciate the myriad complexities of faculty life, which include the core position of research. Thus, graduate students find themselves in the unenviable position of being fully served neither by their graduate faculty mentors nor by their institutions' efforts at preparing them to assume faculty roles, in all of their complexities, at a variety of institutions. Extant mentoring and other institutional efforts to socialize graduate students do not appear to counter successfully the powerful influence of the schema that graduate students bring with them to graduate school. Conversely, an ideal script that is divorced from institutional realities may not be powerful enough to help all graduate students persevere. The fact that roughly 50% of graduate students do not finish their degrees (albeit many of them leave during the early phases of their graduate careers, prior to achieving candidacy—see Lovitts, 2001, p. 8) indicates that neither institutional socialization nor personal ideal scripts by themselves are sufficient to help these students stay the course while recognizing the realities of faculty life.

Discussion

At this point, we would like to emphasize once more the fact that we are dealing with narratives constructed by the interviewees. Specifically, this means that we acknowledge the setting of these interviews and all that this might imply: Graduate students were being formally asked by a professor/researcher to talk about how they envision faculty life. A different tale may be told informally, for example, among graduate

students or to parents. We also recognize the presence of silences, the presence of that which was left out by our interviewees.

In this same vein, we wish to underscore that life scripts in general serve personal psychological needs as well as reflect master narratives that are part of our society. Carl (Spanish literature) was acutely aware of the partial, constructed nature of graduate students' views of academic life, commenting that "We see what we want to see, we have experiences we have been looking for and we interpret things, I mean, to interpret things to make sense to us." Carl underscores the selective nature of both the experiences themselves and the interpretation of these experiences into a fictitious coherence. It makes sense to conceptualize this process as one wherein lived experiences play the role of the "words" of an individual's autobiographical script. These words are strung together, organized, using a "grammar" derived from an available "public discourse structured by class, code, and convention" (Eakin, 1989, p. xxi). For many of our interviewees, the available codes and conventions were those found in the sociocultural "script" of the faculty member as teacher/advisor. Recognizing the fact that our respondents largely share "a public discourse structured by class, code, and convention" allowed us to make sense of the—at first—puzzling fact that the narratives told by our respondents were strikingly similar. Factors such as type of undergraduate institution attended and gender made little difference. We encountered essentially one pattern with several moderate variations.

We found that once a script of an ideal faculty life was formed, it proved to be almost unshakeable and exhibited an immense staying power in our respondents' lives. The largely *positive* script of faculty life tended to be formed *during the undergraduate years*. Once established and modified to include our respondents' own image of self-as-faculty, this "script of an ideal faculty life" continued to exist relatively unchanged for the vast majority of our respondents, despite subsequent negative experiences or conflicting information encountered in graduate school. Schema theory may help explain this puzzling lack of change: Information not fitting into preexisting schema may not be apprehended at all and/or may not be internalized and become a part of memory. The staying power of the early ideal, however, is not just a negative force that reflects a blindness to new information. It also serves a positive purpose. Rather than putting aside a vision emotionally rooted in undergraduate experiences, our respondents told us of their ongoing belief in this script. The stories we heard revealed that this "script of an ideal" often motivated our students to continue through the vicissitudes of graduate school.

The core of our argument is that the theoretical construct of socialization by itself is not sufficient to explain the graduate student experience and the views graduate students hold of faculty life. We do not argue that

socialization does not occur. We recognize that some degree of socialization takes place, because graduate students who appear on the doorstep of doctoral programs primarily wanting to be teachers at some point come to appreciate the importance of conducting research as a contemporary reality of faculty careers, even if they do not come to embrace the fact fully. We contend, however, that the socialization is incomplete and so erratic that its hegemonic status as interpretive construct must seriously be questioned.

Seeing the serious deficiencies of the socialization process in graduate education, we sought other mechanisms for understanding what does (or does not) occur in graduate school. Our search has led us to understand that schema theory is a useful mechanism for understanding why graduate students hold and keep the views of faculty life that they do. Knowing the power and tenacity of schema, we propose that for socialization to be effective, it must deal directly with the constructs graduate students hold. Thus, we argue that socialization must start by knowing the graduate students' views of faculty life. Simply put, in order to effectively teach and mentor someone, extant schema must be uncovered and understood. Once brought to the light of day, these schema can be challenged and problematized. Without these steps, the power of the schema remains unabated, and the underlying schema will continue to influence and form the views of the graduate students. These steps are necessary but not sufficient. Graduate faculty also need to examine their own schema and the assumptions contained therein, for they too have been formed by a particular set of circumstances. Just as is the case with their students, the views held by graduate faculty may not have been developed via a systematic inquiry of the profession. The disjuncture between the schema held by graduate faculty and those held by graduate students may impede meaningful communication and positive socialization.

Endnotes

[1]Preparing Future Faculty (PFF) is an initiative created through a national program of the Council of Graduate Schools and the Association of American Colleges and Universities with support from The Pew Charitable Trusts. PFF programs have been institutionalized at various universities around the country. The PFF programs are based on the principle that graduate education can and should familiarize graduate students with the broad and complex realities of the scholarly life and the wide range of postsecondary institutions.

[2]All quotes are reported in unaltered form from the transcriptions in order to stay as true to our informants' words as possible.

[3]It is worth noting that the heroic script dominates most of the published biographies or autobiographies of academics. This is not surprising, however, due to the simple fact that, typically, only the leading researchers/inventors will be the subject of published biographies. The heroic script, however, cannot be unquestioningly extended to the professoriate as a whole.

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