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A Career with a View:
Agentic Perspectives of Women Faculty

This study examined how women faculty in one research university enacted agency via perspectives that facilitated their career advancement amidst gendered organizational practices. Archer's (2003) critical realist theory of agency and inner conversations and Acker's (2006) work on gendered organizations guided analysis. Four perspectives adopted by women associate and full professors to achieve their goals are described and analyzed. These four perspectives contributed toward agentic actions, as well as women's satisfaction and well-being. The strengths and the limitations of supporting agentic perspectives as a way to advance gender equity and organizational change are presented.

Keywords: faculty agency, career advancement, women faculty

> I find that when you can see a problem from lots of different perspectives you don't ever get locked down into "this is the only way to do something." Generally, when people seem to lose it completely, it's when they see that there's really only one choice here.

In this quote, taken from a tenured woman professor in a research university, three ideas emerge that contextualize this study. First, there is recognition of the presence of scripts, or grand narratives in the workplace that shape and dominate choices. Second, faculty struggle as these grand narratives dictate models for behavior and stances that do not fit with their social reality or priorities. Third, it is possible for faculty to

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craft alternatives to grand narratives through their framing of contexts and their role in them.

Assuming perspectives, or taking stances to achieve goals, is a form of agency. Although there is a tendency to frame agency in relation to specific actions taken to advance goals (such as asking for resources), in this article, I consider how agentic perspectives (such as framing a situation to see options) can be an equally important and powerful form of agency. To this end, the purpose of this article is to describe and analyze how women faculty in one research university *assumed agentic perspectives to facilitate career advancement.* In order to preemptively avoid a key critique of agency as a concept that underestimates the power of organizational structures and cultures in shaping agentic possibilities (Bourdieu, 1985; Giddens, 1979), this study simultaneously considers organizational influences on women's agentic perspectives.

Although the study of agency is important for all faculty, it is especially important for women faculty in research universities. Among the many contexts that contribute to the different experiences of women and men in research universities are segregated work roles, accumulated disadvantages in access to career resources, implicit bias and discrimination, fewer career sponsors, and ideal worker norms embedded in departments that devalue balance of work and family priorities (Acker, 2006; National Science Foundation (NSF), 2006; Valian, 1998). Each of these contexts can constrain women's career advancement (Fox, 2010; Gardner, 2012; Park, 1996). These organizational practices and approaches contribute to what Acker (1990, 2006) refers to as gendered organizations, and while there is clearly an extant body of work that has documented the disparities that grow from gendered organizations, there is only a limited body of work that has systematically addressed the ways in which women take agency.

This study contributes to the literature by showing how tenured women faculty craft and leverage perspectives as navigational tools amid inequitable, gendered dynamics. Recent work has considered how academics assume agency in crafting alternative narratives within organizational cultures (see Gonzales, 2012, 2013; Kahn, 2009; Rhoades, Kiyama, McCormick, & Quiroz, 2008; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2012). In a similar vein, I highlight the agentic perspectives, often inscribed in inner conversations (Archer, 2000, 2003, 2007), that women faculty created while embedded in these gendered organizational contexts. Revealing such perspectives is not an end to itself. Women's narratives of navigating gendered practices as they move forward in career advancement are instructive for those trying to improve gender equity, and retain and advance women faculty (Hart, 2007; Sule, 2011; Ward & Wolf-Wendel,

2012). Examining the role such perspectives play in women's careers shows the possibilities of agentic perspective-taking as women "lean in" to overcome gendered practices in career advancement, as well as the limitations of that agency when universities do not "lean back" with accountability for eliminating gendered practices (Sandberg, 2013).

The Study of Agency in Faculty Professional Lives

Agency has been studied in many social science disciplines and fields including sociology, psychology, human development, organizational behavior, cultural, standpoint, and realist. This study was guided by Margaret Archer's (2000, 2003, 2007) critical realist theory of human agency, related psychological and organizational studies of agency, and recent studies of faculty agency. I also drew upon research on faculty careers and gendered universities to contextualize the organizational settings where women professors assumed agentic perspectives.

Agency as Perspective-Taking

Agentic perspectives are a way of viewing a situation and one's role in it to advance goals. Typically, agentic perspectives emerge as a response to barriers and opportunities. As actors confront specific situations they engage in what Archer (2003) refers to as an "internal conversation" and "reflexive deliberation" to diagnose their own situations and interests and design responses (p.9). As a realist, Archer (2003) tends to frame such internal conversation as a precursor to agency expressed as action in the world. Yet, she also describes an active process wherein individuals engage personal powers in reflexive deliberations that reflect agency in and of themselves. In this article, I extend Archer's (2003) theory of human agency and internal conversation, by softening her realist stance and pointing to how internal conversations or perspectives can be agentic.

I do this for two reasons. First, much critical realist theory ostensibly describes agency as action but then uses examples that include internal acts, such as prioritizing, taking a stance, considering, and deciding (Bourdieu, 1985). In this way, agency theorists present a more holistic sense of agency as a process with stages and overlapping parts, where the framing of situations is a necessary precursor to actions taken. Second, survey research on faculty agency found (a) agency expressed itself in two distinct forms—perspective and behavior and (b) agentic perspective had a strong influence on agentic behavior (Campbell, 2012; Campbell & O'Meara, 2013). Therefore, it is important for current and future research to consider agency perspective and agency behavior

individually, as well as holistically, in interaction, and their influence on outcomes (O'Meara, Campbell, & Terosky, 2011).

Organizational Influences on Agentic Perspectives

Agentic perspectives, like agentic actions, emerge from, and are shaped by organizational and social contexts. That is, while the central focus of this article is the inner conversations of women participants, those inner conversations were framed, shaped, and cultivated by a larger organizational experience. Some of these organizational influences were positive, while others were not. For the purposes of this study, I focused on how the gendered nature of their research university influenced women's agentic perspectives, using Acker's (1990, 2006) theory of gendered organizations coupled with their participation in an NSF-ADVANCE program. The National Science Foundation's AD-VANCE grants provide higher education institutions the opportunity to diagnose and design interventions to address issues of gender equity and work environment for women faculty in STEM fields and the social sciences (NSF, 2006).

