

CAREER STRATEGIES FOR WOMEN IN ACADEME

ARMING ATHENA

Lynn H. Collins
Joan C. Chrisler
Cathryn Quina
Editors

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CAREER STRATEGIES
FOR WOMEN
IN ACADEME

ARMING ATHENA

To the many incarnations of Athena
—ancient and modern



Foreword

A Feminist Classicist

Reflects on Athena

Who is Athena that she has been chosen as patron and paradigm of women academics in the title of this book? I'd like to begin with a review of Athena's roles and activities for those readers whose memory of Greek mythology is dim.

Athena is as respected, appealing, versatile, balanced, and fully realized a figure as any found in ancient myth. As the Greek goddess of wisdom, warfare, and handicrafts, she is the favorite daughter of the chief god Zeus, born from his head as the reified representation of his wise counsel. Associated with the owl and the olive tree, she is frequently described by the epithet "grey-eyed" (*glaukopis*), which many believe refers not so much to her eye color as the bright-eyed mental alertness that is her very essence. As the Roman goddess Minerva, she shared a place of distinction with Jupiter and Juno, king of the gods and his consort, and the three were revered throughout the Roman world as the Capitoline Triad.

Armed from birth with helmet, spear, and shield, she is associated with the Aegis, a distinctive armor variously thought of as either a breastplate or a fringed cape. It displayed the severed snaky head of the monstrous Gorgon, Medusa, and in common parlance has become synonymous with the notion of protection. As favored daughter of Zeus, Athena has access to his thunderbolts as well. Born shouting her war cry, she takes an active part in battle, as suggested by her epithet *Promachos* (fighter in the front

lines), yet she is not hated for mindless blood lust, as is her half-brother Ares. Rather, she is champion of defensive war and savior of cities (Athena Polias at Athens; her icon, the Palladium, guarantees the continued existence of Troy).

A remarkably autonomous figure for patriarchal Greece, Athena is one of only three goddesses (the others are Artemis and Hestia) without consort and allowed to retain her status as virgin (Athena Parthenos) in perpetuity.

Known for her active and creative engagement with kings and later the city-state (polis), she is associated with success (either as Athena Nike or accompanied by Nike, the goddess of victory). She is consistently successful, whether in her pro-Greek partisanship during the Trojan War, or in her victory over her uncle, Poseidon, for the position of eponymous patron of the city of Athens, the city that defines Greece culturally, which was called by its leader Pericles the very "education" (paedeia) of Greece.

In fact, Athena herself is preeminently a teacher who makes the name Mentor (one of her disguises) a byword for wise nurturance. She is a force for civilization who associates herself with those movements (e.g., the defeat of the Giants) that established the younger, more enlightened Olympian gods in power. She is associated with various skills and artifacts, both those traditionally feminine and masculine: patron of textile arts, she is the teacher of these skills to female figures from Pandora to Arachne, and couturier to the gods as well. She is inventor of the war chariot, of pottery, of the flute, and of carpentry: She taught the renowned Cretan inventor Daedalus carpentry, helped build the ship *Argo*, and devised the Trojan horse.

Although herself a virgin by choice, she promotes fertility in the lands she favors, as evidenced by her gift of the olive tree to Athens in her contest with Poseidon. Unlike the aloof Artemis, or the often angry and vengeful Hera, Athena is a good figure to have on one's side. In fact, she is the patron of many a major hero, from Jason (leader of the Argonauts, who searched for the Golden Fleece) to the Athenian king Erichthonius, to whom she served as foster mother. Athena provides Heracles with the tools and stratagems he needs to perform his labors and rid the world of monsters, as she does Perseus in his victory over Medusa. It is her idea for that hero to use his shield as a mirror, thus avoiding gazing directly at the Gorgon, who had turned other heroes to stone for doing precisely that. In the Trojan War, Athena champions the Greek hero Achilles, restraining him from making the rash mistake of slaying his commander-in-chief, Agamemnon, in the course of a quarrel, and delivering to him Hector, the Trojan champion whom she had beguiled into battle by impersonating his brother,

Deiphobos, and then deserting him. Most especially, Athena is linked with Odysseus, whose cunning matches her own, and in whom she delights for his reflection of her mental agility, power tempered by calculation, and patience in waiting for the opportune moment to act. He knows more than any other hero when to suffer abuse in silence and when to assert himself, when to assume a false identity and when to reveal himself. She is the one who helps him succeed in his contest with Ajax over the armor of the dead Achilles, and she is never far from exerting a wise and supportive influence over Odysseus, his wife Penelope, and his son Telemachus. She takes the initiative in stirring the gods to action when her favorite is held captive by the nymph Calypso, prompts Telemachus to embark on a search for his father, plants in Penelope's mind the device of challenging her unwelcome suitors to a contest for her hand in marriage, and in the guise of the family tutor, Mentor, counsels Odysseus before his battle with the suitors, and later in dealing with the slain suitors' aggrieved families.

