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significant responsibilities. The only pitfall is that a placement in an alternative marginal organization may carry less professional weight and credibility when it comes to job hunting.

The strong desire to create our feminist visions now is often a block to the actual realization of those visions. We need time to define our visions more clearly, and time to develop the personal skills necessary to implement them. For me, this is a central purpose of women's studies. Our task is to teach our students to be creative rather than reactive in responding to the cultural norms, values, and models that surround and are a part of us.

We and our students can only move from reaction to creation by accepting, rather than denying, the problems we have and the obstacles we face, personally and organizationally. We need to encourage the acknowledgment of fears, hopes, confusions, and expectations around power, leadership, and equality. We need to find and teach that difficult balance between patience and gentleness with flaws, on the one hand, and demands and expectations for change, on the other. We need to validate that it makes sense if the changes we are seeking are personally confusing and difficult. Not only are we struggling with the residue of our socialization around power and leadership and our experiences of their being used against women, but we are also attempting to create organizations free of the types of power and leadership most familiar to us. The role models are very scarce; our students have the right to know the complexity and enormity of the undertaking, and the cost of the superwoman, Amazon myth.

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Three Decades of Reminiscences about Women in the Academy

Thalia Gouma-Peterson

The following oral history was presented as part of a panel on "The Isolation of Women from Each Other in the Academy," at the GLCA Women's Studies Conference in Fall 1980.

I came to the United States in 1952 from Pierce College, a women's high school in Athens, Greece. During my years there as a student, I had always taken the friendship and companionship of women for granted. I had excellent teachers in history, psychology, chemistry, art, ancient Greek, physical education, and philosophy—all of them women; and I had come to take for granted the existence of strong and inspiring women role models. Many of these women were single. I did not realize then that this would prove to be a common occurrence for professional women. I still remember them distinctly, for their warmth, their intelligence, their dedication, and their encouragement. The president of the school was also a woman, an American in her sixties, rather eccentric and colorful. Many of the Greek students made fun of her, but I found her rather splendid.

I won a Fulbright award and arrived at Mills College in September 1952, assuming, erroneously, that I would find the same spirit of companionship and friendship. Very quickly, however, I learned that, although Mills, like Pierce, was a small women's institution, most of my teachers were men. Of the few women, most were single. They were considered brilliant, eccentric, and difficult. My major professor, a German émigré, was an excellent and stimulating teacher. With our common European background as a bond, he encouraged and supported me and, in fact, became my role model.

There was one woman art historian, a visiting assistant professor. She was married, taught part time, and commuted from out of town. Because the student grapevine rumored her to be disorganized and effusive, I resisted taking a course from her until graduation requirements finally forced me to do so. She was disorganized, to be sure, but
she loved her subject passionately and she communicated that love to all of us. She was also extremely warm and kind. While I became very fond of her, I did not regard her as my model or inspiration. She was not, I thought, "up to the level" of my male professors. Only years later, when as a college teacher I began to review my own undergraduate experience, did this warm and passionate teacher reemerge in my mind as one of the positive elements from my past. Even later, I discovered that among specialists in the field she has an outstanding reputation as a connoisseur of Chinese art. Mills students did not know that.

At Mills I first became aware of another category of women, the "faculty wife." Many of these women had academic or professional credentials, but few of them had jobs or any "official" status. Students saw them as "difficult and troublesome" or even as "devious." They were to be avoided. The one exception was a French woman, the wife of a distinguished composer, who taught at Mills every other year. She taught French courses (as a lecturer, of course), presided over the French Club, and directed French plays. The students were awed by this charming and exotic, independent woman. I got to know her when I was a member of the French Club, then became her assistant in a children's class and played major roles in every production she directed. Although she meant much to me, I did not then realize how important her presence at Mills was for me and how much her friendship eased my moments of loneliness and doubt. She told me something which I did not fully understand at the time, but which I never forgot: "When a woman gets married, she should make sure the sacrifice is worth it."

