Specialization and Fragmentation Among Faculty as Endemic Features of Academic Life

Hal A. Lawson

Proposals promising integration have been offered as solutions to problems of faculty specialization and fragmentation. Despite their merits, these proposals may be premature or even misguided. A prior need is to analyze the roots and processes of specialization and fragmentation. One kind of analysis begins with the relationship among professionalization, problem setting, and paradigmatic communities. In addition to emphasizing the import of institutional and societal contexts, this analytical frame of reference calls attention to issues of power, authority, resources, and prestige in higher education. Specialization and fragmentation are endemic in higher education, and proposals aimed at integration must accommodate both.

In the 1960s an academic discipline of physical education was proclaimed (Abernathy & Waltz, 1964; Henry, 1964). In the 1970s and 1980s disciplinary advocates provided alternative visions for this discipline, including its proper name, subject matter domains, methodological imperatives, and nomenclature. Subdisciplinary associations formed, new academic specializations were founded in them, and related academic journals were established. Graduate and undergraduate programs of disciplinary study were designed, and departments that committed themselves to the development of this discipline increasingly called themselves kinesiology or exercise and sport science(s) in substitution for physical education. At the same time, new professional preparation programs for sport and exercise careers other than teaching were initiated.

The emergent disciplinary emphasis, as well as the changing programs, focuses, and names for departments, was contested, often bitterly. Physical education's teacher education professors and performance teachers in university-sponsored service or basic instruction programs led the resistance. Excitement about programmatic and departmental changes was matched by confusion, turmoil, and concern. With the ascension of the discipline, was the end of the physical education profession in sight (e.g., Bressan, 1979)? Was there one field of study or several? Were there ways to integrate faculty and programs to protect them against excessive fragmentation and specialization (e.g., Hoffman, 1985)?

About the Author: Hal A. Lawson is with the Department of Physical Education, Health and Sport Studies at Miami University, Oxford, OH 45056.
Proposals aimed at integration (e.g., Morford, Lawson, & Hutton, 1981; Rose, 1986), ironically enough, may have added to the confusion, turmoil, and concern they were framed to remedy.

As the 1990s drew near, there was another development. After a December 1988 conference cosponsored by the American Academy of Physical Education and the Consortium of Big Ten Universities, in the spring of 1989 the Academy officially approved kinesiology as the discipline. By extension, what was left was the profession. Both discipline and profession thus had become, in the organizational eyes of the Academy, singular, reified, and naturalized entities.

The Academy’s recent proclamation prompts several questions. Has consensus finally been achieved? Is the Academy’s proclamation the path to integration and harmony? Does it mark the end of fragmentation, specialization, and their expected consequences? Or, are fragmentation and specialization so endemic that integration and harmony are nearly impossible? Have discipline and profession become singular, reified, and naturalized entities?

Answers to questions like these require an analysis of the roots and processes of specialization and fragmentation, and such an analysis will be undertaken here. Among several alternatives for analyzing specialization and fragmentation, one will be developed. An analytical frame of reference founded upon the relationship among professionalization, problem setting, and paradigmatic communities will be employed. The progression is as follows. First, these three concepts are defined separately and then joined. Then their import for addressing questions about specialization, fragmentation, integration, disciplines, and professions is illustrated. The importance of institutional and societal contexts is emphasized, together with the ways in which the concepts of discipline and profession are intertwined with issues of power, authority, prestige, and resources. Selected implications are offered as a conclusion.

Two limitations must be acknowledged at the outset. First, the ensuing analysis is not designed to offer solutions or to endorse, explicitly or implicitly, any of the alternative proposals for the future of kinesiology (or exercise and sport science), its subdisciplines, or physical education. Rather, the intent is to facilitate critical appraisals of past proposals and discussions about future ones. If the twin effects of specialization and fragmentation are, as some analysts claim, like a disease, then this disease needs to be understood before offering cures. Second, it bears repeating that there are alternative perspectives on specialization and fragmentation. The selectivity and biases associated with the perspective used here are recognized; they will become more apparent as the analysis unfolds.

**An Analytical Frame of Reference**

**Professions and Professionalization**

Profession is an elusive concept. Discourses about the definition and functions of a profession are loaded with the ideological baggage carried by analysts and advocates. Whether their aim is description (objective analyses of professions), prescription (if we wish to become a profession, we should . . .), or both, the ideologies of analysts and advocates alike influence the definitional
parameters they employ. University faculty, especially persons trained in sociology, tend to dominate the discourses on professions, but their professional positions and training does not eliminate or conceal their values and vested interests (after Veysey, 1979). The fact remains that the concept of profession and the process describing a profession's formation (professionalization) are not amenable to black-and-white characterizations; rather, characterizations are like varying shades of gray. The same ambiguity surrounds the concept of an academic discipline, and again there are both analysts and advocates.

