

The Social Organization of Mentorship in Bahá'í Studies*

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Abstract

This article explores mentorship in the context of contemporary Bahá'í Studies. This context is influenced not only by gender inequality and generation a, differences but also by a perceived hierarchical order or stratification of disciplines. Historical factors, traditional secular understandings, and trend, within and outside Bahá'í scholarship account for the stratification of the disciplines that comprise Bahá'í Studies. Such an ordering involves the differences between single mentors and long periods of training versus many mentors and multiple points of entry into a profession or discipline. Gender imbalance in Bahá'í Studies has a profound impact on mentoring practices. Male scholars must become familiar with the distinctive characteristics involved in cross-gender mentorship, while female scholars must develop the art of mentoring other junior female entrants into the field. Contemporary Bahá'í Studies, moreover, highlight generational differences, characterized by the presence of both "objective" and "subjective" research approaches. The newer approach implies a recognition of a different path of mentorship, involving many mentors, not merely the replication of traditional knowledge, and an increasing awareness of the need to publish outside as well as within Bahá'í channels.

Résumé

L'article explore la notion de mentorat dans le champ des études bahá'íes contemporaines. Il s'agit d'un contexte influencé non seulement par l'ordre hiérarchique présumé des disciplines, mais aussi par l'inégalité des sexes et les différences entre les générations. Cela est dû à des facteurs historiques, à des perceptions traditionnelles séculaires, ainsi qu'à des tendances constatées tant à l'intérieur qu'à l'extérieur des champs d'études bahá'íes. Tous ces facteurs expliquent la hiérarchisation actuelle des disciplines qui composent les études bahá'íes. Cette hiérarchisation comprend les différences résultant d'un encadrement effectué par un seul mentor et échelonné sur de longues périodes, comparativement à un encadrement assuré par plusieurs mentors et ce, en présence de plusieurs points d'entrée dans une profession ou discipline. L'inegalité entre les sexes dans les études bahá'íes a aussi un effet profond sur l'exercice du mentorat. Les érudits de sexe masculin doivent se familiariser avec les caractéristiques propres au mentorat entre les sexes, tandis que les érudits de sexe féminin doivent développer l'art d'encadrer d'autres femmes entrant dans leur domaine d'expertise. Les études bahá'íes contemporaines sont également marquées par des différences intergénérationnelles, où se côtoient les approches « objectives » et « subjectives ». La nouvelle approche implique une reconnaissance d'un mentorat qui emprunte un cheminement différent, faisant appel à plusieurs mentors et ne se limitant pas à la reproduction de connaissances traditionnelles, et qui reconnaît davantage la nécessité de diffuser ses travaux à l'extérieur aussi bien qu'à l'intérieur des cercles bahá'íes.

Resumen

Este artículo explora la condición de mentor en el contexto de los estudios bahá'ís contemporáneos. Influye sobre este contexto no sólo el enfilar de las disciplinas jerárquicas sobrepujantes sino tambien la desigualdad de los generos y las diferencias generacionales, todo lo cual afecta la condicion de mentor en los estudios bahá'ís. Factores históricos, modos de ver seglares tradicionales y direcciones de orientación dentro y fuera de la erudición bahá'í dan lugar a la ordenación jerárquica de las disciplinas que componen los estudios bahá'ís. Tal clasificación involucra las diferencias entre mentores solos y largos perfodos de entrenamiento en contraste con muchos mentores y múltiples puntos de entrada a una profesión o disciplina. El desequilibrio de los géneros tiene profundo impacto sobre el ejercicio del mentoreo. Los eruditos masculinos deben familiarizarse con las características distintivas del mentoreo masculino-femenino, a la vez que las eruditas deben desarrollar el arte de servir de mentores a otras principiantas neófitas en este campo. Es más, los estudios bahá'ís contemporaneos hacen resaltar las diferencias generacionales, caracterizadas por la presencia del planteamiento investigativo tanto objetivo como subjetivo. El enfoque Nuevo implica no sólo la replicación de conocimientos tradicionales sino tambien el reconocimiento de un camino distinto

hacia la condición de mentor en que participan muchos mentores, acompañado de una creciente necesidad de estar al tanto de la necesidad de publicar dentro y fuera de la esfera bahá'í.

Mentorship is a time-honored practice that probably dates back, in the Western world, well before Socrates and Plato, an early notable mentoring duo. The strength, progress, and continuation of a field of study is as much a matter of mentorship as it is of discovery and knowledge. It is not uncommon for academic or professional societies to encourage mentorship formally, such as in the case of the Gerontological Society of America (Suggs, “The Mentoring Relationship: A Professional Asset”). However, professional societies are more faithful in practicing mentorship than academic ones (Wright and Wright, “The Role of Mentors in the Career Development of Young Professionals” 204). The academic/professional distinction will be outlined in detail below.

This article explores mentorship in the context of contemporary Bahá'í Studies, reflecting the field over the past twenty years in particular. Mentorship does not occur in a social vacuum. The social context of mentorship in Bahá'í Studies is influenced not only by a distinctive tone in Bahá'í Studies but also by gender inequality, generational differences, and by what will be described here as a “hierarchical ordering” or stratification according to prestige of disciplines. It is this particular social organization in Bahá'í Studies that defines mentorship in Bahá'í Studies.¹ I believe that the social organization of Bahá'í Studies covers both veteran-novice and peer mentorships.

