

Enabling Possibility: Women Associate Professors' Sense of Agency in Career Advancement

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In this multimethod, qualitative study we examined associate women professors' sense of agency in career advancement from the rank of associate to full. Defining agency as strategic perspectives or actions toward goals that matter to the professor, we explore the perceptions of what helps and/or hinders a sense of agency in career advancement. Our participants consisted of 16 women associate professors at a major research university who participated in an institutional intervention program designed to enhance sense of agency in career advancement, and a subset of 12 attendees who also participated in a follow-up focus group 6 months later. Participants commonly noted that the influences of workload alignment, interactions with on-campus colleagues, and sense of fit between personal values and institutional promotion criteria constrained their sense of agency in career advancement, while the institutional intervention, self-selected professional networks, and perceived abilities fostered their sense of agency in career advancement. We conclude with individual and institutional level recommendations for policies and practices aimed at enhancing sense of agency perspectives and actions in career development in hopes of better retaining, promoting, and supporting women faculty.

Keywords: agency, career advancement, women faculty, associate faculty, promotion

Over the past several decades, many campuses have implemented measures aimed at increasing the number of women faculty hires (Trower, 2012) and at addressing impediments to the promotion of women, including creating women's networking groups and leadership programs and adopting "stop the tenure clock" and parental leave policies (National Science

Foundation, 2006). Likewise, major foundations have become involved. The National Science Foundation's (NSF) ADVANCE program advocates for multiprong approaches to the recruitment, retention, and advancement of women faculty (NSF, 2006; Sturm, 2006), and the Sloan Foundation places significant resources into programs to create more equitable work environments for academic parents. As a result, there has been considerable progress in increasing the number of women hired at colleges and universities, as noted by a 16% increase between 1997 and 2007 (Trower, 2012; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2013). However, progress in advancing women to the upper ranks of the professoriate has been complicated and slow, with women remaining underrepresented at the top and overrepresented at the bottom (Trower, 2012; Valian, 1998; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2013). Although colleges and universities have increased the number of women entering the academic profession through recruitment efforts, many women faculty re-

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main “stuck in the middle” at associate professor (or lower rank) and find the barriers to advancement particularly difficult to overcome (Glazer-Raymo, 1999, 2008; Misra, Lundquis, Dahlberg Holmes, & Agiomavritus, 2011; MLA, 2009; Valian, 1998).

Considered an understudied career stage, researchers have more recently examined the rank of associate professor in hopes of better understanding the responsibilities, opportunities, and challenges associate professors face. Overall, the findings are not positive. National surveys on faculty work and satisfaction by Harvard’s Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) of 13,510 faculty members at 69 4-year institutions (public and private) during the 2011–2012 academic year found that associate professors are significantly less satisfied with their work than either assistant or full professors (Jaschik, 2012; Trower, 2011a, 2011b; Wilson, 2012). Associate professors also reported lower satisfaction levels on nine of 11 questions related to research (i.e., time for research, course release time) and five of seven survey questions related to service (i.e., time spent on service, institutional support for balancing service loads and other responsibilities; Jaschik, 2012; Trower 2011a, 2011b; Wilson, 2012; see also COACHE, 2008). In agreement with COACHE data, surveys by TIAA-CREF (Trower, 2011a, 2011b) and the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI; DeAngelo, Hurtado, Pryor, Kelly, & Santos, 2009) found that associate professors hold comparatively grim outlooks on prospects for their own career advancement and are the most likely of all three career stages to feel “stuck” (Baldwin, Lunceford, & Vanderlinden, 2005; Buch, Huet, Rorrer, & Roberson, 2011; DeAngelo et al., 2009; Easterly & Pemberton, 2008; Trower, 2011a, 2011b). Data also highlights that associate professors rank lower in feelings of appreciation and recognition (Bozeman & Gaughan, 2011), support for scholarly endeavors and research (Terosky, Phifer, & Neumann, 2008; see also Baldwin et al., 2005; Bozeman & Gaughan, 2011), collaboration with colleagues (Trower, 2011a, 2011b), clarity of the promotion process (Baldwin, DeZure, Shaw, & Moretto, 2008; Buch et al., 2011; O’Meara & Campbell, 2011; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2013), and level of service workload (Buch et al., 2011; Misra et al., 2011; Neumann & Terosky, 2007). As such,

these extant surveys and studies reveal that associate professors report significant dissatisfaction with key elements tied to promotion.

Beyond the aforementioned challenges facing the rank of associate professor in general, research on women faculty at all ranks, but especially at the associate level, paints an even bleaker picture (Gappa, Austin, & Trice, 2007; Glazer-Raymo, 2008). In studies related to time in rank and gender, several scholars have documented patterns of slower tracks or “nonpromotion” from associate to full professor for women faculty (Allan, 2011; Clark & Corcoran, 1986; Conley & Leslie, 2002; Geisler, Kaminski, & Berkley, 2007; Misra et al., 2011; Modern Language Association, 2009; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2013). Stout, Staiger, and Jennings (2007) found that women faculty were 2.3 times more likely than men to be in the above median category of time to advancement (13 or more years according to their study). A study by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP, 2006) reported that women remain half as likely as men to reach full professorship. Additionally, a Modern Language Association (MLA) study (MLA, 2009) found women take 24.2% longer than men to obtain the rank of full professor. In agreement, data presented by Valian (1998) shows that men and women academics hold similar rates of publication at the beginning of their careers, but a disparity between publication rates occurs at midcareer. In sum, the pattern exists that women faculty’s advancement from associate to full professor “stalls out” (Shaw, 2007) and remains disproportionately slow or unattainable.