Hence, when presented with any analysis of professions and professionalization, or disciplines and "disciplinization," it is always possible to raise questions about the author's or proponent's values and vested interests. Whose political, social, economic, and moral interests are advanced and served by the definitional parameters employed?

The question has salience in physical education. Franklin Henry (1964) was among the first to make the distinction between an academic discipline and a profession, a distinction echoed repeatedly in the decades that followed. The definition of an academic discipline was predicated primarily upon an antithesis—whatever the profession was, the academic discipline was not (Henry, 1964; see also Kenyon, 1969). For example, physical education was technical and professional; the academic discipline that later would be called kinesiology was theoretical and scholarly. Physical education belonged in a school or college of education; kinesiology belonged in a college of arts and science.

Proposals aimed at making the physical education profession dependent upon this discipline (e.g., Kenyon, 1969; Lawson, 1979; Morford, 1972) also invite questions about vested interests of the advocates. Such a distinction between discipline and profession, together with the presumed dependence of the latter upon the former, is not unique to physical education. Since the turn of the century, the same kind of distinction has been offered in the social sciences, humanities, medicine, and law (Geiger, 1986; Rosenberg, 1979; Ross, 1979; Veysey, 1979). As in physical education, academic professors have formed and offered claims about the differences between themselves (i.e., the members of a discipline) and the profession's practitioners employed outside colleges and universities and engaged in client services. The presence of such an identifiable pattern suggests that there is more to this alleged antithesis between discipline and profession than professorial self-interest and the uniqueness residing in physical education. There also are institutional and societal influences. This relationship among professional self-interests, institutional demands and opportunities, and societal influences merits exploration.

**Professionalization, Knowledge, and University Employment Markets**

Between 1860 and 1920 the foundations for the modern university were established (Bledstein, 1976; Geiger, 1986; Lawson, 1989; Veysey, 1965). Like other societal institutions, the university was shaped by the forces of modernization—namely, specialization, urbanization, bureaucratization, and industrialization (Rosenberg, 1979). The American university that emerged in this period was a hybrid, combining aspects of the German, English, and Scottish models for a university (Lawson, 1988b). The kind of academic specialization embodied in the German model was incorporated in the American university, and the internal differentiation of the university followed. The once-universal classical
curriculum was replaced by an elective curricular system, the prototype for which was advocated by President Charles William Eliot of Harvard University.

An elective curricular system for undergraduates allowed the offering of specialized courses that required, in turn, faculty members with special expertise. Graduate programs emerged quickly that prepared such specialized faculty for the new responsibilities of teaching both undergraduate and graduate students and for new research activities. And specialized faculty required equally specialized academic homes and supervision, leading to the formation of an increasing number of academic departments and resulting in a new balance of power between the faculty and the administration (Geiger, 1986; Rosenberg, 1979; Veysey, 1979). With the addition of professional schools and colleges, which offered vocationalized education for an array of new careers (Bledstein, 1976), and with the advent of specialized majors in other subject fields, the American university played a central role in advancing specialization in society. At the same time, the university's internal specialization was responsible for its bureaucratization.

In 1900, 16 universities, conscious of their new roles and status, formed the Association of American Universities and patterned themselves after each other even as they competed for faculty and prestige. Other colleges and universities imitated these 16 leaders. So it was that universities became more alike than different in the years before 1920. These universities experienced dramatic growth, and, as they grew and developed, a fledgling "knowledge industry" was formed (Geiger, 1986). Academic departments, each with their increasingly specialized faculty, became the equivalent of knowledge production centers and gained privileged control over faculty appointments and reward systems.

Thus, the university of 1920 was dramatically different from its counterpart—the college—of the early 1860s. The universities in 1920 enjoyed a novel, firm connection with society's political, economic, and social institutions. The roles for, and preparation of, faculty had changed. New kinds of knowledge were being produced by these faculty, and curricula had changed to accommodate and disseminate this knowledge. These and related transformations of the universities, together with their enrollment growth, offered new opportunities for faculty employment.

In other words, universities offered new, specialized employment markets for faculty. Cognizant of changes in faculty roles and knowledge, and mindful of the new employment opportunities, groups of like-minded faculty organized themselves to gain economic, political, and social advantages. Their organizational activities included (a) offering definitions aimed at separating amateurs from appropriately prepared experts; (b) forming a national association and starting one or more scholarly journals; (c) gaining recognition for the necessity of their subject matter and, by extension, themselves; and (d) securing increasing amounts of authority and power, through academic departments, over the organization and conduct of their work in each university. Geiger (1986, pp. 20-39) documented the rise of most of today's commonly recognized disciplines in the years prior to 1920, indicating that each faculty group followed the same organizational pattern.