Acker's (1990, 2006) theory of gendered organizations outlines the overt and subtle ways in which every day organizational practices routinely favor men, devalue women and their contributions, and maintain women's lower status. Specifically, Acker (1990) noted five ways gender inequality manifests in organizations. First, gendering occurs in a division of labor wherein men are almost always in greater numbers in the highest positions of organizational power (e.g. higher faculty ranks, in midlevel and executive leadership). Second, gendered universities have symbols, language, and images that reinforce those same labor divisions (e.g., image of full professor or department chair as a successful White man). Third, in gendered universities interactions between actors "enact dominance and submission" wherein "men are the actors, women the emotional support" (p. 147) (e.g., women being interrupted more often than men in a meeting). Fourth, in gendered universities actors consciously or unconsciously take on gendered ways of thinking about work, and these gendered ways of thinking seep into individual identity (e.g., to be successful, I will have to work all the time). Fifth, gendering is embedded in organizational logic, such that systems of job evaluation and other managerial documents favor male characteristics and preferences for work roles (e.g., evaluative criteria favor obtaining federal research grants, yet there are fewer women in disciplines with the most opportunity to get federal funding). Although they vary in severity, Acker (2006) observes that all organizations have these aforementioned "inequality regimes" embedded in their practices. Thus, women

faculty forming agentic perspectives in this study did so while embedded in gendered organizational contexts likely to constrain their sense of agency in career advancement.

In addition to being women in a gendered university, participants in this study were tenured faculty. Tenure and promotion play important roles in faculty agency. Campbell (2012) found that agency in career advancement increases with career stage for tenure track faculty. This is consistent with research on faculty careers that shows that the achievement of tenure provides faculty greater job security, legitimacy, status, and perception of social capital (Tierney & Bensimon, 1996). Whereas pretenure faculty worry about whether they will receive tenure, relationships with colleagues, and their own productivity (Ponjuan, Conley, & Trower, 2011; Trower, 2012), associate and full professors have the benefit of a series of career successes behind them, adding (at least theoretically) to perception of their own agency, power, voice, and status in the academy. However, a lack of clarity around advancement criteria, mentoring, work overload, and work-life constraints merge to make associate professors, and women associate professors especially, among the least satisfied faculty (Baldwin, Lunceford, & Vanderlinden, 2005; Terosky, O'Meara, & Campbell, 2014; Terosky, Phifer, & Neumann, 2008).

One might assume that having achieved promotion to full professor, women full professors would be extremely agentic in seizing opportunities to advance into leadership roles in their units, colleges, or disciplinary associations. Although this may be true for many, it is important to remember that these women still exist in gendered institutions. Women full professors remain underrepresented in research universities and still have to deal with the "accumulated disadvantages" (Clark & Corcoran, 1986, p. 21) and accumulated "micro-inequities" (Stout et al., 2007, p. 137) that stem from gendered organizational practices. Whether the organizational practice relates to the distribution of committee work, access to decision-making, unequal pay, the privileging of masculine perspectives in meetings, or the devaluing of academic work to which they are committed, women full professors may also experience decreased agency from gendered organizational contexts (Bird, 2011; Glazer-Raymo, 2008; Toutkoushian & Conley, 2005; Valian, 1998).

There are, of course, many different ways individual women respond to the gendered nature of their workplace and field. Studies show some women commit to "working harder" (Acker & Feuerverger, 1996) and others resign as a result of negative work climates (Gardner, 2012). Even the most distinguished women professors often feel like "imposters" and are less confident than their male colleagues about their

accomplishments (Valian, 1998). Women faculty report being emotionally exhausted (Robertson & Watts, 2011), "powerless" and disengaged based on their experiences of subtle and overt sexism and other aspects of gendered universities (Bird, 2011; Gardner, 2012). Some women faculty may not see gendered organizational practices as a pattern affecting them and other women at all. Still other women craft alternatives to "grand narratives" operating in academe regarding what constitutes good scholarship (Stanley, 2007) or the separation of career and family (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2012).

There are also collective group and organizational responses to gendered dynamics in higher education institutions. Aligned in many ways with liberal feminist, collective strategies for change (Allan, 2011), the implied assumption in the National Science Foundation's ADVANCE program is making the issue of gender inequality an institutional problem, as opposed to an individual one (Cantor, 2011; NSF, 2006; Sturm, 2006). The program assumes that by enveloping women faculty in a larger collective of women with similar experiences, as well as men who act as allies toward gender equity, patterns of organizational practices that are disadvantaging women can be identified and changed. Participants in this study, though experiencing the organizational constraints of a gendered university, were also participants in a university ADVANCE program.

Given agentic perspectives are focused toward specific goals (i.e., career advancement) and emerge out of very specific organizational contexts where social identity interacts with that context (i.e. research university), there is reason to believe the agentic perspectives produced by White men, international faculty, and women of color, as groups, could be different based on the opportunities and constraints that they encounter. As such it makes sense to study women faculty first as a group, with recognition of intersectionality of identities, and compare those perspectives in subsequent research. For these reasons, I decided to examine the experiences of women faculty alone to create an in-depth understanding of their own agentic perspectives as women, as opposed to comparing genders or subgroups of women. However, I acknowledge the nuances, varying histories, and different experiences that exist among women. For instance, I acknowledge that White women have been the greatest beneficiaries of equity-oriented programming and efforts, yet women of color still struggle in distinct ways to advance (Turner, Gonzalez, & Wood, 2008). Additionally, women of international and immigrant statuses face other complex and nuanced barriers (Nuñez & Murakami-Ramalho, 2011). Other identities, such as sexual orientation, disciplinary identities, age, and family status intersect with gender identity. In

addition, as tenured professors with Ph.D's at a major research university, the women faculty in this study held more than a fair amount of social capital and privilege which supported their agency. For space reasons, I am unable to include each of these intersecting identities in this study. Research questions that guided this study included:

- What agentic perspectives did women faculty who had achieved tenure and promotion assume to guide their career advancement?
- How, why, and in what ways were these agentic perspectives facilitative of their career advancement goals?
- What organizational factors shaped these agentic perspectives?