Scholars have suggested a number of institutional and individual reasons for women academics’ slower progression (Barrett & Barrett, 2011; Clark & Corcoran, 1986; Creamer, 1998; Sax, Hagedorn, Arredondo, & Dicrisi, 2002). First, critical feminist scholars argue that societal and institutional structures of power decelerate women’s advancement, particularly in light of the increasing managerialism of American higher education in the 21st century (Anderson, 2009; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Davies & Thomas, 2002; Gonzales, Martinez, & Ordu, 2013). Managerial structures, critics argue, uphold gender norms and schemas (Valian, 1998), segregated work roles, and patterns of dominant male power (Glazer-Raymo, 2008), thereby disproportionately relegating women to the historically undervalued and un-

derrecognized relational and domestic functions of academic work (i.e., teaching, advising, service, lower level administrative work; Clark & Corcoran, 1986; Lester, 2011a, 2011b; Misra et al., 2011; MLA, 2009; Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006; Valian, 1998). For example, one study of a research-extensive university found that women spend as much as 8 hours more per week on service, mentoring, and teaching than men, although men spend 7.5 more hours a week on research (Misra et al., 2011). Because a professor's career trajectory is shaped more by the "sheer number of publications" (Sax et al., 2002, p. 424) and grants (see Argon, 1995; Easterly & Pemberton, 2008; Kleinfelder, Price, & Dake, 2003) than by his or her contributions in other areas, women academics find themselves in vulnerable positions in regard to career advancement because they carry disproportionately higher workloads in the areas of teaching, service, and lower level administration. Women are no longer fully blocked from entering the profession, but gendered expectations within the promotion process for publication productivity is misaligned with the workload women face (Clark & Corcoran, 1986; Cress & Hart, 2009; Martinez Aleman, 2008; Trower, 2012).

Critical feminist scholars also assert that "accumulated disadvantages" (Clark & Corcoran, 1986, p. 21; see also AAUP, 2006; Cole, 1979; Valian, 1998) or accumulated "microinequities" (Stout et al., 2007, p. 137) impede women's progress. These terms suggest that even small differences in treatment can add up to large disparities in promotion, salary, and prestige (Valian, 1998). Specific to promotion, scholars note that organizations tend to evaluate performance in ways that mirror the beliefs of those in charge, even if those beliefs are subjective, inadequate, or incomplete evaluation measures (Valian, 1998). Women academics continue to report working in climates that privilege masculine perspectives and approaches to organizing, leading, and evaluating, which in turn operate to women's disadvantage (Allan, 2011; Glazer-Raymo, 2008; Mason, Goulden, & Fransch, 2009; Valian, 1998). In agreement, data culled by Valian (1998) suggests that women must meet higher standards than men to gain tenure or promotion, oftentimes because gender schemas deem men more competent than women as scholars and leaders.

A key disadvantage for promotion that accumulates for women faculty is a lack of collegiality and mentoring (Allan, 2011). National faculty surveys highlight that an institution's climate and collegiality has the greatest impact on overall job satisfaction and intent to stay than any other factor (Trower, 2009; Wright, 2005), as well as influences job-related stress (Wright, 2005). A study by August and Waltman (2004) found that the factor of collegiality was the most significant predictor of career satisfaction for all faculty women regardless of rank. On today's campuses, women faculty are also less likely than men to be fully integrated into collegial networks, as seen in women reporting higher levels of isolation, a lack of collegiality, and less access to senior colleagues (Clark & Corcoran, 1986; Easterly & Pemberton, 2008; Fox, 2010; Rice, Sorcinelli, & Austin, 2000; Tolbert, Simons, Andrews, & Rhee, 1995; Trower, 2011a, 2011b; Turner, Gonzalez, & Wood, 2008). Moreover, women report less satisfaction with the fairness and transparency of the reward system (Glazer-Raymo, 2008; O'Meara, Terosky, & Neumann, 2008), largely due to higher levels of isolation and limited access to the informal rules at play in reward systems (Barrett & Barrett, 2011; O'Meara, 2011; Sax et al., 2002; Tierney & Rhoades, 1993). Scholars of faculty careers have found numerous benefits to having positive interactions with on-campus colleagues, including improved faculty satisfaction and motivation, (Austin & Gamson, 1983; Blackburn & Lawrence, 1995; Bozeman & Gaughan, 2011; Dickens & Sagaria, 1997; Hagedorn, 2000; Rosser, 2004), increased research productivity (Blau, Currie, Croson, & Ginther, 2010; Creamer, 1998), greater sense of recognition (Bryson, 2004; Creamer & Lattuca, 2005; Dickens & Sagaria, 1997), and higher levels of success on the tenure track (Bilimoria, Joy, & Liang, 2008; Williams & Williams, 2006). Due to fewer collegial networks, women faculty receive less recognition and support for research productivity, both of which are considered major factors for promotion and retention (Barrett & Barrett, 2011; Blau et al., 2010; Creamer, 1998; Sax et al., 2002). As such, the disadvantage of a lack of collegiality accumulates throughout women faculty members' careers, thereby hindering their advancement in profound ways.

A third reason noted for slower advancement among women academics is related to work-life issues. Historically, women's family roles have

affected their professional work engagement and advancement to a greater degree than men, largely in part due to societal pressures around gendered notions of woman as caretaker and homemaker (Allan, 2011; Clark & Corcoran, 1986; Mason & Goulden, 2004; Trower, 2012; Valian, 1998; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2013). Because the tenure track often coincides with childbearing years, and women faculty must negotiate parenting and tenure requirements simultaneously, women faculty tend to rank factors related to overall balance between work and home-life lower than their male colleagues (Trower, 2012; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2013), as well as report greater levels of stress (Civian, 2009). Additionally, male faculty are more likely than female faculty to have nonworking spouses (National Academy of Science, 2002; NSF, 2006). However, it is important to note that academic fathers also face stress managing the tenure clock and parenting roles (Sallee, 2012, 2013). In addition to the tension between work and family roles, the normative construct of the “ideal worker” (Hochschild, 1995) or “greedy institutions” (Coser, 1974), inherent in managerialism, suggests that workers fully concentrate on scholarly production rather than the demands of home and family (Clark & Corcoran, 1986; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2013), thereby leaving the advancement of women academics and academic parents vulnerable if they do not uphold the ideal worker notion.