Although the framework provided by Geiger (1986) did not include an analysis of the early 20th-century version of physical education, the emergence of 20th-century physical education fits his pattern. Weston's (1962) limited, albeit original, description of the "Battle of the Systems" has been supplemented and,
in some ways, supplanted by subsequent historical research. In addition to Weston's description of competing kinds of programs (e.g., Swedish gymnastics, medical gymnastics, the sports and games curriculum), there were competing ideologies, not only among organizers of the fledgling physical education profession but also in other academic subject fields and in politics. The dynamics of achieving a kind of ideological compromise have been described by Whorton (1982) and Mrozek (1983). They, along with Park (1989) and Vertinsky (1990), have addressed selected aspects of the institutional and social contexts within which organizers of physical education attempted to (a) separate amateurs from expert professionals; (b) form national associations (e.g., American Association for the Advancement of Physical Education in 1889, later to become the American Physical Education Association in 1903); (c) start scholarly and professional journals (e.g., American Physical Education Review in 1896, Mind and Body in 1894); and (d) offer claims about the need for specialized scientific knowledge while establishing the need for formal programs and the creation of specialized faculty positions in universities.

As in other fields, a necessary, but uneasy, compromise was reached in conjunction with the professionalization of physical education, meaning that the foundation for the emergent profession was far from stable. From the beginning of the modern era, there were competing groups in physical education, each with their own version of idealized faculty, programs, and work practices. The absence of unanimity among the profession's organizers notwithstanding, in retrospect, the professionalization of physical education in universities was successful and conformed to Geiger's (1986) pattern.

The pattern endures today, along with the departmentalized and bureaucratized university in which it unfolded. Physical education's subdisciplines (e.g., sport psychology, exercise physiology) provide cases in point. Owing to the organizing efforts of like faculty in each subdiscipline, specialized national and international scholarly associations and specialized scholarly journals now exist for each subdiscipline. Specialized doctoral programs have been designed and implemented, helping to distinguish between experts and amateurs. Appointment, tenure, and promotion systems rely heavily upon the recommendations of visible subdisciplinary experts. There are continuous lobbying and legitimization efforts, sometimes expressed in accreditation and certification requirements. These efforts are aimed at convincing each university department that its curriculum must include the specialized knowledge of the subdiscipline, requiring the employment of at least one faculty specialist.

Today in physical education, as yesterday in other subject fields, these are efforts aimed at the constitution of and control over employment markets. These markets, along with the specialized knowledge that faculty are prepared to generate and disseminate, provide the structure for the prototypical academic career. Despite self-serving claims about doctoral programs preparing future faculty to pursue knowledge for its own sake, these programs are, first and foremost, vocational, career-oriented programs aimed at established and emergent employment markets in universities and, to a lesser extent, other organizations that accommodate academic work.

Analyses of professionalization fall into three categories: structural-functional approaches, process approaches, and power approaches (Lawson, 1984). The power perspective takes analysts to the heart of professionalization—a
group's attempt to constitute and control labor markets (Larson, 1977). As indicated, each group makes claims about its special knowledge and expertise, its privileged qualifications. Each group seeks two kinds of authority: economic authority (a monopoly of the employment market) and cultural authority (Starr, 1982). The latter is control over meaning and experience—for example, what it means to be physically fit, together with how, by whom, and under what conditions fitness is developed and maintained. The development of several disciplines prior to 1920 and, subsequently, the development of the discipline and subdisciplines after 1964 are themselves examples of professionalization (Lawson, 1989).

Hence, distinctions between discipline and profession, whether in physical education or in other fields, are socially constructed and constituted rather than naturalized and reified. Although academic faculty specialists differ from human service professionals in several ways (e.g., service ethics, client orientations, direct versus indirect organizational support systems), they all are, as the saying goes, cut from the same cloth. Attempts by the so-called learned professions (i.e., university faculty) to distance and distinguish themselves from the technical and client-oriented human service professions are, therefore, aspects of the former's professionalizing activities. Their claims about their distinctiveness are intended to gain them "socio-epistemological deference" (Larson, 1984). And it will become evident that problem-setting activities play central roles in this process of professionalization, both in the learned and the human service professions.

Disciplines as Professions: The Role of Problem Setting

Problem setting is the process by which an identifiable group—in this case, specialized university faculty—determines the purposes of their work. It proceeds on the basis of framing and naming (Lawson, 1984).

There are both individual and collective frames of reference, which are acquired during the various stages of the occupational socialization process for faculty. Reference frames are responsible for the social editing of both individuals and entire groups. These frames are grounded in values and ideology, and they call attention to some phenomena at the expense of others. The result is a kind of selective perception that is demonstrated in the actions and inaction of individuals and groups.

Over time, a specialized nomenclature develops around a frame of reference, and this vocabulary of names also is acquired during each faculty member's occupational socialization. Names are employed in individual and group discourses, both oral and written; analyses, via deconstruction, of these discourses allow the identification of ideology and reference frames (Tinning, 1990). In both the learned (academic) and human service professions, gaining the equivalent of induction as a member involves mastering and expressing a formalized vocabulary, and this vocabulary is employed in relation to identifiable frames of reference and purposes.