In 1956 I went to the University of Wisconsin to begin work toward my Ph.D. All my professors—both in my major field, art history, and in my minor, theater—were men. By now I was not surprised by that. I was surprised, however, to discover that almost all the graduate assistants in the department were women. As a small group of preprofessional women trying to succeed in a male world, we did not form many friendships. The competition was intense. Most of my friends were male graduate students. Undergraduate women, to whom I was closest in age, could not become my friends, for I was now their teacher and, I discovered, their role model.

Once again I encountered the "faculty wife." Again, women in that category were considered "difficult and problematic," or else "kind and motherly." This time the exception was the wife of my major professor, a woman of great intelligence, humor, and humanity. She was a professional musician and teacher, born and trained in Europe, who had married my professor after he became a widower. She was strong and sensitive, direct and witty; she sustained a full teaching schedule and managed the home. The meetings of the graduate seminar at their house were very pleasant weekly events. After the formal session, we discussed music and art over cups of tea and her delicious cakes. We developed a close friendship that continued after her husband's unexpected death, and, several years later, I stayed with her when I returned to Wisconsin to take my Ph.D. orals. She told me then that she had always been confident that I was going to complete the degree. I had not been so confident.

In my second year of graduate school, I married a fellow graduate student and entered the "couples world." I was still seen as the capable, unusual, Greek teaching assistant, but I also had become someone's wife. At the time the two roles did not seem to be in conflict. I became aware of the struggle of the wives to hold their own but did not have much time to develop friendships with them since it was my first year of full-time teaching. During that year my husband accepted a teaching position at Oberlin College. I stayed in Wisconsin, and we became one of the early commuting couples, seeing each other on weekends—a ten-hour drive in those days. When the year ended, I joined my husband at Oberlin, becoming—overnight—a "faculty wife."

I remember that year as one of extreme disorientation. I had no job, I was pregnant, and I was seen as someone's wife. I remember vividly that, at the first meeting of the faculty wives, we were asked to introduce ourselves and state "our department." One by one each wife introduced herself as belonging to her husband's department. When my turn came I stated that, although my husband taught English, I did not belong to the English department; I was an art historian completing my Ph.D. at the University of Wisconsin. The group was startled. As I became acquainted with more wives, I realized that many were struggling for existence. It was not easy. We spoke a great deal about children, natural childbirth, and baking bread. I felt that my mind was atrophying.
One bright thread during that year, besides the birth of our first son, was a growing friendship with several members of the art department, one of them the only woman art historian on the faculty. They took me seriously as an art historian, and, the following year, they asked me to teach a section of the introductory course. Even though Oberlin's antinepotism rule meant that I could teach only as a lecturer on a temporary appointment, I accepted gladly. Thus began eight years of part-time teaching, as a faculty wife who was allowed only into the fringes of the Academy. I soon discovered that there was a whole group of us, all faculty wives with Ph.D.'s. We did not have offices, nor could we attend faculty meetings, but we were more fortunate than many of the faculty wives with Ph.D.'s who were not even allowed to teach part time.

During those years, 1959-1967, there were few women faculty on continuing appointments at Oberlin. Most of them were in their late fifties and sixties and were teaching in the humanities. Many were single and most were considered "difficult." One of these women was my senior colleague in the art department, a distinguished teacher and scholar. She befriended and supported me through my eight years of frustration and instability, and remains a friend and role model. Another faculty wife in the department, a Ph.D. from a distinguished Eastern university, taught for years at a prestigious New England college. This required that she and her husband, a professor at Oberlin, live apart one semester out of every year. Eventually that became too hard for her, and she settled in Oberlin as a perpetual lecturer. I admired and respected her, and we developed a lasting friendship. Some of the younger women on the museum staff also became friends, and I found myself in a small circle of professional women friends. But, except for one year when I was asked to teach full time as an instructor, the teaching was sporadic, unpredictable, and poorly paid.