Methods

The Institutional Context

The preceding literature portrays agency as assumed in a particular context and as influenced by that context. As such, I focused this study of women's agentic perspectives in a single research university. In addition, the research university in this study was one that was actively involved in trying to enhance women faculty members' career advancement. I had unprecedented access to these efforts and their evaluation. Next, I describe the institution, which I have fictitiously named.

Research University

Research University is in many respects a typical public, research extensive university. It is highly selective in terms of admissions, serves a little over 37,000 students (roughly 70% undergraduate), and it engages in extensive research activity, with over $500 million annual research expenditures. Women make up 46% of assistant professors, 35% of associate professors, and 23% of full professors at Research University. Research University received an NSF-ADVANCE grant that it paired with in-kind funds to launch an institution-wide effort to support the professional growth and retention of women faculty. Such efforts included mentoring programs, peer networks focused on career advancement, work-life and promotion and tenure policy reform, climate surveys and exit interviews, research seed grants, and efforts to increase access to career-related data. Institutional research collected for the purposes of the grant showed that like many of its AAU peers, women and faculty of color were more likely to resign than White, male faculty. Women faculty were also more likely than men to note in a climate survey that they felt they had to work harder to be perceived as legitimate scholars and had experienced discrimination.

Research Design

The primary data-gathering technique was interviews and focus groups with women associate and full professors in Research University. Interviews are an ideal method to uncover how actors make meaning of processes and structures (Schein, 1985; Yin, 2003). Archer (2003) observes that "the point of interviews is to identify inner mechanisms of thought on ultimate matters" (p. 159). Adopting Archer's logic, I undertook interviews and focus groups assuming that participants would be able to tell me something about the kinds of perspectives that were guiding them in career advancement.

Participants

Women faculty were invited for interviews by virtue of having been involved in one of two faculty development programs (one for full professors, one for associates). The associate professor program focused primarily on career advancement to full professor; the full professor program focused on participants' own professional growth, as well as their mentoring of other women. The invitation to be interviewed noted that I was engaged in a study of the professional growth experiences of faculty at the institution. The request for participation promised confidentiality and noted that all findings would be shared in aggregate form. Individual interviews were conducted with 25 women full professors, and 2 focus groups were conducted with 12 women associate professors (6 individuals in each). Table 1 and Table 2 provide further demographic data on participants. The interviews and focus groups were semi-structured, wherein all women faculty were asked similar sets of questions, but there was room for participants to further explore ideas that these questions raised for them.

Interview questions for both full and associate professors focused on faculty agentic perspectives, views, and ways of thinking that had helped and were currently helping participants to achieve their career goals. For example, participants were asked to share perspectives that they had adopted to help them move forward, including self-talk, or inner conversations that helped them to advance goals. They were asked to share their experiences of times when they recalled having been stuck or facing resistance and how they chose to view those situations. They were asked what they were thinking during these experiences and what they did. Participants were also asked if there were any specific aspects of their work environments and their identities in those work environments that influenced their agentic perspectives regarding career advancement. Examples of possible influences were given as

TABLE 1
Women Full Professor Interview Demographics

		Full Professors	
		N	%
Total		25	100%
Race	Am. Indian/Alaska Native	0	–
	Asian/Pacific Islander	2	8%
	Black/African American	2	8%
	Hispanic	1	4%
	White/Caucasian	20	80%
	Other	0	–
Discipline	Agriculture	2	8%
	Architecture	1	4%
	Biology	2	8%
	Business	3	12%
	Education	2	8%
	Engineering	2	8%
	English	2	8%
	Hearing & Speech	1	4%
	History	1	4%
	Information	1	4%
	Journalism	1	4%
	Kinesiology	1	4%
	Math	1	4%
	Psychology	1	4%
	Public Health	1	4%
	Sociology	1	4%
	Women's Studies	2	8%

prompts, such as resources, mentoring or colleague support, and work-life policies or practices. Given all of the participants were involved in one of two ADVANCE networks aimed at improving agency in career advancement, they were also invited to comment on whether and how their participation in such programs influenced their agentic perspectives toward career advancement. Confidentiality was provided to participants by eliminating names, masking identifiable comments, and masking the identity of the university.

TABLE 2

Women Associate Professor Focus Group Demographics

		Associate Professors	
		N	%
Total		12	100%
Race	Am. Indian/Alaska Native	0	−
	Asian/Pacific Islander	4	33.3%
	Black/African American	1	8.3%
	Hispanic	0	−
	White/Caucasian	7	58.3%
	Other	0	−
Discipline	American Studies	1	8.3%
	Community Health	1	8.3%
	Geology	1	8.3%
	German Studies	1	8.3%
	Government & Politics	1	8.3%
	Education	1	8.3%
	Bioscience & Biotechnology Research	1	8.3%
	Languages, Literatures & Cultures	1	8.3%
	Mechanical Engineering	1	8.3%
	Nutrition	1	8.3%
	Psychology	1	8.3%
	Survey Methodology	1	8.3%

Data Analysis

The analytic process for this study was iterative (Creswell, 2007). I went through each interview and focus group transcript and coded for the expression of an agentic perspective, and then I began a process of grouping like perspectives together in dominant themes. In analyzing the data, it became clear that agentic perspectives were most prevalent among full professors. This is consistent with the findings of previous faculty survey research (Campbell & O'Meara, 2013). I engaged in the same process of line-by-line coding to identify gendered practices present in situations where women noted agentic stances. During this process, a subtheme emerged, which was participation in ADVANCE networks. In another round of coding, I thus made three columns—one with agentic perspectives toward career advancement, another noting gendered practices, and a third noting ADVANCE influences. I then

made connections between the three columns, noting where and when agentic perspectives were responsive to gendered practices or shaped by ADVANCE participation.