Based on the challenges previously mentioned, it is clear that the advancement of women associate professors is an area in need of further exploration for the health of higher education institutions. Beyond the foundational argument that “women and men are inherently of equal worth,” (Freedman, 2002, p. 7), there are several other reasons why colleges and universities should pay attention to equitable associate professor advancement. The first reason is the limitation of women’s voices at the highest ranks of faculty, thereby causing gaps in institutional agenda setting and decision making (Acker, 1990; Bird, 2011; Glazer-Raymo, 2008). The midcareer stage is considered the “primary pipe-line from which institutional leaders emerge,” (Buch et al., 2011, p. 39, see also Baldwin & Chang, 2006; Baldwin et al., 2008) and therefore colleges and universities need to support this pipeline if women’s contributions at the uppermost levels of the institution are to be leveraged (Acker, 1990; Bird, 2011; Gardner,

2013). The second reason is related to role modeling. Research demonstrates the influential power of seeing a person “like yourself” in a position that was once considered unattainable for your demographic group, such as women at the full professor level (Gibson, 2006; Turner, Sotello-Viernes, Gonzalez, & Wood, 2008). Third, speaking from an economics and talent management perspective, faculty turnover, especially among those who hold deep “institutional memory,” is costly in terms of the budget, as well as in the retention of human and social capital (Conley, 2007; Huston, Norman, & Ambrose, 2007; Johnsrud & Heck, 1994; Misra et al., 2011; Ponjuan, Conley, & Trower, 2011; Stout et al., 2007; Xu, 2008). Thus, it is in the best interests of higher education institutions to examine and address the forces hindering the careers of associate professor women academics.

Theoretical Framework

As noted previously, a body of valuable research has highlighted implicit bias and gender/cultural schemas in higher educational environments that inhibit the progress of women academics (Clark & Corcoran, 1986; Williams, 2010; Valian, 1998). However, fewer studies have focused on what helps women faculty progress in environments mired with hindrances to advancement. Much like the work of Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2013) that shares counternarratives of “promise and possibility” for academic motherhood (p. 2), we too hope to highlight what helps women faculty advance in both theoretical and practical terms. In order to do this, we turned to the theoretical framework of agency. Defined as strategic and intentional views or actions toward goals that matter to the professor (O’Meara, Campbell, & Terosky, 2011), agency is a potentially fruitful construct to better understand how an individual navigates and crafts her professional work in ways that increase the possibility for advancement and potentially transform institutional structures. Agency focuses attention on both the espoused and the enacted, namely what the faculty member herself believes is possible and what she does to move toward those goals. Agency is a concept with a long tradition in the social sciences and is especially relevant in contexts where (a) a group is known to face disadvantages based on representation, structure or culture, and (b) the onus is on the individual to advance.

In this study, we were guided by O'Meara, Campbell, and Terosky's (2011) framework for agency in faculty professional lives, which was developed out of an interdisciplinary literature review of theoretical and empirical studies from the social sciences including sociology, psychology, human development, organizational behavior, cultural, and critical realist perspectives. We were also guided by Archer's (2000, 2003, 2007) analysis of the mutual interaction of structure and human agency, which highlights the interplay of opportunities and constraints facing agents as they pursue their goals.

The O'Meara et al. (2011) framework suggests that *faculty agency is expressed in at least two ways, through perspectives and/or action*. Perspective involves taking strategic views on human experiences in ways that advance individual or collective goals (Archer, 2000; Marshall, 2000, 2005; Neumann, Terosky, & Schell, 2006). Neumann and Pereira (2009) observed agency perspective as a form of meaning-making which "entails a reflexive purposefulness, a thoughtful directedness born of personal desire and valuing" (p. 139). Whereas, agentic action consists of individuals asserting free will and influencing their own life trajectories through strategic tasks or steps (Clausen, 1991; Elder, 1994, 1997; Marshall, 2005; Neumann et al., 2006). To date, most of the agency literature merges perspectives and actions. However, Campbell and O'Meara (2011) found that agency perspective and action were expressed as two distinct concepts, with agency perspective having a strong influence on agency action among tenure track faculty.

The framework also proposes that *faculty agency is content specific* (Neumann & Pereira, 2009). For instance, a professor might assume agency in a challenge she is facing in her teaching but maybe not in her work-life balance. Additionally, *faculty agency is exercised in specific social contexts and is influenced by individual, institutional, and societal factors*. Marshall (2000) reminds us that individuals respond with various levels of agency based on a sense of their own social and political capital in a given setting. For example, an associate professor who perceives that she is more productive than her departmental colleagues will likely feel more agency in asking her department chair for resources than one with a weaker sense of her own social and political capital in that same setting.

Lastly, *not all agency is enacted as a form of resistance to the status quo* (Ahearn, 2001; O'Meara et al., 2011). In some cases, an associate professor might assume agency to take advantage of an opportunity and in others to overcome a constraint. Archer (2000) observes that at times there may be barriers that no amount of agency can overcome, thereby reminding us of the power of certain kinds of constraints that limit opportunities to act with agency, just as we appreciate the freedom individuals have to determine courses of action with regard to their goals.

Although faculty members of all career stages could benefit from considerations of agency, in this article we focus on women professors at the associate level due to the extant literature on the constraints to their career advancement. Moreover, our data set focuses on women faculty at a research university because research and doctoral universities are the institutional setting where the greatest inequity has been reported between men and women in compensation, time to advancement, and dissatisfaction with workload and climate (Glazer-Raymo, 2008; Trower, 2011a, 2011b; Valian, 1998).

Method

In this article, we draw from a multimethod, qualitative study with a focus on two sets of data: open-ended questions collected in connection with an evaluation of an ADVANCE professional development session ("workshop") offered to all women associate faculty at Primetime University (a pseudonym) and two focus groups comprised of a subset of workshop attendees. The goal of this workshop was to enhance the agency associate professor women felt toward achieving their goal of becoming full professors. We conducted an evaluation of the workshop to determine if it met its intended objectives. We also conducted a research study, guided by the O'Meara et al. (2011) and Archer's work, to better understand the factors that constrained or enabled associate professor sense of agency. To distinguish between the two purposes, evaluation was conducted to understand how to improve a single workshop intervention to enhance agency, while research was conducted to understand the myriad of factors influencing our participants' sense of agency in career advancement. Because we found in our research that the workshop itself acted as a

facilitator of these women's agency, we use materials from our evaluation of the workshop and from other methods of data collection to answer our research questions.

