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Women Learning in Self Defense

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Student affair professionals are given the task of creating learning environments for college students who are developing and becoming. With this task one must consider what influences their learning environment and the ways in which students make meaning of their experience. The context of learning and programming is found in campus environments and climate as well as in the development theories. The complexity of creating programs and events is found in this quote “The relational view of women’s identity is built on the notion that women develop in ways distinctly different from the ways in which men develop-that is, toward and with different values and processes” (Hayes, 2000, p60).

What is the implication of this for those working in higher education and providing services for students? Are their programs designed with women specifically in mind? Is there knowledge of the ways women learn, likewise the way men learn? Are we fostering experiences that are safe and accessible to women and their development? These questions I attempt to address in the following program titled *College Women Learning in Self Defense*. In *Coming Into Her Own*, (Davis, 1999) they discuss the strong sense of identity that women experience when they learn to defend themselves against physical assault. Two implications for their study that apply to my program were: women learn best from other women (p270) and in learning self defense women gain the courage to transcend gender roles and restrictions (p268). With this as the framework, I cross the theory of self-authorship, developed thoroughly by Baxter Magolda, with women’s development theory of both Josselson and Gilligan. I then place these developmental theories in the context of current college campuses. As a result I hope to have designed a program that will engage college women in finding “self” through “defense” skills.

“How do I know? Who am I? and What relationships do I want with others? A key issue in all three questions was hearing one’s own voice regarding each of these questions” (Magolda,

2001, p4). The epistemological, interpersonal and intrapersonal are three key words used to identify these questions when describing self-authorship.

In each developmental dimension (the epistemological, interpersonal and intrapersonal) there are four phases of the journey towards Self-authorship: Following Formulas, Crossroads, Becoming the Author of One's Life, and Internal Foundation (p40). Support and encouragement are needed in the journey towards self-authorship. Students both male and female are questioning themselves and come to sobering realization that there are multiple perspectives and holders of knowledge. As students are asked to make important decisions about their future they often find themselves questioning. "At the crossroads, the internal voice, or intrapersonal sense of self gained sufficient strength to topple the external formula" (p 51). This is the third phase of self authorship, the crossroads. If students are not engaging, Baxter Magolda believes the responsibility may fall on student affair professionals. It becomes important to expose students to different experiences, ask questions they are not asking and support them to move beyond what they know.

"They realized that their relationships had been founded on acquiring others' approval rather than mutual negotiation of others' and their own needs" (p38). Yet there is a difference in how we support male and female during this crossroads.

Carol Gilligan's women's development theory shows that women are often silenced in trauma and in their experience. And in the silence they no longer have the courage to step out. "Girls struggle against losing voice, so that a large part of themselves are kept out of relationship" (Gilligan, 1993, p xxiii). This is crippling as we have previously stated women learn in community and in relationship. "And without voice, there is no possibility for a change whose wellsprings are psychological" (p xix)

Using Josselson's theory we learn the development of women as they relate and connect to others. The success of these women "comes from their capacity to construct their own identity" in complexity, ambiguity and with confidence (Evans, 1998, pg 59). The most matured developed women is what Josselson titles: "Identity Achievement women break the psychological ties to their childhood and form separate, distinct identities. Separation is difficult, for it means giving up what is known and trusted about themselves" (pg 58). In regards to self-authorship this would be the point of leaving behind "Followed Formulas" and entering in a "Crossroads"; the authority and holder of knowledge shifts for women in this stage of Josselson's theory. These women are "likely to make decisions contrary to parental expectations" (pg 59). An important note in women's development with the framework of Josselson is that these women "interpersonal relationships elicit autonomous satisfaction, giving a woman a better sense of her individual identity" (pg 64).

This very idea is contradictory to campus climates and societal norms. In *Learning Environments for Women's Adult Development: Bridges toward Change*, practical ways of creating spaces and experiences unique to a women's development are discussed. In one such example "the faculty recognized that women learn better in climates of cooperation rather than competition" (Taylor, 1996, pg 58). Additional research that supports this is found in an article titled, "Gender differences in spiritual development during the college years" written by Alyssa Bryant (2007) in conjunction with the Spirituality in Higher Education research project of Astin. Though the focus of this research is not on the spiritual development we find a parallel predictor of successful women development: strength and motivation found in community and relationships. Women are more apt to participate in religious activities and discuss their spiritual

development in a community of peers (Bryant, 2007, p844). Furthermore our current college environments are not conducive to this learning environment.