The data analysis process for this study was therefore concept and data driven (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). Concept-driven coding involves the use of predetermined codes from the literature to guide analysis of the data. In this study Archer's (2000, 2003, 2007) theory of human agency as expressed through an internal conversation helped me identify when and how the women were taking perspectives on their careers and career goals. Acker's (1990, 2006) five ways in which organizations are gendered acted as concepts guiding analysis of how these women's organizational environments influenced their agentic perspectives toward career advancement. Finally, I used the concept of ADVANCE interventions and past work showing its benefits to women's careers (Cantor, 2011; NSF, 2006; Sturm, 2006) to identify relationships between perspectives and ADVANCE participation. Yet, I also allowed themes to emerge from the ground up (data-driven coding), directly from the voices of women faculty in this particular context. For example, themes related to women making up their minds that they would succeed and leave their university for another if things did not work out emerged more directly from the data than application of concepts to the data. Through this process, I identified four agentic perspectives women adopted toward career advancement. Each woman that participated in an interview noted at least one kind of agentic perspective and several noted up to four. The four agentic perspectives presented in this article were those that were repeated most often by participants in interviews and focus groups.

Limitations

Like any research project, this study has some limitations. First, there are no negative cases in this study. The study was limited to participants who had achieved tenure and promotion and were reflecting on the perspectives that had helped them get there and continue to advance. The study does not compare perspectives of women faculty who were and were not able to achieve the same goals. A comparative approach might have illuminated the power of agentic perspectives and should be done in future research. Second, participants all signed up for and participated in an ADVANCE faculty development activity. Although generalizability to all research faculty was never a goal of this project, it is important to observe that because of the sampling process this group could be more agentic by nature and reflective on their agency by virtue of the faculty development programs they participated in. Also, there

is the potential for participants to idealize the perspectives that helped them to advance when recalling them retrospectively.

Positionality and Trustworthiness

As in all qualitative inquiry, my position is an important feature of this study. I am committed to enhancing faculty agency in career advancement and the advancement of women in higher education more generally. I assume that agency is something that can be enhanced but that gendered practices exist in universities and inhibit agency. Consistent with feminist perspectives informing this work (Allan, 2011; Hart, 2007; Sule, 2011), I believe my own experiences as a woman in academia who studies faculty careers and has experienced gendered practices is not a limitation but an asset that enriches the analysis. At the same time, I wanted to balance my own interpretations of the findings with those that might emerge from those with different positions vis-a-vis this content. To accomplish this and to ensure trustworthiness of the data, I relied on several well-established practices. I maintained an audit trail to account for objective observations and potential biases, and I engaged in debriefing of initial conclusions with three peer researchers who acted as critical readers and have not been involved with ADVANCE projects. I engaged in member-checking transcripts with participants (Creswell, 2007). I also presented key findings to a subset of participants (associate and full), which both added to and confirmed the results.

Findings

In this section, I present four agentic perspectives. These perspectives represent patterns of thought by associate and full professors relative to their goals of career advancement. Perspectives are presented in order of their prominence in the data. In each subsection, I use a one-sentence header to describe the perspective. The header is followed by quote(s) that illustrate the perspective. I then present a fuller discussion of the perspective, its prevalence and its meaning for women faculty. I also discuss specific gendered organizational practices in relation to the perspective. When appropriate, I mention the role of ADVANCE participation in shaping participant consciousness.

"I keep going."

I did have two kids, I had one just when I started at Research University and another [a few years later], and [my department chair] was really mad

that I was having a second child. He yelled at me in the office. I told him the minute I knew, and he yelled at me and said I screwed up his schedule, that I should have told him earlier. I was sobbing in my office, because I felt like I had just worked so hard and I was doing everything they wanted me to do and now he was telling me I shouldn't be having a second child when you'd think someone should be happy for you. But I just kept going. [I] said, "Okay, it's a setback, but there will be another day."

Women faculty in this study described many obstacles they faced in pursuit of career advancement. Some of these obstacles were commonly experienced obstacles for all faculty, such as having articles rejected, pressures for greater productivity, or obtaining external funding. Other obstacles were gendered organizational practices as in the example above. In both cases, a prominent perspective that women faculty in this study seemed to take in response to such situations, was, "I will keep going anyway." This "keep going" perspective was present in all of the full professor interviews, and both associate professor focus groups.

Often repeated phrases by women faculty related to this theme were that they simply decided to "keep going," "work hard," "do all that they could," and "make it work." One full professor described maintaining an internal mantra that she should just keep trying and when things go wrong, like when a "paper goes down" she should just revise and resubmit it. One full professor noted: "I think my mid-west work ethic is like you get in there, and you figure it out, and you do your best. And I think that carried me a long way." Another noted she made a conscious effort to "dig in her heels" and keep publishing and working hard despite bad, gendered politics in her department. An associate professor described frustrations with student gender bias and increasing publication productivity standards in her unit and said: "but what I've decided for myself is that it is not going to stop me from what I want to achieve, and I am going to plow through it and keep moving." A full professor told a story of receiving an initial negative tenure decision in a previous institution, which was later over-turned. Although upset by the situation, she said she decided not to allow herself to "dwell" on it but instead to keep doing her job.