Our research site, Primetime University, is a large, public, research-extensive university located in a metropolitan area in the United States. It is highly selective in terms of admissions, serves approximately 38,000 students (roughly 70% undergraduate), and engages in extensive research activity, with more than \$500 million in research expenditures (university Web site). Primetime received an NSF ADVANCE grant to support the retention and advancement of women faculty, who were resigning from Primetime at higher rates than their male colleagues and were underrepresented in higher faculty ranks, according to internal institutional data.

The ADVANCE program personnel developed workshop sessions that addressed institutional and individual factors that shape professors' agency perspectives and actions toward achieving the goal of full professor. The workshop offered opportunities for participants to engage with current and former promotion and tenure committee members and administrators on the following topics: preparing promotion personnel statements and vitas, research/external funding productivity, work-life balance, networking and on-and off-campus colleague interactions, personal branding and making one's work visible, and clarification of the promotion process. These program sessions, facilitation by a former administrator who supervised the promotion process, and the presence of a strong peer network were intended to work in concert to provide participants with the knowledge and skills necessary to achieve their goal of promotion to full professor. The workshop was open to all women associate professors at Primetime, of which 16 attended. Of those participants, there were 11 White faculty and five faculty of color representing seven of Primetime's 12 colleges, including arts and humanities, professional schools, and STEM fields. The workshop attendees' years at associate rank included seven at *early tenured* stage (1 to 4 years in associate rank), five at *median* stage (5 to 8 years in associate rank), and four at *above median* stage (more than 8 years in associate rank).

Three evaluations were completed (at the beginning, middle, and end of the 2-day workshop) with Likert scale and open-ended ques-

tions. Likert scale sections of the workshop evaluations indicated that participants reported higher levels of agency in career advancement at the end of the workshop. In this article, we pull from the open-ended responses from the evaluation because they provided the richest data on the factors influencing women associate professors' sense of agency.

Six months after the workshop, we conducted two focus groups with 12 women associate professors total (six per focus group) that attended the ADVANCE workshop. The 12 professors, similar to the workshop attendees, represented multiple disciplines across campus, ranging from the arts and humanities to the sciences to professional schools. Seven participants were White and five were faculty of color. The focus group participants' years at associate rank included seven at *early tenured* stage (1 to 4 years in associate rank), one at *median* stage (5 to 8 years in associate rank), and four at *above median* stage (more than 8 years in associate rank).

Based on institutional data sources and workshop evaluations, our research team designed a semistructured protocol for the focus groups that concentrated on participants' advancement intentions, factors influencing their promotion to full professor, their perceptions and actions in regard to their career advancement and sense of agency in career advancement, and outcomes or updates on their progress toward promotion. Both focus groups were audiotaped and transcribed.

Data analysis focused on uncovering common themes among participants around their sense of agency in career advancement, organizing the themes into a form that makes sense, and building richer discussions on what helps or hinders women associate professors' sense of agency in career advancement (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012). In organizing the data, we followed a multistep process modeled after Saldana's (2012) manual coding model. Our first step in the analysis process was to read all of the 16 ADVANCE workshop participants' responses to the three sets of workshop evaluations. We conducted first round coding (Saldana, 2012) that highlighted emerging themes and relevant codes. Then, we created a master code list with accompanying definitions to return to the data for a second round of coding (Saldana, 2012). Throughout the coding process, we viewed the data through the lens of agency, specifically

through the O'Meara et al. (2011) and Archer (2000, 2003, 2007) constructs. Despite our focus on these constructs, we remained open to new meanings in the data, as well as discrepant cases (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). During the coding process, our research team, consisting of members associated to and not associated to Primetime and/or ADVANCE efforts, discussed our reflections and researcher notes on emerging data themes.

In our second step of analysis, we followed a similar process of coding the focus group transcripts. Following this analysis, we compared and contrasted themes found in both the workshop open-ended evaluation questions and the focus group transcripts, thereby allowing us to work the data as a whole through a process of progressively narrowing a large set of specific codes (particularity, see Erickson, 1985) to more abstract groups of common themes.

Throughout this project, we employed a number of measures to enhance trustworthiness, especially in light of researcher positionality to Primetime's ADVANCE efforts. A first step was to include external content experts on faculty careers on the ADVANCE research and evaluation team; these experts, including one of the authors of this article, do not have connections to ADVANCE. Beyond the external members of the ADVANCE research team, we included other critical readers with expertise in faculty careers and women faculty throughout the data collection, analysis, and writing stages of this study (Creswell, 2012; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012). Our critical readers were particularly useful in providing feedback on questions for the workshop evaluations and focus groups, as well as maintaining ongoing conversations with us regarding our data analysis. Lastly, we maintained detailed researchers' notes and regularly discussed emerging themes in the data, as well as our own positionality on those themes. Through our efforts to enhance trustworthiness, we believe the findings from this ADVANCE research site holds promise for other institutions and faculty members to better understand agency in career advancement in ways that may guide research and practice on faculty careers, associate women's advancement, and agency more generally.

Findings

Our analysis revealed three constraining influences and three enabling influences on associate professor sense of agency in career advancement. Each constraining and enabling influence shaped both the actions associate professor women felt they could take toward their goal of promotion and the ways they were thinking about it. Within each section describing a constraining or enabling influence, we show how participants felt these forces affected their actions and views toward promotion. As a note, the themes presented in this findings section were commonly voiced by all the participants, however, at times, there were variations based on time in rank as an associate professor, and to a lesser degree, discipline/field. In these cases, we will make a note of time in rank and discipline/field-related variations.