Disciplinary Hierarchy

Historical factors, enduring secular understandings, and trends within and outside Bahá'í Studies have led to a distinctive hierarchical ordering of the disciplines that comprise Bahá'í Studies. For the purpose of my analysis, I see Bahá'í Studies falling into two categories: one pertaining more closely to university-oriented research and the other following a non-university orientation. For the sake of brevity, I call them academic and professional approaches, respectively. I hesitate to call these approaches “theoretical” and “applied,” because some academic studies are empirical rather than theoretical in orientation, and some professional material is theoretical rather than applied. In any case, the evidence suggests that Bahá'ís with a professional background also write on academic topics. Hence, the distinction between academic and professional can be a gray area. This section of my article shows that within the academic approach to Bahá'í Studies, the humanities occupy a preeminent position. In the professional approach, medicine is the predominant background for Bahá'í Studies. I shall now turn to each of these fields.

For historical research, the Bahá'í community can never underestimate the long-lasting impact of Nabil's influential narrative, *The Dawn-Breakers*, and, more importantly, the historical works of Shoghi Effendi on generating an enduring interest among Bahá'ís in their history. It is not so much the standard, but the very presence of their works that has given a preeminent place to history and Middle Eastern Studies as touchstones of serious Bahá'í Studies. In a survey of citation practices among Bahá'í academics, Fazel and Danesh (“Bahá'í Scholarship: An Examination Using Citation Analysis” 22) found that of the ten most-cited authors, eight are historians. Of the eight historians, six are established Middle-East academics. The relative importance of history among Bahá'ís as a field of interest or study is apparent in other areas.

The May, 1997, establishment of the Rabbani Chair for Bahá'í History at the Landegg Academy in Switzerland illustrates the high profile of history as an “extremely important area” of study for Bahá'ís (Landegg, “The Establishment of a New Chair at Landegg”). The Landegg Academy is a Swiss-based Bahá'í institution with programs to study the Bahá'í Faith, some programs in conjunction with the University of Maryland and its Bahá'í Chair for World Peace.

The Hasan Balyuzi Memorial Lectures at the Association for Bahá'í Studies annual conferences also reinforce the profile of Bahá'í Studies as primarily a historical study of the Bahá'í Faith. This prestigious lectureship was established in memory of the highly respected Bahá'í historian, and adds to the profile of historical research as a respected field of Bahá'í Studies. Between 1980 and 1997, thirteen (72%) of the eighteen lecturers devoted their presentations to historical topics, even though only three (16%) of the lecturers are historians (Association for Bahá'í Studies-North America, “Chronology of Hasan Balyuzi Memorial Lectures”) (see appendix). The remaining topics were devoted to the fields of law or religion (e.g., “The Human Soul”) (28%).

When we look at the particular disciplines, training, or occupational background of the Bahá'í Hasan Balyuzi Memorial Lecturers, we realize that” as stated above, three come from history (16%) and four from medicine (22%),² five are writers (27%), two come from the legal profession (11 %), two from business (11 %) and two from literature (11%). Thus, history and religion are the two foci of the presentations, which overshadow those lecturers trained in the specialties of medicine, writing, business, law, and literature. Bahá'í Studies, in this sense, is defined as either a historical perspective or one that deals with specific Bahá'í religious teachings.

The same picture emerges from a study of the articles and the backgrounds of the contributing authors in the *Journal of Bahá'í Studies* since its inception in 1988 to June, 1995. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the main areas covered by the peer-reviewed articles in the *Journal*, showing the overwhelming prevalence of the humanities³ and the professions, followed by the other fields.

Table 1
Principal Fields Covered by Refereed Articles
in the *Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 1988–1995
(in N)

<i>Principal Field of Articles</i>	<i>Number</i>
Humanities ⁴	55
Professional ⁵	15
Social Sciences ⁶	13
Sciences ⁷	11
Art, Music, Creative Writing	7
Total	101

The humanities (55 articles) involve literature (18), history (11), religious studies (9), apologetics, Bahá'í teachings, or Bahá'í scholarship (10), language or linguistics (5), and philosophy (2). There are almost as many articles on literature alone as on all of the social sciences combined. There have been as many articles in the history field as there have been in all of the sciences. The professional fields (15 articles) include psychology⁸ (6), education (3), medicine (2), law (1), business (1), library science (1), and architecture (1). The social sciences (13 articles) cover sociology (4), economics (4), political science (2), social science (2), and social and economic development (1). The fourth largest category of articles is that of the sciences (11 articles) wherein the sciences in general account for 7 articles, while agriculture and the environment have 1 and 3 articles, respectively. The fifth category, art, music, and creative writing (7 articles) adumbrates the smallest number of articles in the *Journal*, with the highest number devoted to the visual arts (5).

This analysis shows the humanities have the highest representation of all fields, led by literature and history, constituting an impressive 29 of all 101 articles surveyed, while the professional topics cover 15 of such articles. We now turn to examine the formal background of the authors⁹ of the peer-reviewed articles that appeared in the Journal.