Finally, she acts as mediator between conflicting claims; she prefers respect, reconciliation, and persuasion to brute force. Perhaps the chief expression of this aspect of Athena is in the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus, the dramatic trilogy that recounts Clytemnestra's murder of her husband Agamemnon on his return from Troy and their son Orestes's retaliatory matricide. Although he acted on Apollo's instruction, he is pursued by the matriarchal snake-haired Furies, goddesses of blood-guilt and vendetta. When the distraught youth takes refuge at Athens, a city associated—by the Athenians—with the forces of enlightenment, Athena saves him by establishing the Areopagus, a homicide court to try capital murder cases, and casts the tie-breaking vote to acquit. When the enraged Furies threaten Athens with blight, she manages to win them over and install them as Eumenides (Kindly Ones) who promote fertility and prosperity; their menacing torches are transformed into those of Athenian citizens in procession, celebrating the Panathenaia festival and bringing their gift of a new peplos (robe) to their benefactress, Athena, patron of Athens and the political process.

Wise, inventive, versatile, powerfully armed yet a skilled diplomat, autonomous yet an active collaborator in the civilizing process, a teacher, mentor, and friend, brave and successful, Athena would appear to be the perfect patron for women professors. Yet there are some aspects of the goddess that I find disturbing and problematical.

Apart from her association with textiles, Athena's experience is unlike that of actual ancient Greek women, whose place was within the confines

of domesticity, and to whom the arenas of glory, war, governance, public speaking, and education were closed. In spite of the tremendous advances made in broadening the horizons of accomplishment for women since ancient times, I think we still face the danger presented by the "exceptional female": the too-easy assumption that the highly visible success of a few can be generalized to the whole sex, and the concomitant attitude that those who do not achieve similar prominence have only themselves to blame. After all, we should beware of the assumption that a society that worships and reveres a goddess (or the Virgin Mary, for that matter) is a female-dominated, or even a female-friendly, society, any more than having a queen rather than a king on the throne entails an elevation in the status of women. And as women professors, we must be all too aware of the "Queen Bee" syndrome: the phenomenon of the sole, high-powered woman in the department who "has it made," but has no desire to help other women to share her high status.

Then too, Athena was celibate and childless. Like the "school marms" of an earlier era, who were wedded to their calling and expected to devote their lives to nurturing other people's children, Athena, at least in the Greek understanding, could achieve autonomy only at the expense of her biological generativity and her sexuality. Women today, in academia as elsewhere, have and want to have choices about how and whether to express their physical and emotional as well as their mental capacities without forfeiting credibility as "professionals." Issues arise from How do we dress? to What are our institutions' policies on maternity leave and child care? How do we balance our time and energy in our attempt to live varied, satisfying lives? How do we judge ourselves—and how do others judge us—for our decisions? Athena offers us no help here. The very catalog of Athena's positive and nurturant relationships with heroes is a reflection of her asexual nature. She poses no threats, makes no demands. She is a female without specific femaleness, and only as such could the Greeks conceive of a female as being beneficent, or even self-controlled.

Furthermore, Athena as daughter can be accepted and even indulged because, unlike a son, she poses no real threat of rivalry with her father, Zeus, who had overthrown his own father, Cronos. Is it only by assuming the role of the cherished, nonthreatening daughter that female junior faculty can win the support and protection of senior male faculty?

Clearly of note is Athena's consistent pattern of identifying with males and maleness. Despite her many associations with snakes (as with water), an emblem of the Great Goddess, the tradition has her display on her (or

is it her father's?! Aegis the severed head of the Gorgon Medusa, the very representation of the male's fear of female power. The rationale that Athena offers in the *Oresteia* for siding with Apollo to acquit Orestes of his mother's murder is her own birth without a mother's agency.

Athena had likewise chosen as the site for her new homicide court the Hill of Ares, where the invading Amazons had unsuccessfully attacked the hero Theseus and the city he founded, Athens. She allies herself with the patriarchal point of view that equates civilization and progress with male usurpation and domination of female power and prerogatives.