“In addition, some studies have indicated that certain college experiences can have a negative effect on women’s personal and intellectual development. For example, two national, longitudinal studies of the impact of women’s perceptions of a chilly campus climate for women found significant negative correlations between those perceptions and a variety of objectively measured and self-reported gains” (Whit, 2003, p 2). The research of Whit and Associates (2003) supports the idea of inequity in higher education and calls for a change in the way we structure our learning environments. In Rund (2008) book review of *Creating and Maintaining Safe College Campuses: A Sourcebook for Evaluating and Enhancing Safety Programs* he found that women’s development suffers in unsafe environments. Not only are the women’s physical health and well being in jeopardy so is their emotional health. Living in fear creates a debilitating learning environment and negatively influences identity achievement (Rund, 2008, p266).

Additionally the research article of Kelly and Torres examines campus safety issues and the environment that influences the college experience for women. More specifically the term “chilly campus climate” is used and identified as a predictor in women who do not experience full “equality of educational opportunity” (Kelly, 2006, p20). The article discussed the numerous reasons for fear and the manifestations of this fear such as not going to the library, choosing to not attend events and programs. “As such, efforts to enhance campus safety must be done in conjunction with larger efforts to fight sexism. Students need to be empowered rather than fearful” (p 34). The article looks at ways to change the culture climate of a campus; there are stereotypes that must be changed through education. Student service should provide intentional

programming to dispel the stigma attached to sexual assault, the women who are victims and the false sense of safety many feel on campus (p 35).

The mission of *College Women Learning in Self Defense* is to educate, empower and inspire college women through self defense classes to be strong individuals and active citizens in the campus and global community. The learning experience will guide the women through a journey of health and knowledge. The experience should engage the women physically, mentally, and emotionally. It will ask them to examine the world around them, reflect on their experience past and present, and express their personal knowledge and understanding.

The program *College Women Learning in Self Defense* is designed in response to the developmental needs, and current learning environments on college campuses. In order to develop into fully confident strong intelligent women, we must engage them on all levels: physically, emotionally, and cognitively. Moreover as research has shown it must be a safe environment to do so. It is the role of student affairs professionals to engage this learning in creative ways, provide support and challenge, and introduce them to new experiences; in combination these elements should awaken a sense of identity within them. Likewise there is a need for young college women to be exposed to mentors and leaders of the same gender whom can guide and inspire them through this journey of self authorship and development.

In the development of women and of students, it is important to account for the individual motivation to engage in learning. As Baxter Magolda says in her article (2002), it is a partnership between the student and the professional. The learners role is to actively engage, to take initiative and responsibility, and to reflect one one's sense of self. Moreover, "genuine achievement of this learning outcome as a free choice requires integration of cognitive maturity, integrated identity, and mature relationships" (Magolda, 2004, pg 7). Those women who value growth and

development or who are challenged to do so, will be the most likely to participate in this program.

For this learning experience, I first begin with Learning Goal and then developed more specific outcomes for the women. I distinguish outcomes from goals as the latter are hopes and a projection upon the learning experience. The learning outcomes are specific in nature and will be used when assessing the program. In *Learning Partnerships: theory and models of practice to educate for self-authorship*, Baxter Magolda describes three College Learning Outcomes which when combined result in effective citizenship; they are as follows: 1. Cognitive maturity is the ability to make decisions in a complex environment through intellect and reflective judgment. 2. Integrated identity is identified by a strong autonomy and connectedness and understanding one's personal history. 3. Mature relationships are defined by "respect for both one's own and other's particular identities and cultures and by productive collaboration to integrate multiple perspectives" (Magolda, 2004, pg 6). It is with this framework that I developed the learning goals and outcomes for the program *College Women Learning in Self Defense*.

Learning Goals:

1. Women will be empowered to make changes personally and socially.
2. Women will be given a direction to lead on campus
3. Women will experience community of peers, open dialogue, shared experience.
4. Women will hear their own voice and gain confidence to make decisions and lead.
5. Women will develop their self-authorship.
6. Women will gain a sense of autonomy through relationships.

Learning Outcomes:

1. Women will learn the skills and technique and become certified in self defense classes.
2. Women will learn to express their individual experience through writing in community.
3. Women will identify resources on campus that can help them in times of crisis.
4. Women will build relationships with professional staff of the university.
5. Women will plan events, promote activities on campus, and engage as active citizens

There are five components to the program expanding over a 2 day period, preferably a weekend. (Depending on time, budget and resources, this learning experience could be formatted into a women's retreat.) Various offices will collaborate over this learning experience: Women's Center, Campus Safety, Writing Center, and Counseling Center. There should be two female representatives from each office present, a total of 6 student service professionals. These female staff will serve as facilitators for the program. Campus safety should be able to provide the instructors and class schedule to complete official certification. This program can be offered a number of times depending on instructors and professionals that can staff these weekends as well as the number of female student participants. The students will have an opportunity at the beginning of the semester to sign up for the program. Depending on the budget, the cost should be kept at a minimal. Students should pay no more than \$10. This should be possible with three offices contributing to the program. The motivation and draw to the program will be 1. A certification in self-defense and 2. Completion of the program will serve as a prerequisite for serving on future committees.