Constraining Influences

As previously outlined, there is a robust literature detailing the numerous constraints hindering women associate professors' advancement, oftentimes of a structural or cultural nature at the department/institutional level. Our unique contribution to this literature is to view the constraints through a lens that highlights the possibility of agency. Although advancement challenges should not be minimized, we found that the constraints commonly faced by our participants all contained elements of possibility for successful navigation and reform.

Constraining influence: Workload versus promotion requirements. Participating women associate professors acknowledged that Primetime's promotion process prioritizes research productivity and publication rates. They also observed that they knew this when they decided to work at a major research university, as this emphasis is common. Despite understanding the prioritization of publication rates, the greater challenge facing participating women associate professors was how they perceived their chances at reaching these publication goals (agency perspective) and in whether or not they could implement a path to reaching them (agency action), given what they considered to be "overloaded plates."

For associate women professors at or above the median time in rank, the level of their ad-

ministrative and service workloads greatly influenced their sense of agency in relation to reaching the promotional criteria of research productivity. Participants repeatedly and emphatically stressed that their time for research was regularly circumvented by time on university committees, middle-level administrative roles, high teaching loads, and advising/mentoring students. This concern is evident in one participant's words, "Administrative and mentoring responsibilities are such that I have little time to devote to my own learning or to writing." Another workshop participant discussed how service took a toll on her career:

I have been so burdened by administrative work that has continued to increase over the past 10 years, along with an increasing lack of administrative support staff to lighten that increasing burden that I have decided to leave [Primetype University]. It is impossible to be in a position of leadership of a program without sufficient support staff and still manage to get to my research. Additionally, I frequently engage with students at all levels and contribute to the school (in terms of service). I feel that I am punished for these activities since it takes time away from cranking out high numbers of papers.

As heard, in part, in these two women's cases, a common theme among the participants, especially those at median and above median time in rank, was to resign themselves to one of three possible paths if their service loads did not lessen: "permanently remaining" at the associate level, actively stopping the pursuit of promotion, or investigating career options outside of Primetype or academe.

Newly tenured participants viewed the experiences of their women associate professor colleagues with a sense of caution. These participants shared how they observed other women associate professors falling into the "service trap," thereby hindering chances for publications and promotion. These observations led them to perceive the possibility of a similar fate, as well as desire to proactively develop strategies to safeguard time for research. However, in their opinions, their proactive mindsets and actions came about after attending the ADVANCE workshop.

In sum, we found that the amount of time participants were spending on nonresearch related work constrained their agency in career advancement in two ways. First, participants could not take actions in their research they knew would align with career advancement, and

second it dampened the sense that advancement was possible because they perceived that if they kept performing nonresearch work, they would not meet promotion standards. Moreover, prior to attending the ADVANCE workshop, most women associate professor participants did not see a clear pathway in which to alter any workload misalignment.

Constraining influence: Departmental colleagues. Participants shared a number of ways in which their "organizationally mandated colleagues," in the words of one participant, negatively influenced agency and career advancement, including issues around workload distribution, lack of mentoring and support, and absence of clarity in the promotion process, all of which we expand on next.

By and large, participants blamed their departmental colleagues for their disproportionately high administrative and service workloads; they criticized their senior colleagues for refusing to perform a fair share of service work. "I think the associate professors are carrying the full professors in our school. And that just seems extremely unfair," said one focus group participant. Another agreed, "I will never accept another leadership position at this university and I will actively mentor all other associate professors to stay away from such service. The full professors in my area were all too happy to have me do this job, which allowed them to focus on their research." Although indirectly, senior colleagues and their refusal to "do service" contributed to participants' reduced time for research, which in turn affected productivity levels needed for promotion, thereby influencing their agency perspectives and actions toward "feeling ready for going up for full."

Moreover, most participants criticized the lack of mentoring or support from their on-campus, departmental colleagues, especially in relation to career advancement, which matches concerns raised by a plethora of previous studies on faculty (Delgado-Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Gonzales & Satterfield, 2012; Pinnegar, 1998; Rhoades, 2009; Trower, 2011a, 2011b). Participants shared that their "local colleagues" failed (or continued to fail) to guide them in navigating workload distribution, institutional politics, and/or the tenure/promotion process. For example, one workshop participant bitterly stated, "I and others were not reviewed under our chair(s) for almost 8 years," said one par-

ticipant, "Therefore I had no guidance for when to put my portfolio up for promotion in the [Primetime] system. There is no mentoring or anyone looking out for tenured faculty in our department." Another workshop participant accused her colleagues of engaging in a tenure/promotion process that was "arbitrary and capricious," largely in part due to the current process' ambiguous guidelines, faulty policies, lack of mentoring, and/or the political nature of the department. In addition, participants commonly discussed that their departmental colleagues also showed little to no interest in—or even a willingness to understand—their scholarly endeavors and research agendas.

Beyond uneven workloads and lack of mentoring and recognition, a few participants also commonly criticized their senior colleagues for "sabotaging [their] attempts to realign priorities" toward research. Two participants, in particular, passionately shared stories in which they unsuccessfully advocated for a reduction in service work with their department chairs. One participant at the early tenured stage with a joint appointment discussed her failed attempt at negotiating a service reduction with either department, with one chair claiming that lack of resources prevented any reduction in service and the other chair citing promotional standards. This faculty member concluded her story by stating, "If I continue to not be able to maintain a work load split which is appropriate for a research faculty member, which has been most of my experience, then I don't know if I will get promoted on time or stay at Primetime." This experience highlights some of the risks of acting with agency, namely that advocating for what one needs for advancement does not mean one will get it. Not getting what one requests can add to frustration and resentment.

In sum, our participants perceived that it was difficult to realign their workload for advancement because, in their view, their colleagues do not do their fair share of work. Similarly, participants voiced that the lack of positive mentoring or feedback from departmental colleagues worked against their perspective that advancement was possible.