Finally, in a later Roman myth, found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, explaining why spiders weave webs, Athena engages in a weaving contest with the low-born Lydian girl, Arachne. The story is ostensibly about the punishment of human hybris: Arachne's arrogant boast that she excels an immortal in the very skill the goddess had imparted to mortals, and her willful refusal to let herself be persuaded to defer to Athena's superior position (if not ability). However, one cannot dismiss as coincidental the elaborate description of the subject matter of Arachne's web: She boldly and defiantly depicts the illicit and sometimes violent amorous adventures of the powerful male Olympians Zeus, Poseidon, and Apollo. Athena can find no fault with the artistry, but she is deeply affronted by the theme of the girl's handiwork; she thinks of herself as divinity, not as female capable of understanding or identifying with female experience. Instead of fostering, she punishes the female voice speaking its own truth, its own story. She beats Arachne with her shuttle, and when the poor girl hangs herself, turns her into a spider, destined to weave its web forever. And this is not the only instance of Athena's association with the destruction of another female. She also, in one version of the story, killed her childhood friend Pallas, either by accident or in a fit of temper, and in remorse assumed her name. Likewise, the daughters of Cecrops leapt to their deaths in fear when, succumbing to "female" curiosity, they disobeyed Athena's instructions not to look in the casket that contained the man-snake Erichthonius, her fosterling.

So is Athena, in her dealings with other females, only a male Olympian in drag, indifferent at best and lethal at worst? Does she demonstrate that a woman can achieve power and success only by being accepted as an honorary male? "Gee, you don't look like a chemist!" "Wow, you think like a man!" And are we still tempted to take these remarks as compliments?

Granted, Athena is a paradigm of much that we as women can celebrate and emulate: her wisdom, craft, versatility, strength, diplomacy, initiative,

and capacity for mentoring. At the same time, she is a product of patriarchal thinking, male-created (literally and figuratively) and male-identified, exceptional, removed from and even hostile to the consciousness of anything approaching sisterhood.

My long years of dealing with classical antiquity have convinced me that the Greeks acknowledged, feared, and tried desperately to tame and domesticate female power (be it sexuality, fertility, valor, or intelligence) in order to serve patriarchal purposes. Our challenge as women—and as well-educated, privileged, professional women—is to recognize and tap into that power. How do we understand and negotiate “the system” while maintaining our clearsighted ability to critique and transform it? How do we define success and achieve it without sacrificing important aspects of our humanity? How do we learn to take ourselves seriously, how do we get others to take us seriously, without turning into something we—rightly or wrongly—find distasteful? How do we keep ourselves from being co-opted to serve agendas not our own? Finally, how do we learn to acknowledge and honor our Mothers and mentor our Daughters? To negotiate these challenges requires all the wisdom, timing, diplomacy, and cunning of the armed Athena of tradition—and, as I hope I’ve suggested, new armor besides, our own armor, armor of which the Athena of myth could never have conceived. That is what this book is about.

—Joann Claire Silverberg

Introduction

Career Strategies for Women in Academe: Arming Athena is the book we wish we had read as graduate students. If we had known then what we know now, we would still have made the decision to pursue academic careers, but we would have been more savvy about what to expect and would have felt less alone during stressful times. We hope that the facts and the experiences described in this volume will provide information about institutional problems in academe, advice on how to handle difficult situations, and encouragement to persist and achieve one's career goals.

Athena, we knew, was the Greek Goddess of Wisdom, whose emblem, the owl, is a contemporary symbol of education. She is usually portrayed with a shield and sword, and we wondered whether those weapons would be sufficient these days to protect her against the hostilities experienced by women faculty. Perhaps, we thought, a tank or a nuclear arsenal would be necessary for a woman as strong and independent as Athena to become a tenured full professor!

In conversations with the feminist classicist Joann Silverberg, we learned that Athena's weapons were not her own. She borrowed them from her father. The design on Athena's shield is the severed head of the Gorgon Medusa, another woman. We realized that Athena needs arming in more ways than one. She needs to develop her own weapons in her fight for tenure. Perhaps the ways of men do not work for women faculty. Certainly, we hope it will not be necessary to slay other women or ruin their careers in order to achieve our own. The modern Athena must learn to work in coalition with other women in order to achieve success.

In Part I, we provide information about the current status of women in academe. Lynn Collins examines the data on the number of women who have received doctorates over the past 20 years and the number of women

in the various faculty ranks. Her research shows that despite the increasing number of women who have earned advanced degrees, women faculty remain clustered in the lower ranks—the three A's: adjunct instructors, assistant professors, and associate professors. Women are also more likely to be found in lower-status institutions with teaching missions than in high-status institutions with prominent research missions. She describes the resistance to affirmative action and considers how intergroup dynamics create adverse conditions for women that may lead to their voluntary or involuntary exit through the revolving door of academe. Despite years of affirmative action and rumors of discrimination against White males, men still dominate college and university faculties and retain most of the most prestigious appointments for themselves.

Many Americans believe that sex discrimination has seriously declined and is rarely to be found these days among the educated elite. Sociologist Nijole Benokraitis demonstrates that sex discrimination is not gone; it has merely become more subtle. She describes the many levels of sexist behavior from societal to institutional to individual, and she shows us how to recognize it when it is happening to us. Unless we realize when sexism is occurring, we cannot effectively combat it.