This perspective of "I just keep going" seemed to work in the favor of women's career advancement in several ways. First, women faculty believed that by adopting this perspective they seemed to colleagues (at least outwardly) to be tougher, less emotional in the face of constraints. This kind of toughness was valued in their departments and by taking this stance, they appeared to others to be stronger. Second, the "just keep going" stance allowed them to continue to collect needed social

capital (via publishing, getting grants, extending networks) to use as armor against constraints they brushed up against. Third, this perspective of just keep going meant that they did not dwell on micropolitics, difficult people or other things in their way but instead put their time, energy, and focus into their work and career advancement.

Participants were aware their perspective of "just keep going" was gendered, related to being a woman who sought career advancement in a research university. Participants observed there was a sense of proving oneself that was a greater burden for women and required higher productivity. One full professor said: "Again, I think I just knew I needed to work harder as a woman." This stance reflects Acker's (2006) description of how gendered ways of thinking seep into individual identity, only to become further inscribed in organizational practices and culture. Especially women full professors seemed to accept the fact that women faculty had to develop an ability to be more productive than male peers, *while* ignoring sexist, racist, and homophobic comments and approaches. One full professor noted: "I think, dealing in an all male environment, particularly, you had to be quite assertive and . . . you know, because I think to survive sometimes you have to, um, desensitize yourself." Another full professor said:

> I feel like you have to be awful tough to live through some of the stuff you have to live through. Even to this day, I still feel like there's academic bullying. I'm regularly told by my supervisors that I'm not doing enough, or I shouldn't be doing one thing or another, again, because it doesn't suit their vision of things. But I just ignore it and keep going.

In these examples, and in the story of the department chair yelling at the faculty member for having a second child and ruining his class schedule, we see classic interactions between actors that illustrate dominance and submission (Acker, 1990; 2006). In addition, the fact that women felt they had to be tough and ignore their own emotions is reflective of ideal worker norms of separating the personal and professional, negating emotion and intuition. Women faculty recognized these realities as unfair, but also explained that their "just keep going" inner conversation facilitated their staying focused and stalwart in the face of gendered practices and general challenges.

This perspective was framed in "I" terms, with the onus on the woman and her agency to move past gendered practices alone. This was in part due to the nature of interview questions focusing on individual career experiences. However, there was some evidence participation in ADVANCE programs helped women see ways they might "overcome" together. One full professor noted "Because of ADVANCE, I [now

have] a really strong senior faculty woman network for myself, and that's something I never knew I was missing, but my God, I feel like I could call up on any one of these women now and say, 'I've got a problem. Can you help me? You know I might not need to go to the ombudsman next time.'" Women full professors felt that they had more power by virtue of their connections, similar to Hart's (2007) findings related to women's groups organizing to create gender equity.

"I will do work that is meaningful to me."

> But I've also made the decision, which also may delay my ability to move forward, [which] 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. I decided not to write another book but to focus on my design practice, and that's a harder route in terms of getting promotion, because people understand what a book is. [. . .] I am very proud of the research that I did, but when I stepped back and thought about it, ten years from now and look[ing] at what my accomplishments were, I would ultimately want to look at myself as someone who made things . . . with two hands. That may lead me to not to be able to come up, and I won't have as good of a case in three years, but at the same time . . . it leads me to continue doing the kind of work that I ultimately love.

Another pervasive perspective that women associated with career advancement was the opportunity to pursue meaningful work. This perspective was present in 23 of 25 of the full professor interviews and both associate professor focus groups. Women faculty noted that often the requirements for promotion and tenure in their field and at Research University required them to focus on certain types of research, or obtaining certain kinds of grants that were not their passion. However, they had adopted a stance or perspective to not "cave in" to that pressure but instead to follow their intellectual passions. For example, one associate professor said:

> So, I think that there is another dynamic for a lot of people as well, and I think if you get bogged down in doing only what the university says you have to do and not doing something that you . . . I care about my work. Whether they count the work . . . it makes you happy. And that's the kind of decision I think you have to make. And I have people tell me I shouldn't do the work that I am doing, it's too narrow, but it makes my heart, and it makes me happy.

In another example, a full professor observed that: "I had my own beliefs about what questions we should be asking and how we should

be going about answering them that came out of my PhD work, and I wasn't going to switch gears just because everybody else was doing this if I didn't think that was the right thing to do." Another full professor, looking back on her career, said:

> I stuck to what my passion was for research. I had been advised strongly from various different places that my research path was not productive in the tenure homes that I was in, and I basically said to myself and to the people I reported to that I had to do the best research path for me, and if it wasn't good enough for tenure at least it would get me the next good job that I needed.

Many of the constraints that women faculty experienced such as pressures to prioritize different kinds of work or pursue topics that were not meaningful to them were reflective of gendered organizational practices. For example, these women operated in departments where there were more men in evaluation roles and less credit or recognition given to work they valued—including interdisciplinary research, qualitative research methods, teaching and mentoring, and service roles. Senior colleagues (some well-intentioned) attempted to dominate these women faculty members' choices by encouraging them to divert their priorities more toward disciplinary traditions. Women faculty described a resistance to these gendered practices and norms in deciding internally that they would focus on work they found meaningful regardless of how it would "count." Also, participation in ADVANCE seemed to facilitate some women faculty doing work that was meaningful to them in the ways they wanted to do it. For example, one associate professor observed that the ADVANCE program was helpful in order to "talk to some people about this without getting anyone in trouble or hearing people's stories about when someone grabs onto you and publishes over you and being a sidekick. I don't want to be a sidekick; that is not going to help me become full." This associate professor did not want to engage the hierarchy in her department to address gender equity issues. Rather, her involvement in ADVANCE allowed her to look "sideways" for strategies to overcome gendered practices.