Constraining influence: Fit between personal values and promotion requirements. A third constraint for sense of agency among participants, particularly participants at or above median time in associate professor rank, relates

to "fit" or whether or not these women are willing to "conform" to Primetime's criteria or "unbalanced pace" for promotion. This constraint speaks to personal and professional values, oftentimes shaped through years of experience at Primetime and/or academe. More than half of the focus group participants discussed their steadfastness in "remain[ing] true" to their values despite any misalignment with institutional norms. As a note, participants in the early tenured stage spoke less frequently to this tension, perhaps because they either already entered with or accepted institutional norms. This factor is pertinent to career advancement because participants, especially those in rank longer, articulated that they were willing to align their priorities to departmental norms for promotion but with limits. For example, participants explained they would only conduct research on topics they were passionate about rather than the ones considered most popular in their fields. One participant in rank longer than 8 years who decided to renew attempts to advance following the workshop shared her self-created limits:

But I've also made the decision, which also may delay my ability to move forward, is that I am going to continue to do the work that I really love to do. And my work isn't really in the mainstream of my field . . . That may lead me to not to be able to come up, and I won't have as good of a case in 3 years, but at the same time I am looking that it leads me to continue doing the kind of work that I ultimately love. So not making that goal: to turn me around inside out to become someone that someone wants me to be.

In the end, she is determined to actively pursue promotion, but remains committed to "doing it on [her] own terms." Another boundary was work-life balance, especially again among participants at or above median time in rank. An above median time in rank participant shared a similar conviction to the case above except in regard to maintaining a "balanced lifestyle." She notes:

I'm going to go out on a limb here and say I have never met a successful professor who had what many of us would call a balanced life. By definition, they are so possessed by and committed to their work . . . that it is their life. That, for them, is balance. That is their choice. I made other choices and I am simply not going to succeed at the level they have.

Both examples symbolize conviction and awareness: conviction to upholding their re-

search area or lifestyle and awareness in acknowledging the potentially negative impact of these convictions on their advancement prospects. Although we believe these participants' boundary drawing is reasonable and respectable, we still consider it a constraint for career advancement at Primetime, mainly due to the end result oftentimes being slow progression or "nonpromotion."

In sum, participants felt that the range of actions they could take to advance in their careers were constrained by a disconnect between their own values/priorities and Primetime's promotional criteria. Likewise, their perspectives were dampened by the same sense of disconnect between their desire for work-life balance or scholarly passion and Primetime's culture.

Overall, participants felt frustrated and hindered by these constraints, but not defeated. Consistent with Archer's (2000) observation that even within a sea of structured constraints, there are small freedoms in which to view and act toward goals—and participants could see opportunities and possibilities, especially after the ADVANCE workshop, described in the next section.

Enabling Influences

Although our participants' constraints primarily highlight limitations at the institutional level, their discussion of factors that enabled their sense of agency in career advancement included individual and institutional level perspectives and actions, as well as combinations of both. Here we review three common themes shared by our participants in regard to what fostered their sense of agency in ways that opened up possibilities for promotion, including an institutional intervention (the ADVANCE workshop), self-selected professional networks, and perceived abilities.

Enabling influences: An institutional intervention (ADVANCE workshop). Debates ensue about whether or not certain mindsets and skills can be learned. In agreement with related studies (Dweck, 2000, 2006; O'Meara et al., 2011), our data suggests that although some individuals may hold certain inherent tendencies toward agency, agency can be learned, enhanced, and applied. Here we share how participants felt the ADVANCE workshop facilitated

the sense of agency they held toward promotion.

The ADVANCE workshop facilitated participant sense of agency toward career advancement by providing knowledge about the requirements and process, opportunities to reflect on strategies to advance, and time to complete promotion materials such as personal narratives, vitas, and publications. As noted in national faculty surveys, one of the most common questions is whether the criteria and process for tenure and promotion to full rank are clear and fair (Trower, 2012). In two subsequent surveys distributed by Primetime, tenure track participants noted that the requirements for promotion to full were less clear than those for tenure, and more women than men were unsatisfied with the clarity of promotion to full guidelines. Many studies have shown that agency is enhanced when the rules and requirements surrounding a task is clear and transparent. Thus, it was not a surprise that one of the major benefits of the workshop was having the promotion guidelines reviewed carefully by administrators, recently promoted women, and women on the university-level promotion and tenure committee. As such, one participant noted that the workshop provided her with a "clear vision of what is needed to work toward and achieve promotion." Another participant explained that the information and strategies she gained from the workshop made "the idea of full professor a real and more immediate goal."

A second benefit of the workshop related to having the time to consider strategies for promotion. Although attendees across all of the categories for time in rank spoke of the transformative nature of the workshop, associate professors at the stages of early tenured and above median time in rank appeared particularly inspired by the experience. One participant in the above median time in rank category articulated the impact of the workshop on her perspective and actions:

I would say I'm one of those senior associate professors that did way too much service starting from the beginning. I like the ADVANCE workshop . . . it gave me hope that it is possible to go forward, and I'm seriously looking at it . . . I would say there is a big service trap. And I believe female faculty tend to get caught in it more than male faculty, and ADVANCE is good for helping the younger associate professors avoid it, and helping some of those who are senior associate professors get out of it.

As alluded to in the above quote, newly tenured women faculty also shared how the workshop altered their perspectives by creating a sense of awareness for the constraints against and opportunities for career progression. A newly tenured professor explained:

The ADVANCE workshop was very timely for me because I had just got off the break in getting tenure, so it allowed me not to relax and to keep the momentum. So it was perfect timing that way. And I think I am very lucky that I could attend that workshop so early. I think it helped me focus and strategize and right after the ADVANCE workshop, I went back to my department and renegotiated some service assignments and got out of one very time-consuming assignment that I had . . . So I told them that I would alternate years instead of doing it every year. So I'm planning accordingly, that next spring when I don't have [the committee], I'm going to do this and this and this. And so I think it has helped me live up to a 5-year timeline and I do hope and plan to go up for full in the next 5 to 6 years . . .