Pay equity is another issue that is as important in academe as anywhere. Ellin Scholnick has examined a number of equity studies at various institutions, and she shows us that women faculty still earn less than their male colleagues, especially at the higher ranks. In her chapter, Scholnick shows us how we can do pay equity studies on our own campuses and how we can use social science methodologies to understand and explain salary studies. Administrations will have to make adjustments when the injustice is unavoidably clear.

In Part II, on women's roles and career decisions, Joan Chrisler discusses how the roles of teacher and researcher can conflict. The role of teacher is more compatible with women's gender role training, and it can be tempting to focus on that aspect of professional work to the neglect of research and writing. However, it is scholarly productivity that is usually more important for tenure and promotion. In her chapter, Chrisler helps us to see whether this conflict is happening to us and provides ways to bring our roles into better balance.

Susan Basow reviews the research on gender and teaching evaluations. Although it is far too simple to say that students give male professors higher ratings than female professors, Basow shows us a myriad of ways that gender of teacher, gender of student, and the qualities rated can interact.

She indicates in which situations this is most likely to produce problems for women and suggests ways to minimize the damage. This chapter is a must read for all department chairs and faculty on tenure and promotion committees.

One reason that pay inequities are worse at higher ranks is that faculty do not enter the system with the same base. Thus, even if men and women receive the same percentage increase year after year, inequality persists. Suzanna Rose and Mona Danner tell us how to find out what the range of starting salaries is, help us figure out what we most need in order to do our work effectively, and describe successful negotiating strategies to help us get what we deserve. Everyone who is searching for an academic position should read this chapter right away.

In Part III, on assuming leadership in higher education, Joan Chrisler, Linda Herr, and Nelly Murstein explain why it is so important that women faculty involve themselves in the governance system on their campuses. They show us how to recognize leadership ability in ourselves, how to encourage it in others, and how to band together with other women to increase the number of women in leadership positions. After all, if we want to change things, we must be willing to place ourselves in situations where we can become change agents.

Women who try to move up in academe, as elsewhere, frequently bump their heads on the glass ceiling. Kathryn Quina, Maureen Cotter, and Kim Romenesko review the literature on this phenomenon. They tell us how to recognize the glass ceiling and why our male colleagues don't seem to notice that it's there. Better yet, they present strategies for empowering ourselves and others and suggest ways to break through the ceiling to success.

In Part IV, on taking charge and taking care, we present group and individual ways to take care of ourselves and protect ourselves and each other from toxic environments. Bernice Lott and Lisa Rocchio discuss the problem of sexual harassment on campus and present strategies for exposing and reducing it. They believe that this cannot effectively be done by individuals, and they promote group action by sharing with us a strategy that worked on their campus as women faculty and graduate students banded together.

Linda Carli acknowledges how stressful academic life can be, especially when things are not going well. She encourages us to engage in active coping strategies, such as seeking social support, managing time efficiently, and reducing role ambiguity, in order to take control of our professional

lives and move our careers ahead. This chapter is full of helpful suggestions that can be done by individuals and/or groups of women faculty.

Throughout this book, you will find short essays in boxes. We call these “success stories and cautionary tales,” and we commissioned them to illustrate the points made by the chapter authors. Each describes some difficulty encountered by the author and tells what happened next. Each has at least one important lesson—what went right or what went wrong. We found reading some of these essays heartrending, but all of them, we believe, are well worth reading. We can recognize ourselves in some of them, and we’re sure that you will, too. The authors of these essays can serve as your role models; if they could survive or correct the situations in which they found themselves, so can you.

We would like to thank our role models who have toiled long and hard in the vineyards of academe to open doors for other women, especially Mary Gray, Barbara Bergmann, Paula Caplan, Emily Toth (a.k.a. Ms. Mentor), Harriet Aronson (a.k.a. Aunt Academe), Mary Roth Walsh, Florence Denmark, Rhoda Unger, and Bernice Lott. This book would not exist without the authors of our chapters and essays, who shared their expertise and bared their souls in the service of this project. Some of our authors are longtime and dear friends of ours; others we have met only recently but have come to know intimately and appreciate greatly as we worked together. In addition, we offer our gratitude to those who offered us support and encouragement in the production of this book: Nancy MacLeod, Jack Powell, Carl Stenber, our editor Peter Labella and the production staff at Sage, and our colleagues at Connecticut College and the University of Rhode Island.

We enjoyed working on this project together, and we’re very pleased with the results. We hope that you learn as much from reading this book as we did from writing and editing it, and that you will feel as wise as, but better armed than, Athena as you reenter the fray. Always remember how important women faculty are to women students. If you do not achieve tenure, who will look out for the welfare of your students? Who will encourage them to achieve? Who will their role models be?

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