Table 2
Fields of Authors' Expertise of Refereed Articles
in the *Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 1988–1995
(in N)

<i>Authors' Expertise</i>	<i>Number of Authors</i>
Humanities ¹⁰	37
Professional ¹¹	36
Social Sciences ¹²	13
Art, Music, Creative Writing	12
Sciences ¹³	11 7
Total	109

A surprising pattern emerges here. The first pattern to note is the prevalence of the humanities and the professions as the background of those who have contributed peer-reviewed articles to the *Journal of Bahá'í Studies*. For the humanities, the pattern is similar to that found for the topical coverage of the articles, as mentioned above, namely literature (13), history (11), religious studies (6), language or linguistics (4), and philosophy (3). From the analysis, it appears that authors with a humanities background tend to write on topics that are germane to their training.

An altogether different image presents itself for those trained in the professions, which account for 36 of the authors out of 109. There is a high proportion from the medical professions (14), education (6), psychology (4), law (3), library science (3), journalism (2), and one each from business, architecture, communication, and psychoanalysis. What is noteworthy is the fact that many Bahá'ís trained in the professions contribute to other fields. It is the medical profession, psychology, and education that seem to exercise an enormous appeal within the Bahá'í community. There are several factors that seem to encourage the involvement of medical people, psychologists, and educators in Bahá'í Studies.

First, I have observed a trend in society at large towards applied disciplines, reinforcing the popularity of the professional trinity of medicine, psychology, and education. Among Bahá'ís at least, the trend probably expresses an intense desire to witness a practical application of Bahá'í teachings to daily life. Programs aimed at personal or individual transformation are also popular within the Bahá'í community and encourage the applied purpose of Bahá'í Studies.

Second, the focus on individualism in our general culture (Johnson, *The Forest for the Trees: An Introduction to Sociological Thinking*) tends to highlight the individual, rather than societal, concerns as holding the key to the ills of society. Works taking this approach delve into family violence, aging, Alzheimer's disease, drug dependency (including alcohol), and the like. They attempt to apply Bahá'í insights to individual problems, as do the presentation of Bahá'í ideas about education.

Third, encouraging Bahá'ís in seeking the relevance of the Bahá'í writings in everyday life has favored an applied approach that professionals find attractive. Indeed, according to Shoghi Effendi, the term "Bahá'í scholar" seems to entail an applied understanding of the Bahá'í teachings and correlation of such an understanding with the "current thoughts and problems of the people of the world" (*Scholarship* 5). From this perspective, no Bahá'í scholar is more privileged than any other Bahá'í, because all are potentially able to derive a profound understanding of the Bahá'í writings and apply them to solving human and social problems. Thus, every Bahá'í can be a "scholar," according to guidance from the Bahá'í World Centre, when she or he intelligently applies the solutions offered in the Balla'i writings to the dilemmas and troubles of the age.

Thus, the two highly profiled approaches to Bahá'í Studies—the humanities (specifically literature and history)¹⁴ and the professions (education and psychology in particular)—shape the nature of Bahá'í mentorship in fundamental ways.

Impact on Mentorship

First, what can be described in terms of a social hierarchical ordering of the disciplines is partly a function of the level of difficulty of gaining entry into various fields. More prominence attaches to fields that generally require longer periods of training, especially in acquiring a PhD, and that require a longer period of achieving recognition. The median time lag between a baccalaureate and a doctoral degree is 12.1 years for history and 14.1 years in the health sciences; both are well above the average of 10.5 years for all disciplines. Perhaps more significantly, the median age at which academic incumbents achieve a doctorate is 35.6 years both for the languages/literature and history and 37.6 in the health sciences; again, above the 34.1 years of age for all disciplines (National Research Council, "Highlights from the 1992 Survey of Earned Doctorates" 2–3). It can be hypothesized that both the longer median time lag between a baccalaureate and a doctoral degree and the older age of doctoral incumbents, may indicate a heavier reliance on mentorship and a long time to develop a deeper mentorship than in the other fields requiring less time and involving younger people. No research, however, has been conducted to test these relationships.

Second, the critical elements that affect mentorship involve a personal relationship with one incumbent, or mentor, and a steady, consistent path of encouragement and guidance. With more prominent fields (where the length of training is longer), the path of mentorship is dictated by the need to have very few mentors, while less prominent fields are marked by multiple points of entry, and an aspiring Bahá'í academic will have to rely on several mentors along the way.

It does seem, however, that Bahá'í Studies should have room for a variety of approaches. The Universal House of Justice itself sees no merit in maintaining anyone particular kind of scholarship, for there must be a common, respectful realization that everyone is "seeking to acquire a deeper understanding of the Revelation of Bahá'u'llah ...," whether one has received formal academic training or not (*Scholarship* 7). Some years ago several issues of the *Journal of Bahá'í Studies* represented the tensions inherent in the presumed hierarchy in Bahá'í Studies. An article by Craig Loehle (1990) on evolution initiated a vigorous debate¹⁵ on whether or not knowledge of Persian and Arabic should be a necessary criterion for any Bahá'í scholar, although the discussions went well beyond the issue of language. Would Bahá'í scholars not versed in Persian or Arabic have less access to the Revelation of Bahá'u'llah than those who know the two languages? Do the translations and interpretations of Shoghi

Effendi counter such privileged access? The ensuing debate was highly charged because of the latent assumptions about the need to know Persian and Arabic that characterize what is deemed worthy or unworthy in Bahá’í Studies.