According to focus group participants, the workshops provided alternate ways to perceive their current situation, whether retrospectively or proactively, and new strategies to act on one's advancement.

A third benefit included the time built into the format of the workshop that focused on the concrete products necessary in the promotion process. During the workshop, there was time set aside to review examples of successful narratives, to revise one's vita and narrative, and to plot out strategies for research projects. Containing time to reflect and work on priorities is also a strategy noted by Neumann's (2009) work on agency. All 12 focus group members shared that time set aside at the workshop benefitted their sense of agency in career advancement, specifically because it served as its own set of concrete actions to move toward their goal and it encouraged their perspective that they were making progress.

Of interest, two focus group participants who were originally self-labeled as "at peace with remaining an associate for life" had submitted their dossiers for full professor based on progress they made in research productivity following the workshop. And both received promotion. Another two noted in postevaluation e-mails that they had decided to go up the following year. One said, "The workshop informed me that there was a sane world out there in terms of requirements to full professor." An-

other noted, "I would not be going through this process (of promotion to full professor) without the ADVANCE program." However, it is important to note that even when assuming agency in career advancement, there is the possibility for unfavorable outcomes, as previously illustrated by the story of the jointly appointed professor attempting to negotiate her service workload. Yet prior to the workshop, many participants viewed their situations passively in that there was little room for change based on the current contextual realities of Primetime. However, this perspective and inaction was altered by an institution offering a professional development opportunity and by individuals seizing and operationalizing the opportunity.

Enabling influence: Self-selected professional networks. In stark contrast to stories of tenuous interactions with on-campus colleagues, participants noted that self-selected professional networks that consisted of internal and/or external colleagues fostered a sense of agency in career advancement. Due to the paucity of departmental mentoring, participants shared that their self-created professional networks filled the "void of support" found in their departmental cultures, and therefore they sought out other colleagues, oftentimes external colleagues, for mentoring and advice on strategic actions around their work and career advancement. For example, numerous participants shared that their graduate school networks remained supportive to this day. Others also described their professional networks as sources of inspiration in that they "push you along." For example, one participant started gathering her promotion dossier materials only after the encouragement of her external colleagues in her field.

For some, the ADVANCE workshop "opened [their] eyes to look beyond" their departments for collegueship and to start "just simply talking" to more senior colleagues, both internally and externally to the institution, about their promotional chances, goals, and needs. By initiating these conversations, they surprisingly found people were not only willing to listen, but also to mentor and help. One participant in a field of science was informed that her promotional materials "were ready" except for one more grant, and her newly found senior colleague agreed to review her grant proposal.

In sum, the theme of self-selected professional networks is an important one for women who tend to find “chilly climates” in their departmental cultures (Sandler, 1986; see also Glazer-Raymo, 1999). Although not addressing the institutional level problems inherent in their departmental context, their individual action of seeking networks outside the department symbolizes what might be called a “partial work-around” to immediate contexts that were not fostering their advancement. Self-selected networks enhanced agency actions by providing concrete feedback on narratives and research projects that resulted in tangible productivity. Self-selected networks enhanced agentic perspectives by lessening isolation and offering affirmation and recognition.

Enabling influence: Perceived abilities. A final theme speaks to self-efficacy, in that we found that participants did not struggle with feelings of self-doubt or incompetence in regard to their abilities to conduct the tasks that they knew would lead to their career advancement. Participants portrayed themselves as competent and capable academic scholars and instead attributed career advancement challenges to hindrances found at their institutions, as previously discussed. Participants’ self-confidence in their own abilities enhanced career advancement because of its connection to self-efficacy, or the perception that one can do something, which is linked to a greater likelihood of an individual assuming agency and taking strategic actions toward a goal (Bandura, 1989; Bauer, Bodner, Erdogan, Truxillo, & Tucker, 2007). In essence, participants appeared to struggle more with navigating the “career management” aspects (Terosky, 2010) of academe than with self-efficacy and competency-related concerns in the areas most highly valued for promotion, namely research productivity.

Because participants believed in their own abilities to meet Primetime’s promotion criteria, the door was opened to focus on contextual constraints. For example, one participant with concerns that her research was not well known by her colleagues discussed how the workshop inspired her to more actively “educate [her] colleagues” on the value of her research rather than change her scholarly approach or accept “nonpromotion.” This example symbolizes how an agency-enhancing intervention, such as the workshop, facilitated her individual perspective

and action, which in turn opened up the possibility of shaping departmental norms on “appropriate” scholarly agendas. Carol Dweck’s (2000, 2006) work on growth-oriented and fixed mindsets speaks to this notion. If participants doubted their own abilities as scholars and believed their abilities were “fixed,” they would have greater doubts about advancement.

In sum, participant data revealed a number of factors that enhanced their sense of agency in career advancement, including the ADVANCE workshop itself, self-selected networks, and positive assessment of their abilities. Using the O’Meara et al. (2011) definition of agency, these factors enhanced both the actions associate professors took to be promoted and the way in which they perceived their goal. As Archer (2000, 2003, 2007) notes, we should not negate a structure’s influence on an individual, especially in terms of the power structures at play on today’s campuses that hinder women professors’ advancement. However, our data suggests that individuals can enhance their sense of agency in career advancement by awareness (through an agency-enhancing intervention), and broadening of supportive networks (through self-selected networks).

Discussion

The findings regarding hindrances to associate professor careers were not particularly surprising considering the extant literature on women’s experiences and this career stage (Allan, 2011; Glazer-Raymo, 2008; Valian, 1998). Concerns such as workloads misaligned to promotion criteria, negative and inadequate interactions with departmental colleagues, and pressure to conform to work practices that do not “fit” with the individual were pervasive and have been well documented in previous research and commentary on gender and academic careers. However, we believe a significant contribution of our study is its focus on the construct of sense of agency and how agency influences one’s perspectives and actions toward career advancement. Juxtaposing our findings with previous work on agency, specifically O’Meara et al. (2011) and Archer (2000, 2003, 2007), we put forth two key discussion points about the construct of sense of agency in career advancement.