The women faculty in this study described several ways in which this perspective of doing meaningful work paid off, both on an everyday basis and long term in their careers. A full professor said that because she followed her intellectual passions, it sustained her "through long and lonely hours, days, and months without supervision." Likewise, she observed that she had not liked what she was doing when in industry, but had purposefully decided to focus as an academic in an area that made her happy with "how she was spending her time." Because of this,

she was willing to put in extra hours, experienced her work as fun, and found greater satisfaction in her work-life. Overall, there was a general sense that assuming a perspective of pursuing meaningful work had helped these women faculty to be more productive, as well as satisfied in their careers.

"I can overcome . . . and succeed."

> My change in perspective has been actually maybe I can overcome some of the issues that actually come up. So I said there are some roadblocks and I am working on them.

Women faculty talked very directly about internal decisions they had made in the face of obstacles. They described specific stances they had taken, with very concrete imagined futures. This perspective was present in 22 of the 25 full professor interviews and both associate professor focus groups. Although related to the perspective of "keep going," this perspective was distinct in having specific obstacles in view that the participant decided she would overcome, as opposed to a more general decision to persist. A second part of the perspective captured in the phrase, ". . . and succeed," relates to participants "making up their mind" that they would achieve tenure and promotion. As such, this perspective had both short-term and long-term views. Short-term, participants assumed they could overcome specific, often gendered obstacles and organizational practices, and long-term they assumed they would achieve goals related to career advancement.

There were two ways in which this perspective became important. First, this perspective was important as a general approach to being different or unique in some significant way and trying to move up the career ladder. Many women faculty felt they themselves, or their scholarly work, did not "fit" into their institutional reward systems and field norms. The ways in which women participants felt they did not "fit" reflect Acker's (1990; 2006) reference to gendered divisions of labor, work priorities and choice of research topics and methodologies, the perceived pace of work, and priority of work over other life goals. Women in this study described interacting with these gendered organizational contexts, considering them carefully and intentionally taking a stance. They decided that while the "fit" issues or other aspects of the barrier they faced were formidable, they could be overcome, and that they would be someone who overcame them. For example, in one illustrative case, a woman full professor explained her lack of research fit and response as follows:

> You also cannot let other people tell you who you are, and a lot of people tried to do that over the years to me, maybe because I'm a woman, maybe because I do things very differently, maybe because I never quite fit. If you don't fit you have to build your own house. You know, oh well. You can't just buy a pre-furnished house. You're gonna have to build the structure yourself.

Overcoming the obstacle of "fit" for this faculty member meant assuming a stance that she could create new structures to replace those that limited her before.

In several cases, obstacles were rejected research articles or lines of inquiry. For example one full professor said: "When I first got hired at Research University I submitted all of my papers for my dissertation, and they all got rejected. And I thought, 'Can I do this? I can't possibly be an academic,' but you know the next day I just dusted them off, revised them and resent, and they all got published." In this example, it is important to note that it is not as if deciding to overcome the rejection meant the participant was not going to be upset or disappointed about what had happened. However, her agentic perspective fueled how she responded. She decided that it was possible to overcome the rejection.

In another example, a full professor recalled that when she was eight months pregnant she went to her department chair to ask for leave the following semester. He looked at her and asked why. She told him to care for her child. He then asked her if another faculty member was hit by a bus should he also receive leave? This example reflects many aspects of Acker's (1990, 2006) notions of gendered organizational practices, including acts of dominance, a division of labor, gendered organizational logic, and ideal worker norms. Not surprisingly, the department chair never approved formal parental leave, but the participant decided his recalcitrance was something she could overcome. She made arrangements with colleagues to cover her classes during the same period of time. By doing so, she brought the situation back under her own control and was able to accomplish her goal of not losing her job while caring for her child.

The second part of this perspective related to the "long view" that the participant would overcome immediate obstacles *and* achieve long-term goals. Participants emphasized how important it was that they "made their mind up" first, and then went and did what they needed to do to make it happen. For example, a full professor said: "Basically, I made my mind up that I was going to succeed." Another said, "Once I decided I was gonna do it, I went out and did it." Several full professors observed that they had noticed this "making up your mind" was something many women associate professors they knew had not done. One

associate professor explained it was critical in her case to have decided she was going to "take that little extra push that yeah, I wanna take that next step." A full professor said: "I mean you have to have your mind set when you start out as an untenured assistant professor that your goal is to be a full professor, and I am not sure that is everybody's goal."

Women faculty explained that "making up their minds" strengthened their resolve, confidence, and ability to "stay on track." They reported that the act of visualizing the finish line and making up their mind that they would cross it aided their satisfaction and success in doing so. In sum, the perspective that these women faculty maintained that they could overcome specific obstacles today and cross the goalposts they had identified for themselves down the road helped them to navigate both general obstacles and gendered organizational practices.

Most of the participants framed this perspective as one of overcoming gendered practices individually. However, there was some evidence that participation in ADVANCE programs had impacted women's consciousness of the possibility of collective responses to gendered obstacles. One full professor noted an ADVANCE colleague asked her to be on the university senate, and she said: "I want no part of walking down the hill and sitting at a table with 20 other people, 18 of them being men and acting like it isn't a problem—which has happened to me in previous years. And she said to me, I guarantee that won't happen here, and if it does I will help you out. And I like the power of that. Whereas before I wouldn't have known, you know?" A full professor said: "I think that people will get that they cannot do things unnoticed, and yes, there's gonna be a bunch of women that may end up of making life crazy and a little more difficult (laughs) because sorry, somebody is watching." Thus, in a few instances participants had begun to frame gendered obstacles in ways that included collective consciousness and framing of solutions.

"I see choices and I can create choices."

When I would have to go talk to him I would have to bring a can of Coke with a straw in it, so that every time I was going to cry I could sip it. And basically, what happened is at some point I just said to myself, "Okay, I need to get out of here." And to get out of here I need to publish. So, it doesn't matter whether I stay or go. What I need to do is exactly the same thing. And so, all my energy went to that.