A third factor with an impact on mentorship becomes particularly significant when one considers the importance of using Bahá’í Studies to inform one’s field of study or endeavor (or how one can approach Bahá’í Studies from the perspective of one’s own field). For many Bahá’ís being mentored, it means finding colleagues who have been writing about the interactions between their respective fields and the Bahá’í Faith. In this connection, we can expect attempts at mentorship in the humanities and the sciences to be more open to making those interactions, since many of the Bahá’í authors who are trained in the humanities also tend to contribute articles related to the Bahá’í Faith. Table 3 provides an overview of the source disciplines of articles devoted to Bahá’í topics. On the other end of the spectrum, one finds those fields, (such as the professions, art, music, and creative writing) where the proportion of Bahá’í authors is less likely to make their connections to the Bahá’í Faith.

Table 3
Source Disciplines of Articles on Bahá’í Studies,
in the *Journal of Bahá’í Studies*, 1988–1995
(in %)

	<i>Articles on non-Bahá’í topics</i>	<i>Articles on Bahá’í topics</i>	<i>Difference*</i>
	A	B	(B-A)
Humanities ¹⁶	26.1	39.7	+ 13.6
Sciences ¹⁷	4.3	14.3	+ 10.0
Social Sciences ¹⁸	13.0	11.1	- 1.9
Professional ¹⁹	37.0	30.2	- 6.8
Art, Music, Creative Writing	19.6	4.8	- 14.8
Totals	100.0	100.1	
(Number)	(46)	(63)	

* This last column indicates the percentile difference of source disciplines used in articles on non-Bahá’í topics, on one hand, and articles on Bahá’í topics, on the other hand. “0.0” would indicate that there is no percentile difference, i.e. the percentage of articles in each of the two categories is the same in a particular discipline. A difference of “+13.6%” (as in Humanities, above) means there are proportionally more articles on Bahá’í topics than there are on non-Bahá’í topics. As a further illustration, the proportion of articles on Bahá’í topics written by professionals is lower than on non-Bahá’í topics (the difference being -6.8%).

The social sciences are somewhere in the middle, where Bahá’í authors are about as equally as likely to make their discipline connect to the Bahá’í Faith as not. As a consequence, those being mentored can expect to find more of a consistent buildup of knowledge or Bahá’í perspectives in the humanities and the sciences than in any other field.

Gender Imbalance

The prevalence in Bahá’í Studies of literature and history, on one hand, and the medical fields, on the other hand, indicates that one would expect a significant degree of gender parity in Bahá’í scholarship, since these fields have significant representation of women (unlike more male-dominated fields of the natural sciences and mathematics). Surprisingly, however, there is gender imbalance throughout all areas of Bahá’í Studies.

We can reflect on gender imbalance in a variety of ways: through citation analysis, the proportion of women Bahá’í academics to men, and the authorship of articles in some of the most influential publications in Bahá’í studies, namely the *Journal of Bahá’í Studies*, *World Order*, *Bahá’í Studies Review*, *Bahá’í Studies Bulletin*, and *A Short Encyclopedia of the Bahá’í Faith*. (Table 4 gives a statistical rendering of women in several channels of Bahá’í Studies.) Many researchers indicate the importance of gender issues in mentoring but have also noted that most mentors are men and that women have a more difficult time finding mentors (Burke et al., “Sex Differences and Cross-Sex Effects on Mentoring: Some Preliminary Data” 1012).

Table 4
Participation of Women in Selected
Areas of Bahá’í Studies (in %)

	%	Number	Date
	A	B	(B-A)
As Authors in Four Major Bahá’í Studies Journals ²⁰	21	(35)	1988–93
As Authors in <i>A Short Encyclopedia of the Bahá’í Faith</i>	31	(105)	1996
As Canadian Bahá’í Academics*	33	(22)	1996

* Defined as those teaching in universities or conducting studies at the Ph.D. level.

Sources: Fazel and Danesh, “Bahá’í Scholarship”; van den Hoonaard, “Bahá’í Faculty at Canadian Universities and Community Colleges”; Bahá’í Encyclopedia Board, “List of General and Country Entries.”

Citation Analysis

In their article on Bahá’í citation practices, Fazel and Danesh (“Bahá’í Scholarship” 19) discovered that the percentage of Bahá’í women authors publishing in the four most well-known journals in Bahá’í Studies, namely, the *Journal of Bahá’í Studies*, *World Order*, *Bahá’í Studies Review*, and the *Bahá’í Studies Bulletin*, has actually decreased between 1978 and 1993. Between 1978 and 1983, 31% of authors were women; between 1988 and 1993, there were only 21 %. There are no women among the ten most-cited Bahá’í authors. Moreover, none of the twelve most-cited academic Bahá’í books is written by a woman (Fazel and Danesh, “Bahá’í Scholarship” 20)²¹ (By 1998, the *Journal of Bahá’í Studies*—inaugurated in 1988—had shown itself to be an exception to this trend, with women contributing 33.3% of articles from 1988–93, and 32.5% from 1993–98.)