To prepare for the final dinner reception, invite local organizations and resources around the community to join the group. You can make this as formal or informal as you like.

Schedule: (times may vary)

Materials: waters, snacks, lunch, journals, pens, self defense instructor, CSA staff facilitators, discussion #1-4, Writing/Journaling Guide, Information/Fact sheet

Day One of College Women Learning In Self Defense:

1. The females will break out in small groups of 8-10 and will be assigned a CSA staff who will facilitate introductions. (There can be no more than 60 female students as there must be a staff assigned to each group to facilitate.)
2. The group will proceed into the self-defense instruction, the times varies on the instruction and size of the group.
3. The females will remain in their groups throughout the training.
4. After the first session of self defense instruction, break for lunch.
5. Resume in small groups with staff facilitator, to begin discussion #1. Pass out journals and pens. (at least an hour)
6. End for the day

Day Two of College Women Learning in Self Defense

1. Gather in same small groups: Discussion #2 (at least an hour)
2. Complete self-defense training and certification
3. Lunch break
4. Discussion #3 (at least an hour)
5. Dinner with all groups, round tables and encourage women to branch from small groups, Discussion #4
6. At the dinner reception, provide information tables:

- a. sign up for committees to plan and organize events on campus: Take back the night, Clothesline project, etc.
- b. Resources of community tables

Discussion/Journal Writing #1: (Questions to facilitate journal writing)

What was this experience like for you?

What were you feeling while you were being trained?

Why do you think you felt that way?

Do you have a personal experience you can write about?

Discussion #2: Pass out information sheet of Facts and statistics

Were you aware of these statistics?

How safe do you feel on campus or in other environments?

Does this change anything for you?

Discussion #3

What has your experience been through this time?

How does it feel to be certified in self defense?

Discussion #4 (around dinner tables):

Has anything changed for you?

What do you know now that you didn't before?

What can you do to make a change? What are things you would like to see on campus?

Assessment:

- include a questionnaire at the end of the dinner for students
- ask CSA staff and professionals to write an evaluation of the program
- use the sign up tables as a reference to how involved students become on their campus
- the future success of other programs related to women health: Take back the night, Clothesline, etc.

This learning experience recognizes the collaboration and safe environment that women need in finding their voice, progressing towards self-authorship. If done successfully women will know their voice, feel confident in the decisions they have made and who they have become. They will know oneself, accept oneself, connect with others, hear and change perspectives, feel empowered, and seek a continued growth and development (Taylor, 1995, p 41). The program will “situate the learner in learning experience” (Magolda, 2002, p9). In these small groups the women’s learning experience will be validated with others in the group (p7). Additionally, women will be able to reflect on their experience in a safe environment where their voice is accepted. What they know is not what anyone will tell them but rather what they have experienced, a shift in authority as Josselson would describe (Evans, 1998, p59). “Finding their own voices and standing up for themselves was complicated for many participants by personal dynamics and external events” (Magolda, 2001, p 10).

In the small group discussion groups, individual females will be asked very personal questions and will be asked to share “their voice” with the others. This fosters an autonomous and collective identity that Magolda believes is important in the journey towards self-authorship. “According to the women students in this study, apart from a friend or family member, they would first report an incident of sexual victimization to a staff member with whom they developed a relationship” (Kelly, 2006, p35). Thus the role of the facilitator is key to the program. It is important for the women to connect with student service professional as a future resource, confidant, and mentor.

“Meeting societal expectations and making one’s way into young adulthood are complex tasks. Taking on adult responsibilities, managing one’s life effectively and making informed decisions as a member of a community require something beyond learning particular skills and acquiring particular behaviors” (Magolda, 2001, p14). As they learn about the experience of others in the class and learn facts and statistics of their campus they will be entrusted with this knowledge. Trusting students with this knowledge is a key in promoting self authorship. (Magolda, 2004, pg 42). At the end of the program, women will have the chance to sign up for event and programs, the learning experience continues on after. They will be encouraged to lead through their knowledge and influence their community.

“She ties a new sense of separation to a new experience of connection, a way of being with others that allows her also to be with herself” (Gilligan, 1993 p53).

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