Informing the Bent Golden Rule or Reforming It – The Platinum Rule

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Title IX and The Lilly Ledbetter (Fair Pay Act, 2009), an extension of the Civil Rights Act, have not changed the fact that women in academia are paid 78% less than males in the professoriate while sometimes experiencing subjugation and oppression. This context is juxtaposed with the Golden Rule and Platinum Rule as nudged by a mentor and mentee relationship between a professor and undergraduate, young female honor student. How does this constant social convention toward women academics effect matriculated university students?

Key words: Golden Rule, Platinum Rule, Women’s Issues, mentor, diversity, civil rights

Close to seven years ago, Social Studies Research and Practice published an article written by me entitled the Bending the Golden Rule. The article focused on the 41 years since the passage of Title IX, the educational amendment protecting people from discrimination based upon gender. Now, 44 years later, women in academia are still continually 78% underpaid and underrepresented in the full professor ranks nationwide (American Association of University Women, 2016). Why is underrepresentation and underpayment still an operative convention? Is the old White male guard still guarding? Is it time to adjust the way we think about how to treat others? Is the Golden Rule bent, or is it replaced out of necessity?

In harmony with the Golden Rule (GR), it is proper to treat other people as you want to be treated by them. Broadening The Golden Rule, The Platinum Rule (PR), mutually independent from the Golden Rule, is treating other people as how they want to be treated by you. Following this rule may involve looking inward first, as well as asking others without imposing values, assumptions, and cultural mores upon them before acting.

The Golden Rule and The Platinum Rule

The Golden Rule is, “do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” This statement is often connected to the Bible as found in the book of Luke, the sixth chapter, and 31st verse. The Platinum Rule builds upon this premise, as it requires an adjustment in how the doer thinks. This adjustment prompts the recipient to think about how she or he wants to be treated. It is no longer a possible act when the actor considers what another wants. Nothing is imposed upon another because what is sought is to meet another’s needs and wants as they want it. Most likely, the recipient asked for what is given. This appears straightforward and moral.

How did the Platinum Rule Enter?

In serving as a mentor to many students (undergraduate through doctoral) within the university setting, I discover how I am perceived by my students. One particularly promising undergraduate educated me about how The Golden Rule is enhanced to be inclusive. The Platinum Rule came to me via Anaiza, an honor student and scholar. Her project in a business
ethics course was about implementing these rules. In our discussions, we covered topics including diversity, women’s issues, education, business, etc.

**More about The Rules**

The Golden Rule and the Platinum Rule have complementary details, particulars that are consonant, and there are circumstances when one rule is preferable over the other (Ronnedal, 2014). Concerning issues of diversity, it is often advisable to implement the Platinum Rule. In the time since those contemplative exchanges with my student, Anaiza about the rules, these notions have pushed my thinking on many levels. Within my classes on issues of diversity and multiculturalism, the Platinum Rule is certainly an appropriate consideration. Concerning ethical interactions with young children, especially children who are coping with trauma, distress, or vulnerability, the Platinum Rule is vital to the specific community context in which questions about what is desired have to be raised. In thinking about children in refugee settings, poverty, or other devastating distress, the Platinum Rule appears a more morally appropriate choice to enact. Families of diverse students in classrooms have to be part of the community. Isn’t it best to invoke The Platinum Rule to incorporate families into the school community? Are there exceptions?

**Questions of Morality and Implementation of the New Rule: The Platinum Rule**

Are there clear-cut markers educators can follow to know when The Golden Rule or Platinum Rule is best? In terms of equity and diversity issues, the Platinum Rule seems most plausible. If taken to the extreme, however, this rule could become dangerously intolerant. An example of this type of intolerance follows. Suppose an educator has to engage in an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meeting with a fervent Shia Muslim family. The family, who has twins (one male, one female) with Down’s Syndrome. The family does not want the female Down’s Syndrome twin to receive services but wants services for the male child. Another example to consider occurs when how medical doctors volunteering in developing countries where female mutilation is common, refuse to perform such a mutilating procedure on baby girls. This is the Platinum Rule gone awry. Morality should come into play. To whom does the morality belong? The question lies in the potential of the vulnerable human being. Seeing no grey area, only focusing a gaze on the extreme pole, most ideas become fanatic or militant.

**The Original Question.** The Golden Rule is terminally bent. If it had been reformed and informed, there would be no need to convene ad hoc groups, gather committees, have explicit statements in faculty handbooks, and write books on the topic of gender equity. If the Platinum Rule concerning women’s issues were invoked, however, there may not be a problem regarding salary and position. Lilly Ledbetter (Fair Pay Act, 2009) would not have had an original pay discrimination problem with Goodyear Tire and Rubber. They would not have paid her a salary rate different from that of male employees.

This type of oppression is discussed by Iris Young (1990). She lists five categories of control. Exploitation is the first, next is marginalization, then powerlessness, cultural imperialism is fourth, and systematic violence is the last. In terms of social conventions in salary and social positions within academia, marginalization and powerlessness are operative according to Young’s categories. Imagine being subjected to category three or worse in higher education. Some women have been. Using the Platinum Rule there would not be any further need for legislative parity or litigation about social justice, due process, or gender equity in academia (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988;
Christensen, Kohler, & Aldridge, 2012). Today, with the Golden Rule bent, no legislative act or lawsuit has changed the established social convention for academic women faculty. The Golden and Platinum Rules are complementary. The rules are not exclusive or equal. The nuances make each particular and contextually specific. John W. Curtis (2011) points to the academy asking examination:

when these high-achieving women students look around campus for faculty mentors and role models, what do they find? The answer by and large is that progress for women into the most prestigious (and well-paid) positions in academia has lagged far behind the advances experienced by women students (p.1).

Women in academia would not want to reject pay equivalent to male counterparts for comparable positions. Would they accept underrepresentation in the halls of academia as full professors in chosen fields? No doubt, implementing the Platinum Rule would turn pay equity on its head, as it would end women’s discrimination and oppression in the academy. Women’s equity and the innumerable other social conventions connected to women are questionable as to the specific characteristics that enter into administrative decisions about salary and positions (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988). Discriminatory moral dilemmas continue to be experienced by most matriculating university students in each university field. Status quo roles for women remain. It is the strongly held ideology that seeks to oppress and subordinate women within the educational academic economy (Christensen, Kohler, & Aldridge, 2012).

References


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