Proportional Number of Women in Bahá’í Studies

This article employs two measures of the extent to which gender balance is a facet of Bahá’í Studies—a contemporary list of Bahá’í faculty at Canadian universities and colleges, and a list of authors for *A Short Encyclopedia of the Bahá’í Faith*. The list of the 69 Bahá’ís at 32 Canadian universities and colleges includes Bahá’ís both with faculty appointments and those who are not faculty, but are pursuing a PhD. It is of some interest to note that 33% of Canadian Bahá’í academics are women. This figure falls below the percentage of female membership in Canadian social-science academic associations which currently stands at 42% (Thomson and Stark-[Adamec], *The Roles and Participation of Women in Social Science Associations in Canada* 4). The closest comparable figure for the United States relates to the percentage of doctorates (53% in 1992) earned by women in the social sciences (National Research Council, “Highlights” 4).

It should be pointed out that the proportion of Bahá’í women among Canadian academics may, in fact, be smaller than it appears. Many of the women do not occupy a full-time position in Canadian universities and colleges, let alone tenured ones; many are PhD candidates who work their research around part-time, untenurable, sessional positions.²²

It is, moreover, striking that Bahá’í women are engaged in the fields perceived as lower in the hierarchy, Canadian Bahá’í academics cover some 27 disciplines; of these, four disciplines have at least five academics: mathematics/statistics (17% of whom are women), physics (33%), medicine (38%), and sociology (60%). As a consequence, it would seem that mentorship is a more probable element for women in such fields as medicine and sociology where the proportion of women is relatively higher. Mentorship in Bahá’í Studies will have to take into account the fact that Bahá’í women should be particularly mentored in those areas where the participation of women is currently low.²³

Authorship

Internationally, there is currently no better register of Bahá’í Studies than the list of those who are authoring articles for *A Short Encyclopedia of the Bahá’í Faith*. Since its inception in October, 1984, the project has been funded by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States (see van den Hoonaard, “Prospects and

Dilemmas of Writing a Bahá'í Encyclopedia"). Table 4 shows that 31% of all articles thus far are being authored by women. For the purpose of our analysis, we can break the articles down into two categories "General" and "Country" articles. The General entries relate to biographical, historical, literary, and theological articles, while the Country entries deal only with geographical areas or territories.

Although there are no published volumes yet available, many of the General articles have already been edited or are in progress (as of November, 1996). Among the 196 authors whose articles will probably find their way into published volumes, one finds 143 men (or 73%) (Bahá'í Encyclopedia Board, "List of General and Country Entries"). Perhaps more telling is the fact that of the 529 articles scheduled for publication, 455 (or 86%) were written by men. Put in another way, women write, on the average, 1.4 articles for the *Encyclopedia*, while men author the equivalent of 3.2 articles.

The ratio is slightly better in the Country category. Of the 153 authors, one finds 100 men (or 65%). There are, moreover, 230 of such articles, with 158 (or 69%) written by men. In effect, a woman author is expected to write an average of 1.4 articles—the same as is the case for the general articles, while men contribute an average of 1.6 articles each.

There is a tremendous need to bring about gender balance in Bahá'í Studies. Fulfilling this need will involve bringing social processes into play that will leave their own stamp on Bahá'í Studies, for example, countering the fact that the flow of mentorship proceeds from men to women, thereby reinforcing traditional positions of power and prestige. Some researchers have identified potential barriers in cross-gender mentoring relationships, centering on the management of personal relationships. The closeness of the personal relationship also holds problems, among them the perceptions of the relationship by outsiders (Burke et al., "Sex Differences" 1012). Wright and Wright speak of risks that are "potentially greater for women and minorities who lack mentors similar to themselves in terms of gender, race, or values" ("The Role of Mentors" 207).

Because it is also men who must "own the equality of women" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks* 163), this will require major readjustment on the part of men to be ready to learn new habits of thought and behavior. This principle is particularly important today when researchers are discovering that women successful in their careers appear unwilling to act as mentors for the next generation of women academics or professionals (see, for example, Yoder et al., "To Teach is to Learn: Overcoming Tokenism with Mentors" 121). Research since the 1970s has strongly indicated the reluctance of women to mentor other women (see, for example, Kanter, *Men and Women of the Corporation*; Yoder, "To Teach is to Learn"). Researchers attribute such reluctance to "the visibility of tokens," which produced performance pressures—"pressures that women in the first [contingent] never escaped long enough to act as mentors" (Yoder, "To Teach is to Learn" 124). A variety of other factors discourages female-female mentorships, including perceptions of gender differences in power and the belief that peer acceptance among veterans was tenuous and might be jeopardized by a mentorship with a novice. The lack of a mentoring role in the success of most women might also explain the subsequent lack of female-female mentorships (D. van den Hoonaard, p.c.).

The extent to which these kinds of interaction (or non-interaction) characterize female-female mentorship in Bahá'í Studies is a matter of conjecture, without a solid base of research. The author's own experience, in both institutional and social settings, seems to underscore the reliability of the research findings; that evidence is anecdotal, however, despite the powerful impression that experience has made upon the author.