After I had been a full member of the faculty for one year, I found the demotion to part-time lecturer very difficult to take—especially after I completed my Ph.D. in 1964. The final blow occurred in 1967, when the man whom I had replaced during his leave retired, and I could not even be considered a candidate for his position (my special field). A series of bright-eyed young men were brought in as candidates. I was among those interviewing them. I had had enough. Then and there, I decided to look for a position within commuting distance. First, however, I had to learn to drive. One of my faculty-wife friends, a wonderful woman with a career as a nursery school teacher, volunteered to be my driving instructor. I remain eternally grateful to her.

In 1968, at thirty-six, I began my new career, as a visiting assistant professor, at the College of Wooster. My older woman colleague and friend in the Oberlin art department nearly wept when I announced my decision to leave. I, too, was unhappy, but I knew that I must now focus on my new professional life. The decision was reinforced when a friend who taught English composition at Oberlin as a lecturer for fourteen years called to thank me for not putting up with the situation any longer—for showing that it can be done and that married women can live with professional dignity. She left Oberlin for a position at Cleveland State the next year and is now a full professor.

At Wooster I was an oddity: a married woman, in a half-time position, commuting from out of town. I remembered my woman professor from Mills. But, for the first time, I had a regular and continuing appointment and was a full-fledged member of the faculty. When I looked around at my first faculty meeting, I was struck by the small number of women. Of those few, most were in their sixties and were single, and I learned soon enough that many were considered "difficult" by younger male colleagues. For the next five years there were no more than five women under fifty on the Wooster faculty, and none of them had tenure. My closest friends were male colleagues of my own age. I served with them on committees as the token woman. As an "accepted" member of the predominantly male faculty, I remained isolated from my senior women colleagues.

As we moved into the seventies more young women were hired, many of them in temporary positions. By 1975 the number of women in continuing positions had increased. We created a "Committee on the Status of Women" and began meeting weekly. Many of the older women who had been on the faculty when I arrived had retired. There still were very few women around, but we were closer in age and began to develop a relationship of trust and support. We fought the good fight together and often lost.

As at Oberlin, Wisconsin, and Mills, the nebulous category of "faculty wife" continues to exist at Wooster. Even though the antinepotism rule was abolished by the College seven years ago, the problems for faculty wives have not been resolved. The majority exist on the fringes of the academic community and remain nonpersons. The "Committee on the Status of Women," which I chaired for two years, and which has been sympathetic to their plight and has invited them to open meetings, has been unable to help them in specific ways.

Some faculty wives with professional degrees have had to make the decision to retrain at nearby graduate schools in order to move into nonacademic professions. Others with Ph.D.'s are employed in part-time or full-time administrative positions. Only a few are fortunate enough to hold positions on the faculty in their special fields. But at least now the option to be considered exists, though that does not guarantee fair and equal consideration, especially if the faculty wife is "older" (i.e., over thirty-five).

By far the largest number of faculty wives are employed by the College in administrative positions or in the library. I was amazed to find out that these appointments are resented by some of the women on the faculty and staff, who are unable to see the faculty wife as a professional woman and who consider these appointments as expressions of favoritism. We still have a long way to go.

In 1977 I received tenure and was promoted to full professor. In 1979, after a year's research leave, I returned to find that several of my younger women colleagues had left and quite a few new ones had been hired. To my surprise, one of the younger women mistook me for a colleague ten years older than I, a respected senior woman whom I had looked up to and admired. Clearly, within two years I had shifted ranks and had become one of the few 'older, established' women faculty. I wondered whether I was now considered "difficult!" When I recently addressed this question to one of my younger female friends on the faculty, she laughed and answered, "Thalia, you have always been difficult. That is why we love you." Perhaps there is hope after all. Perhaps we will increasingly move out of our isolation and will be able to support each other as full human beings.

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