Based on an analysis of our data in relation to agency theory, we highlight that agency is about awareness: an awareness of the individual's desired project, an awareness of strategies for the project, an awareness of the true root of the problem of reaching one's project, and an awareness of what the surrounding contexts affords the project in terms of constraints and opportunities. We argue that our participants, especially those at or above median time in rank, oftentimes found themselves in a reactive stance to a power structure that largely hindered their advancement. Through an agency-enhancing intervention, in this case the efforts of Primetime's ADVANCE team and workshop, our participants were ignited or reignited toward the project of promotion to full, and through this awareness, they crafted a proactive stance of perspectives and actions toward realizing their project within their given circumstances. However, awareness of one's agency requires both mental and physical space—what Archer (2000) refers to as the “inner conversation” (p. 36)—and mental and physical space for “inner conversations” is often a scarcity on today's college campuses. Yet, if we want faculty members to assume agency and proactively work toward their goals, such as career advancement, individuals and institutions will need to carve out that space, much like Primetime did with the workshop and follow-up programming.

Second, we put forth the notion that enhancing agency not only benefits individuals, but also has the potential to foster organizational change. In line with Archer's (2000, 2003, 2007) work, we heard stories of individuals being transformed by a sense of agency in career advancement, namely in their perception that promotion to full was a real possibility, and in their subsequent actions. Although the majority of their actions conformed to Primetime's current promotional criteria and institutional culture, there were cases in which individuals' agency transformed institutional practices or stances, albeit only in the beginning stages. The case of our participant committed to educating her department on the value of her nontraditional, cutting-edge research methods and topics, and noticing an increased willingness among her colleagues to better understand her work, serves as one example of an individual reshaping organizational culture. Researchers assert that departments follow a restrictive

range on evaluating appropriate scholarship for tenure/promotion (Trower, 2012), and this case pushes against the traditional stance about what is valuable in scholarship. As such, we suggest that fostering a sense of agency in career advancement among women faculty has the potential to not only increase the number of individual women achieving the rank of full, but also increase the likelihood that an institution addresses structural barriers that hinder women's advancement in academic careers. As a result, the onus does not just fall on the women themselves to “try harder” within a structure that works against them, but calls on institutions to change as well.

With these discussion points around the construct of agency in career advancement in mind, we next share suggestions for practice, both from the individual and institutional level. From an individual perspective, we first urge women associate faculty members (as well as all faculty members) to pursue agency-enhancing opportunities, whether they are institutionally supported, such as the ADVANCE workshop in this study, or self-initiated, such as seeking a supportive external professional network. Within these opportunities, individuals likely will gain information, clarification, strategies, and examples on how to advance their project of promotion. Participants in our study for the most part did not doubt their own abilities; they simply doubted if the political and workload constraints in their environment would allow them to succeed. Through an intervention aimed at learning about promotion requirements, reflecting on one's own accomplishments to date, and planning strategic career actions, participants felt empowered “to make advancement happen,” as well as potentially influence change in their institution's structure and culture.

From an institutional perspective, we encourage campuses to implement three programming and policymaking initiatives that address constraints and opportunities to career advancement for women academics rather than just simply increasing the ratios of women on college and university faculties (see Clark & Corcoran, 1986). First, colleges and universities should support professional development opportunities aimed at enhancing a sense of agency in career advancement; we witnessed firsthand the power of an intervention on the perspectives and actions of women faculty. Although all ranks and

professors would benefit from such programming, women associate professors would especially benefit due to additional individual and institutional constraints in which they face. Second, we urge academic leaders and department chairs to become knowledgeable about gender schemas and male-dominated power structures that negatively impact the evaluation of women academics and their work contributions and relegate women to vulnerable positions of misaligned workloads to the criteria for promotion (Valian, 1998). Similarly, department chairs and academic leaders need to address and re-adjust the most salient factors hindering the advancement of women faculty, namely workload distribution and transparency in the standards applied to promotion (Trower, 2012). Although we acknowledge that some of the onus is on associate women faculty to say “no” when they have overloaded plates, it is also a responsibility of the leadership of an organization to assign workload equitably, provide support in learning how to navigate the posttenure career (Neumann & Terosky, 2007), and decrease male-dominated subjectivity in promotion decisions (Valian, 1998). Lastly, we recommend that institutions support self-selected professional networks consisting of internal and/or external colleagues. Although there is a much needed place for formal mentoring between more senior departmental colleagues and associate professors, especially in terms of strategic mentoring in which feedback is given on research productivity and professional networks are expanded (Allan, 2011; Wasburn, 2007), our study highlights the need to consider new approaches to networking that include self-selection, external colleagues, and peer-to-peer mentoring.

As with all research studies, this study opens up further questions. What are the work environment characteristics most likely to enhance or constrain faculty sense of agency in career advancement? Relatedly, Campbell and O’Meara (2011) found that faculty perception of department work–life climate, person–department fit, and professional development resources influenced faculty sense of agency in career advancement and that their agency perspectives had a significant effect on their agency actions. Future research might explore the benefits of different kinds of faculty development and organizational interventions for women associate professors’ sense of agency in advance-

ment and, relatedly, their outcomes in advancement. We also encourage institutional researchers to more closely study interventions that positively influence women’s agency in advancement, as well as draw comparisons for men faculty and/or faculty of color. Likewise, this study provides a template for how agency might be explored in other areas, such as work–life balance, teaching development, and leadership.

We argue that the framework of agency is a useful tool for conceptualizing how individuals themselves can navigate and shape their professional goals and how institutions as a whole can reshape their structures into supportive mechanisms for women associate faculty’s advancement. In the words of Harvard educator Marshall Ganz (2010), agency is “more about grasping at possibility than conforming to probability,” (p. 511). As we found in the extant literature and in the results of this study, there is a strong narrative of constraint around career advancement for women associate faculty. However, by viewing associate women faculty’s career advancement through the framework of agency, we shift the conversation from one focused on the probability of constraints to one focused on the possibility of opportunities.

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