Male mentors may well have difficulty understanding the very different social dynamics that undergird male-female mentoring relationships. Laurel Richardson in *The New Other Woman* provides a discussion of the misinterpretations latent in such relationships; The familiar male-male approaches in mentoring (always assumed though not always articulated) may not apply to the cross-gender mentorships. Based on a wide variety of research, Burke et al. observed that female protégées need more encouragement than male protégés and must be more actively "sold" on the idea of mentorship. There are other differences. Women, more than men, also consider "affective, emotional" aspects of the relationship to be important (Burke et al., "Sex Differences" 1012). It can be argued that the current emphasis by women to build "networks" is not a parallel to the "old boys" system. In the "old boys" system, there is a careful, highly focused, face-to-face relationship which involves, above all, academic grooming. "Networks" involve a large number of people, where one finds multiple loyalties. The idea of personal grooming mayor may not be present. Thus, there are two special challenges that participants in Bahá'í Studies must face: (1) the need for men to take the equality of men and women seriously, and (2) the need for women who are veterans in Bahá'í Studies to defy the cultural trend and make an effort in cultivating mentorships with junior, less established women.

The consequences of gender-balanced Bahá'í Studies are manifold: making the contribution of ordinary Bahá'í women visible; a reflexive scholarship in which the researcher does not stand "outside" the subject; and a presumably less authoritarian and hierarchical approach with an improvement of consultative practices. Indeed,

much of the new scholarship, especially in the social sciences, now favors a qualitative methodological basis, highlighting the inductive approach. One is reminded of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s observation that the “true index and representative of humanity” is the scientific person who “through processes of *inductive* reasoning and research” is “informed of all that appertains to humanity, its status, conditions, and happenings” [italics added] (*Promulgation of Universal Peace* 50). It is already widely recognized (for example, Burke et al., “Sex Differences” 1019) that women create new “values and modes of interaction.” Some claim, for example, that while men build hierarchies when working together, women build a sense of community. These two different modes of doing research contribute significantly to the styles of research. With the new synergy among women and men doing Bahá’í Studies, there might well be an expansion of the boundaries of scholarly exploration. Scholarship from the margins can add these new dimensions.²⁴

Generational Factors

Generational factors are a third element that shapes the process of mentoring in Bahá’í Studies and, in fact, highlights the important shifts we are beginning to see in some corners of Bahá’í Studies. If we can extend Bahá’í Studies on a longer time frame, say back to the late 1950s—a period of forty years—we note important shifts, which are also partly induced by post-modernism and the “new ethnography.”

If one characterizes early Bahá’í Studies as having an objectivist stance, based on the assumption that knowledge can be independently ascertained by a lone scholar, the new trend must then be described as one that underscores intersubjectivity. Subjective elements are not ruled out or avoided, but are explicitly acknowledged. Whereas in earlier Bahá’í Studies one does not find the authorial voice, more contemporary studies recognize the relevance of the author’s recording the narrative. At the same time, Bahá’í authors today are urged to “decenter the self” (Brill, “Centering the Sacred and Decentering the Self”) so that self-absorption makes way for a sacred approach to the subject matter.

Finally, generational differences among Bahá’í academics display themselves in the stance a Bahá’í academic takes vis-à-vis his or her peers. I would suggest that the tone of earlier studies was mainly in-house: Bahá’í academics, though cognizant of the need to do Bahá’í Studies, were prone to keep their study of the Bahá’í Faith private and separate from their overall academic work. It was unusual, for example, to find dissertations about the Bahá’í Faith or community written by Bahá’ís, and Bahá’í academics believed that scholarly credibility was derived solely from their contributions to their respective professional fields, rather than from their contributions to Bahá’í Studies.

More and more contemporary Bahá’í academics, however, seem eager and willing to embark visibly on Bahá’í Studies. In evidence of this fact, young Bahá’í academics are more likely to write a doctoral dissertation on a Bahá’í topic, introduce Bahá’í Studies in academic environments, and some are even consciously trying to create new paradigms in their fields based on their reflections from the Bahá’í writings. It is important to highlight the fact that the circumstances of secular scholarship in general have changed, so that the contemporary scholarly discourse is more open to distinctly Bahá’í contributions.

The implications of this trend for mentorship are manifold. First, the new woman or man in Bahá’í Studies turns to a variety of others in Bahá’í Studies for guidance and nurturing, because no one can now define himself or herself as an expert. Rather, a group of people in Bahá’í Studies, known to each other either personally or through electronic referencing, will focus on the subject of study itself. The emphasis has moved clearly away from the self to the subject. The new scholar, as Brill argues, has “conversation with others” (“Centering the Sacred”).

Another implication relates to the way knowledge gets replicated. In the older, established approach, a mentored person would carefully build up a common stock of knowledge—the same body of knowledge that was echoed in the work of successive generations of scholars. In the newer scholarship, because of allegiance to multiple scholars, presumably in different fields, the mentored person does not see herself or himself as replicating or verifying a body of knowledge. Rather, such multiple “allegiances” can lead research into unexpected directions, perhaps seeming to lack the coherence of the old knowledge. What seems to be true, however, is that leaps in new directions are occurring (leading to increased interest in interdisciplinary approaches). Outwardly, and perhaps to the dismay of the older generation, the leap *appears* chaotic. The point is that a turn in Bahá’í Studies is taking place. Its aim is not yet defined; its methods are still fluid.

