

Vicki Bier: Last group is the one on challenges facing senior women. Gerda?

Gerda Lerner: Well it turns out that we probably discussed almost the same thing that Lydia's panel discussed. And we came to similar conclusions. On the question of what obstructs practices, what practices and institutional constraint obstruct women in academic leadership? Well first of all, a history of historical discrimination against women in higher education. And the universities are structured to the male model and the male life cycle. And no concessions are made for the fact that women have different needs and different lifestyles. Then, a long history of low expectations of achievement – and I would stress that we have plenty of data that shows that when people have low expectations of achievement, the achievement gets lower. Then, very specifically, it was mentioned several times, that the structure of the university's power over faculty lies in departments and with department chairs, and that men are not used to dealing with women of their own age group of their own status on the basis of equality. And there is a gap there, I mean, many men are much more comfortable dealing with much younger women, and so when it comes to the chair level, they just don't have the consciousness of the hidden prejudices that are in their mind that they don't even, can't articulate if you ask them. They're not conscious of them. And then, generally, the mystification of processes by which you advance. It's just not explicit, it's not made mandatory that it be explicit, and so people go through the system and they don't really know what they're supposed to do, what are the steps. And that's where mentorship comes in, and men have a distinct advantage in mentorships. It seems that other men feel more comfortable mentoring men than they do women of their own age group. So these were the general obstacles that were identified, and also, the fact that women are – and I think men, too – in the process of academic leadership, and in the process of advancing to leadership, everybody thinks that they are alone, that they are the first person that's ever gone through that, they have no idea that this has been fought for over and over again in other places, that victories have been won in other departments that they have no idea exist. So mystification is a really big aspect the malfunction of the system in this regard. Now, for women there are additional factors, and that is that conflicts that arise with women who have any kind of family life, and we specifically discussed maternity leaves, tenure clocks that do not tick on account of maternity leaves. Even such small things as departmental meetings being held at times that are very difficult for women with children. Sort of the general insensitivity to the differences in demands that now, lately, I think as faculties are aging, also the care of elderly parents, of sick family members, which oftentimes falls more heavily on women than on men. Now, the other small pinpricks, but apparently pervasive, are the lack of professional positive feedback that women get in the way that, when they get an honor or when they are mentioned in the newspaper, or when they win a teaching award, nothing is made of it. That's okay. But if they don't do it, have it, this is very discouraging.

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So how have women successfully coped with this? Make a category – as individuals they either have to be superwomen, totally marvelous in every respect, and strong as an ox, and insensitive, and at the same time really sweet and nice. [Laughter] The kind of demonization of pioneering women that has been going on is a taboo secret – you're not supposed to talk about it. But I remember that a big honor that I had, when I was at the International Institute, I was introduced as Gerda Laserda. I mean, I couldn't be a nice person after that, whenever I see that, it's absurd. Longevity, persistence – this is something that Denice's life can teach us. You come back again. You don't give up. If you get off your feet, you turn ignore your feet and just go on to the next issue, and keep on fighting – that's necessary. Women have coped with it by ignoring insults and pursuing their own goals. They have also coped with it by sharing their experience with other women and gaining strength from that. One of the recommendations that was made is that women should learn how to say no to things that are, where they're channeled into activities that are going to be counter-productive to advancing professionally. So whether that means that they are more likely to get heavy-duty teaching assignments, or larger classes, or whatever it is, they should learn to say, "No, I won't do this." On the other hand, pushing in a positive way to be included in activities that help their career. And this was spelled out in a number of ways. And then women have learned to cope as a group by organizing other women faculty, either in their department, or as Denice did, in the whole field, and in that we can see a very imaginative and very strong and wonderful result in WISELI, with their search committee training for chairs of search committees, which is now an established institutional practice for the whole university and helped a lot. Now, other positive suggestions of what could be done are, first of all, the knowledge of existing professional rules and protections that are already in place in the university system should be shared with junior faculty. It should be mandated that every new incoming faculty gets informed of what protections she has as a woman. And I think we do that insofar as it's mandated by federal law, but we don't do it insofar as it's the knowledge of what really is here in the system. Then there was a suggestions, several suggestions, that we make it mandatory for search committees and tenure committees that they in advance of the search or the tenure decision, that they inform the candidate of the procedures and of the criteria that are going to be used, and that they stick with them and don't change them in the middle. And that would be another way of demystifying the process, and making it easier to blow over these struggles. Then the nominations for international and internal and external honors should be gender neutral. Well that is, of course, an obvious thing, to say that, that they should be. But the fact is they're not going to be gender neutral unless the people in power, or who makes those decisions, at whatever level, make it their business to check routinely whether they are in fact gender neutral. So when it turns out that you haven't recommended any women for national awards that they might be qualified for, well

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then it wasn't an accident. It wasn't because women weren't talented enough to be nominated. That's something that needs to be looked at.

And then that it is necessary for all these rules and good recommendations and best practices to be monitored, and gaps to be identified. And the recommendation of this group was that this could be done best on the level of the deans, that the deans could set up either ombudspersons, or committee, maybe the committee on diversity should have a special charge, that a particular line of decisions, you know, climate factors that affect women faculty are in fact observed and that sensitivity on those issues gets spread to the various level of the people in power. That's about the sum of it. Thank you.

[Applause]