Women participants also assumed agency by intentionally structuring situations that allowed them to see and create choices. This perspective

was present in 21 of 25 full professor interviews and one associate professor focus group. These choices varied in content, but they included ways to make the case for full professor, the kinds of work they would prioritize, and ways to navigate difficult, often sexist relationships with colleagues.

For example, in the case of the participant whose words began this section, a woman full professor recalled being required by her department chair to go and meet with a senior colleague. He was more prolific than she and constantly critiqued her work and told her to write more. Although she loved her research, she found him condescending and she did not work at the same frenzied pace. In order to get out from under his "supervision," she needed to advance in her career or leave. She decided to turn her anger and frustration into a stance, or a way of viewing the situation that would help her see options and strategies to accomplish goals.

Women faculty in this study were conscious that often this stance—to decide to see choices in difficult situations—opposed normative, well-accepted and authoritative scripts on their campus, and in their field, about the one way something had to be done. These "grand narratives" (Stanley, 2007) were often gendered, reflecting organizational logic that favored ideal worker norms, images of men as successful academics, career mobility, and conceptions of academic identity. In another example, an associate professor described being told by senior colleagues and administrators that recruiting multiple outside offers, even from institutions where she had no intention of going, was the only way to achieve a salary increase. She said: "But, as a leader I can also map a different route." She decided to assume that there was more than one way to obtain a salary increase. She went after some large grants and then renegotiated her salary as part of the award process. One full professor recalled being told by a colleague there were two ways to become a full professor. One way was to emphasize research only and go the fast-track to promotion. A second way was to be content as an associate professor for over 20 years and be promoted having done a full portfolio of teaching, research, and service. The now full professor said: "And he's like, 'those are your two choices.' And I said, 'No, those are not my two choices." She decided to reject those choices and adopt a third way, wherein she integrated her research with her teaching and service and had a full portfolio but in a shorter period of time.

Similarly, an associate professor described how participation in an ADVANCE workshop allowed her to see choices. She recalled an administrator who shared her own "inspirational non-traditional trajectory," which included having several children and not moving from as-

sociate to full professor "very fast." Given how successful this woman had been subsequently at Research University, the participant was able to see past the gendered logic that the only legitimate way to be a good scholar was to move through the ranks swiftly. Thus, as she saw her story, in the context of others in the ADVANCE program, she came to view her situation as having more options than otherwise might be assumed. Another associate professor said: ADVANCE is "opening the eyes of women" to "connections and in-roads they wouldn't have had."

In conclusion, women faculty experienced gendered practices that constrained their agency in career advancement. In many cases, they chose to assume agency to achieve their goals despite such negative experiences. By nature of the focus here on agentic perspectives toward individual career advancement, most of the women framed their experiences individually (e.g., "I keep going," "I can overcome"). However, there was some evidence that participation in Research University's ADVANCE program shaped a consciousness that gendered practices were patterns of actions and structures affecting other women, and that there were things that could be done individually and collectively to change or move beyond them. In the next section I consider the strengths and limitations of supporting agentic perspectives as a means toward transforming gendered practices and institutions.

Discussion and Implications

Agentic perspectives play an important role in career advancement and toward gender equity, as do interventions like ADVANCE. However, neither individual career advancement nor organizational change will be successful unless agentic perspectives lead to agentic actions, and unless gendered organizational practices are systematically and continuously diagnosed and addressed by actors within an organization.

Agentic perspectives played critical roles in sustaining, retaining, and advancing women faculty in organizational systems not yet made for them. For example, a participant noted she had never quite fit the proverbial "houses" she had found in the academy (departments, field, university) and so had decided internally to "build her own house." In this image there is acknowledgement of individual women, and women as a group, not yet fitting in Research University, an organization with gendered organizational practices and norms.

What, then, were women scholars to do? Few would argue that the acts of dominance, sexist behavior, or gendered logics women had to endure were fair, or did not need to be eliminated. However, that does not change the fact that they existed as contexts in their careers and

work-lives. These women needed a way to evaluate these barriers in light of their specific goals and design responses. In other words, they needed to enact a form of agency, and that is what they did. For example, when lambasted for having a second child a participant decided she could survive this episode and keep going, become depressed, or leave her university. To advance the work and career that she felt was important, she committed to just keep going. Many would prefer this story to end in the department chair getting fired, the university instituting new department chair training on implicit bias, and creating an automatic parental leave program. However, it is not realistic to assume that every woman faculty member, when facing every gendered organizational practice, will take on the university as a result, and particularly not alone. Many women have chosen to leave the academy in similar circumstances (Gardner, 2012; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2012), or to make other accommodations they later regret, such as having fewer children than they wanted to because of ideal worker norms in the professoriate (Ecklund & Lincoln, 2011).

Women in this study described agentic perspectives as the basis for their navigation. These perspectives enhanced the sense of control they felt and helped them to focus and prioritize in career contexts that were often ambiguous and project themselves into the future. The best examples of this last point were participants who said you have to imagine yourself as a full professor and decide you will make that happen. Neck and Manz (1992) talk about the role of such self-talk in the practice strategies of Olympic teams, and Weick (1979) described this projection of desired self into future as "future perfect thinking." Inner conversations positively influenced career advancement by creating a sort of rehearsal or symbolically imagined result of what they wanted to happen (Manz, 1992). This is similar to Clegg's (2005) finding that in everyday practices faculty write scripts in their heads for future "unscripted" performances. In doing so, they bring their full selves and larger contexts into view and exert will by imagining the future they prefer.

A critical part of changing any gendered organization, and the "inequality regimes" within them (Acker, 2006), is in fact changing the stances and ways women (and men) think about women's career advancement in these environments. Women faculty, who assumed agentic perspectives in response to gendered logics, were in many cases also resisting or changing the power of those logics, thus contributing to organizational change through the stances they were taking. For example, many perspectives that women adopted were in direct response (via opposition, deviance) to grand narratives about the kinds of research to prioritize, how much work was appropriate, or when it was appropriate

to balance work and life priorities. Each time a women faculty member decided to resist gendered logics about ideal worker norms and career advancement, decided to pursue meaningful work as a way of advancing, or "build new houses" or models for their work and advancement, she was in part changing the institution. Thus, agentic perspectives are important to understand as ways to influence organizational change toward gender equity.