Mentorship can go a long way in resolving some of the complex problems that face Bahá’í Studies today. When one peruses, for example, “Notes from Scholarship Symposium” (Morgan, “Notes from Scholarship Symposium”), one can see that of the twenty-one deep concerns raised by a group of Association for Bahá’í Studies Conference participants, about a dozen issues can be resolved by having a process of mentoring in place, whether formal or informal. Yet, in a recent survey (Baghai, “Year-End Report on Initiatives B2 and B4” 2), while clearly all Bahá’í students in Canadian Campus Associations for Bahá’í Studies, as well as in United States Bahá’í College

Campus Clubs “would desire a mentoring relationship, few have experienced it.” It was also found that Bahá’í professors usually do not mentor Bahá’í students on campus.

The absence of mentorship is not surprising, given the findings of Patricia Suggs who states that “locating the appropriate mentor requires an aggressive effort on the part of the student” (“The Mentoring Relationship” 579). She suggests that the ideal mentorship requires that the mentor (1) be open about sharing knowledge and experience, (2) take a personal interest in the protégé(e), (3) engage in one-to-one interactions, (4) have strong connections to the larger academic or professional network, and (5) guide students (rather than mold them).

Conclusions

This article makes the case that Bahá’í mentorship is guided by the following factors that have defined the social organization of Bahá’í Studies:

First, the social dynamics of Bahá’í mentorship are related to the social organization of Bahá’í Studies. Languages, linguistics, and history (the most prolific areas in Bahá’í Studies) offer more time to develop a mentorship. Other fields seem to offer less time and are characterized by multiple points of entry (hence the reliance on several mentors). If those being mentored wish to choose an area where there has been consistent effort to make disciplinary links with the study of the Bahá’í Faith, they are advised to turn to the humanities and the sciences. For lack of a better term, the “lone wolf” syndrome of the other fields (i.e., where there are fewer consistent efforts to make collective disciplinary connections to the study of the Bahá’í Faith) is something of which persons being mentored should be aware. These “lone-wolf” fields include the social sciences, the professions, and music, art, and creative writing, although that, too, is changing.²⁵

Second, we should bear in mind that the participation of women in Bahá’í Studies is fairly low. Depending on the areas of study, Bahá’í women participate between 9% and 20% less than in parallel fields in the larger world. Bahá’í women do, however, seem to participate relatively more in those fields that are lower in the social hierarchy of Bahá’í Studies.

Finally, the social organization of Bahá’í Studies involves generational and temperamental differences. One finds an ongoing struggle between the value placed on objectivity by the earlier generation of Bahá’í scholars and the value now placed on intersubjectivity. These differences make mentorship problematic: if new scholars being mentored must rely on the earlier generation of Bahá’í scholars, then little progress can be charted unless both agree that something of value can emerge from the interaction of those two perspectives. The newcomers in the field, however, might well find multiple mentorships among themselves to be perhaps more rewarding.

Attendees at the 1995 Association for Bahá’í Studies Annual Conference (Morgan, “Notes”) expressed a desire to strive towards a form of Bahá’í Studies that discourages “confrontational exchanges,” promotes “more informal interchange” of views on works in progress, advances a “greater diversity” of perspectives and scholars, refuses to see “historical–critical research” as the defining perspective of Bahá’í Studies, and attempts to overcome the “duality of research” (academic and professional). Contemporary mentorship, in the face of the social organization of Bahá’í Studies sketched above, might have to become more self-conscious about its aims and methods.

Recent tensions between some Bahá’í academics and Bahá’í institutions seem to have bolstered the need, and desire, for mentorship. Such a mentorship has fostered cooperation among these scholars, cutting across disciplines, gender, and, one hopes, also across the generations.

Appendix

Hasan Balyúzí Memorial Lecturers, 1980–1997

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|------|---|
| 1980 | Abbas Afnan, medical doctor, “Hasan Balyúzí, An Afnan.”
Muhammad Afnan, medical doctor, “Hasan Balyúzí, An Afnan.”
John Robarts, former businessperson, Hand of the Cause, “Hasan Balyúzí, Hand of the Cause of God.” |
| 1981 | Douglas Martin, historian, “[no topic indicated]”
Glenford E. Mitchell, writer, “[no topic indicated]” |
| 1982 | Gayle Morrison, writer, “A New Creation: Power of the Covenant in the Life of Louis Gregory.” |
| 1983 | Firuz Kazemzadeh, historian, “Soviet Official Interpretation of Bábí–Bahá’í History.” |
| 1984 | David Hofman, writer and retired member, the Universal House of Justice, “Shoghi Effendi: Expounder of the Word of God.” |
| 1985 | Dorothy Freeman, writer, “From Copper to Gold: The Life of Dorothy Baker.” |
| 1986 | Adib Taherzadeh, former businessperson, Counsellor, “The Human Soul.” |

- 1988 Moojan Momen, medical doctor, “Learning from History.”
- 1990 H. Elsie Austin, lawyer, “Faith, Protest, and Progress.”
- 1991 David Hofman, writer and retired member of the Universal House of Justice, “Bahá’u’lláh: King of Glory.”
- 1993 Abbas Amanat, historian, “Progressive Revelation: From Zoroastrianism to the Bahá’í Faith.”
- 1994 David Ruhe, medical doctor and retired member, the Universal House of Justice, “A New Evolution: Religious Bonding for World Unity.”
- 1995 Amin Banani, professor of Persian literature, “Táhirih: Her Life and Poetry.”
- 1996 Ross Woodman, professor of English, “The Role of the Feminine in the Bahá’í Faith.”
- 1997 Dorothy W. Nelson, judge, “Using the Law to Prevent Human Rights Abuses.”