This study focused on assuming agentic perspectives toward career advancement, but taking agentic actions was equally important in participants' career narratives, as they were in Baez's (2000) work on faculty of color choosing service assignments as a form of critical agency, and Gonzales' (2012, 2013) work on faculty resisting striving cultures. Faculty had to not only decide to keep going but to keep revising and resubmitting articles. They had to not only see choices out of situations where they were being dominated but also had to put such choices into action. As in previous studies, agentic perspectives were not always the cause of agentic actions but often preceded and accompanied them (Campbell, 2012; O'Meara & Campbell, 2011).

Turning to the limits of agentic perspectives, it is interesting to note how many of the women participants in this study, especially those full professors in rank and position for some time, had decided internally to keep going, overcome, and otherwise ignore gendered organizational practices rather than work collectively with other women or men to address them. Participants often told stories where the agentic perspective they adopted was to get around the gendered organizational practice rather than framing those situations as ones they and others ("we") had to change and overcome together. Examples include the department chair refusing parental leave or verbally abusing someone who asks for one, or the faculty members who learned to be tough, or to accept advice they did not need as a way of making it through to advancement. Few women shared experiences, other than those related to their involvement in the ADVANCE project, of collective influences on their agentic perspectives. Such examples might have included participation in women in science organizations, women's commissions, or diversity councils. Even in observing the benefits of ADVANCE participation, participants acknowledged a preference for working around gendered organizational practices rather than systematically working to change them, individually or collectively. An associate professor noted, for example, that she appreciated having a place to talk about gendered organizational practices without "getting someone in trouble," and a full professor was relieved her new network might mean she did not have to engage with the ombudsman. Although such strategies provide less

personal risk to careers, they also suggest less opportunity for systematic diagnosis of gendered institutional practices.

Also, several agentic perspectives expressed by participants, such as the need for women to stay tough amid academic bullying and show no emotion, were reflective of masculine, patriarchal norms or logics that would have to be changed in order to see greater gender equity. Acker (2006) observed, "a belief that there is no point in challenging the fundamental gender, race, and class nature of things is a form of control. These are internalized, often invisible controls" (p. 454). Although individual women were served by navigating around and persisting despite gendered practices, and the status of women in general was arguably improved by more women advancing into more powerful positions in Research University, the stance that women had to individually overcome such gendered practices maintains the status quo. Liberal and radical feminist approaches to the same situations would favor framing the issue as a collective problem and developing policies such as parental leave and transparent and fair workload adjustments to address them rather than simply to keep going to overcome gendered practices (Allan, 2011).

Relatedly, a danger of focusing on women's agency in research universities, absent discussions of structure, is that it can strengthen the meritocratic, individualistic stories of success that dominate in the West. As Allan's (2003, 2012) work suggests, this can position women with agency as those "extraordinary women" who advance, and those without agency as victims who do not. This positioning reinforces acceptance of the status quo and an implicit assumption that structural and organizational barriers are bearable if one simply works hard enough. Also, socialization processes around career advancement are extremely strong forces, as shown by Tierney and Bensimon (1996). Many women faculty viewed the agency needed when an article was rejected the same way as when they encountered an unfair evaluation standard or gendered division of labor (i.e., it was something to ignore, overcome, or otherwise move through). As such, norms of the academy more generally, such as an individualistic approach to careers and solving problems, or the greater social capital one experiences with tenure, also shaped agentic stances.

Next steps for this research area are to compare the experiences of faculty taking agency to those who are stuck and unable to assume agency at particular points in their careers. In-depth career portraits and case studies might examine the relationships between agentic perspectives and actions and career outcomes (e.g., satisfaction, retention, advancement, professional growth). Also, it is important to further study

differences among subgroups of women by career stage, and among subgroups of faculty of color, and discipline.

This study also has implications for faculty development, and the creation of strategic social networks to reduce inequality. Neumann, Terosky, and Schell (2006) observe "Developing agency requires time and effort. It requires thought, reflection, learning through trial and error, creativity, continuing assessment and no doubt, persistence and courage" (p. 115). The perspectives presented in this study acted as tools that women faculty crafted over time to achieve their goals and were particularly prevalent among full professors. As such, faculty professional development efforts might include intentional multigenerational conversations around agentic perspectives and actions in career advancement. Junior faculty could benefit from hearing about the ways in which women faculty viewed the situations they faced that sustained and fueled their achievement of goals, which was one of the implicit goals of this work and of the ADVANCE project overall. This could be especially helpful to women associate professors who report feeling stuck, academic parents struggling with ideal worker norms, and interdisciplinary researchers who find they have to "build their own house."

In addition, scholars who study social networks and organizational change have observed that "relationships within a system matter to enacting change (Daly, 2010, p. 2)." Faculty and administrators interested in improving the career advancement and agency of women faculty in research universities should harness the full strength of existing networks and relationships between women faculty and allies of women faculty to share information, provide mentoring, create greater transparency and accountability regarding what counts for promotion, and collectively problem-solve the structures and cultures thwarting the advancement of women. Acker (2006) observes that research and change efforts that "target a limited set of inequality producing mechanisms" seem to be more likely to succeed in diagnosis and intervention (Acker, 2006, p. 455). Thus, collective, networked actions that target fair workload or salaries, lab space, or work-life policies are likely to be most effective. Such actions have the potential to reduce gendered thinking and the sense that women faculty, like those in this study, have to "keep going," and overcome gendered organizational practices alone (Hart, 2007; Kezar & Lester, 2009).

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