Source: Association for Bahá’í Studies, 30 May 1997.

Notes

1. Other scholars, such as Burke et al. (“Sex Differences and Cross-Sex Effects on Mentoring: Some Preliminary Data”), have also argued that the larger occupational and organizational context must be considered in any discussion on mentorship.
2. As was frequently the case in nineteenth-century England, a number of Bahá’ís who are trained as medical practitioners have also conducted substantial historical research and writing.
3. I have selected only the peer-reviewed articles in the *Journal* since its inception in 1988 until volume 7, number 2, in 1995. I have omitted book reviews, commentaries, and the like, because the relative weight of the *Journal* rests squarely on its major, i.e. peer-reviewed, articles of which there are three to four per issue. A total of 101 articles were assessed in this way, with 109 authors (some articles were co-authored). In assessing whether a peer-reviewed article belongs to a particular discipline, I found that a number of articles overlap in several ways. For an article written from a discipline’s perspective, but dealing with a Bahá’í teaching, I would treat that perspective as the primary one. For example, William Barnes’s article, “Forging More Perfect Unions” (1992), brings a political-science perspective to bear on the Bahá’í teachings concerning international, inclusive political structures. In my assessment, that article is, for all practical purposes, a political-science one (and there were 63 of such articles). There are also articles that straddle several areas of study. For example, Marion Woodman’s piece on Táhirih (1989) is written from the perspective of a social scientist to shed light on the creative interaction between a new revelation and the poet (there were only seven such pieces).
4. History, literature, language or linguistics, philosophy, apologetics/Bahá’í teachings, Bahá’í scholarship/studies, religious studies.
5. Medicine, law, business, library science, education, psychology, architecture.
6. Social science, sociology, economics, social and economic development, and political science.
7. The sciences, environment, and agriculture.
8. While, theoretically speaking, psychology is sometimes considered a social science, it is also reasonable to regard this field, especially when we look at the applied topics covered by these articles in the *Journal of Bahá’í Studies*, as principally a professional field. The psychology articles tend to be written from a professional perspective, rather than an academic, social-science one.
9. Each issue of the *Journal* carries biographical information of contributors of all articles. I have taken either the highest degree in a particular field as an indicator of academic or professional background, or, lacking such information, have taken the statement of their major activity as an indicator of their background and/or training.
10. History, literature, language or linguistics, philosophy, and religious studies.
11. Medicine, law, business, accounting, library science, education, psychology, psychoanalysis, communication, journalism, and architecture.
12. Sociology, anthropology, economics, political science, geography, and urban/regional planning.
13. The sciences in general, environment, physics, mathematics, agriculture, and engineering.
14. The author is grateful to Susan B. Brill for her reminder that the current directions in history, for at least the past decade, offer an “applied” version in such forms as oral history projects.
15. See the *Journal of Bahá’í Studies*, vol. 4, nos. 1 and 3 (1991) for this exchange of views.
16. History, literature, language or linguistics, philosophy, and religious studies.
17. The sciences in general, environment, physics, mathematics, agriculture, and engineering.
18. Sociology, anthropology, economics, political science, geography, and urban/regional planning.

19. Medicine, law, business, library science, education, psychology, psychoanalysis, communication, journalism, and architecture.
20. *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies, World Order, Bahá'í Studies Review, Bahá'í Studies Bulletin*.
21. It might be useful to explore the extent to which women authors are cited in these most-prominent scholarly Bahá'í works.
22. There are no figures available to substantiate this claim. The author's knowledge of Bahá'í women in Canadian academic institutions shows that, with few exceptions, all occupy the lower, untenurable ranks of academia.
23. In Canada, some of the fields without any women Bahá'í academics include architecture, biology/biochemistry, communication, engineering, French literature, Islamic Studies, linguistics, political science, psychiatry, and urban planning.
24. Burke et al. ("Sex Differences" 1019–22) provide a very useful list of questions that accompany the process of cross-gender mentorships, sensitizing their readers to more fruitful ways of interaction.
25. Over the past few years, the author (as a sociologist) has co-authored an article on chaos theory and the Bahá'í community with a mathematician (Dr. William Hackborn of Augustana University College, Alberta, Canada) (van den Hoonaard and Hackborn, "Chaos as Metaphor for the Study of the Postmodern World: A Bahá'í Illustration") and is currently embarking on a joint project with Dr. Anne Furlong of Memorial University of Newfoundland, applying "sensitizing concepts" to linguistic theory.

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