The more familiar way to describe and explain problem setting is in relation to the missions of the human service professions in general (e.g., Rein, 1983; Schon, 1983) and physical education's client-oriented professions in particular (e.g., Lawson, 1984, 1988a; Tinning, 1990). Problem setting also characterizes the identification of purposes and the establishment of reference frames and
vocabularies (names) in the learned or academic professions. Here, it is worth remembering that subject fields or disciplines have been invented; they are socially constructed and constituted by humans. Initially, there was only theology, the queen of sciences. Later, there were two subject fields, as secular philosophy was founded alongside sacred theology. Later still came the classics and the infant sciences. Between 1850 and 1920, in the United States and Germany, the forerunners of many of the modern disciplines were formed (Geiger, 1986).

The point is, the universe of knowledge—human omniscience—is interconnected and unbounded. Humans, chief among them faculty specialists, superimpose knowledge territories or disciplinary domains (e.g., Becher, 1989). These territories or disciplines are socially constructed and constituted by groups of specialists intent upon professionalization.

Campbell’s (1969) Fish Scale Model of Omniscience illustrated the social construction and constitution of disciplines upon this omniscience. Evoking the imagery of overlapping and interconnected fish scales, Campbell reminded analysts that human omniscience is not naturally divided into categories and territories. Rather, human omniscience is interconnected and overlapping, like scales on a fish. It follows that disciplinary boundaries imposed and enforced by faculty are unavoidably ethnocentric (Becher, 1989; Campbell, 1969). Such disciplines conceal and perhaps distort knowledge and knowledge relationships at the same time that aspects of human omniscience are revealed.

In other words, disciplinary boundaries or parameters reflect specialized frames of reference used by faculty. A discipline’s boundaries, subject matter concepts, and relevant methodologies are defined and expressed through a specialized vocabulary or set of names. To reiterate, problem setting proceeds upon the basis of framing and naming. Hence, the social construction and constitution of disciplines upon human omniscience stems from the process of problem setting.

As in the human service professions, problem setting for constructing and constituting disciplines does not occur in a contextual vacuum, nor is it scientific. Problem setting occurs in institutional and societal contexts, and these contexts need to be taken into account when analyzing this process and its products (after Rosenberg, 1979). Related analyses of the social sciences (Ross, 1979) and the humanities (Veysey, 1979) in the period between 1860 and 1920 emphasize the impact of the institutional context of the emergent university and the societal context on these subject fields and the universities in which they evolved. The social sciences and the humanities are instructive because, in both cases, there was visible resistance to disciplinary specialization and only minimal ways to unify disciplinary practitioners.

For example, in the case of the social sciences, Ross (1979) has suggested that only a loose agreement on the import of scientific rationality served to bond the various practitioners. But the institutional and societal contexts in which members of the social sciences and humanities were situated between 1860 and 1920 compelled them to engage in problem-setting activities related to disciplinary and subdisciplinary formation. The cases of the humanities and social sciences, as described by Ross (1979) and Veysey (1979), illustrate another aspect of the relationship between problem setting and the social construction and constitution of a discipline.

In the social sciences, humanities, and other learned professions, opposition to aspirant disciplinary leaders is inevitable. In the face of member resistance
in a group and amidst changing institutional and societal contexts, the politics of problem setting become apparent. The territorial boundaries for, and constituent elements of, a discipline—its purposes, concepts, methodologies, and vocabulary—represent the preferences and values of the leaders. As these leaders read opportunities, constraints, and threats into their institutional and societal contexts, they form alliances with internal and external constituents and begin to exercise political power. The disciplinary power, authority, and prestige accruing to these leaders may be antecedents or consequences of their political success. Thus, in addition to examining the institutional and social contexts for problem setting, it also is instructive to look within a discipline or subdiscipline and ask the distributive question. Who gets what, how much, when, and why during the initial formation and subsequent evolution of a discipline or subdiscipline? Do the values and will of powerful leaders automatically become the values and will of the rank and file? What are the grounds for resistance and who leads the opposition? These questions connect the process of problem setting to the establishment and maintenance of paradigmatic communities.

Problem Setting and Paradigmatic Communities

The ambiguities surrounding his multiple uses of paradigm notwithstanding, Kuhn’s (1975) insights into the social bases of science, like Brannigan’s (1981) work on the organizational and societal contexts for scientific discoveries, show the communal side of institutional science. Freely translated, Kuhn indicated that groups of like researchers concentrate primarily on problem solving (mopping-up operations). Only rarely do they engage in problem setting. Problem setting is initiated in the face of disagreements and anomalies that cannot be reconciled within the dominant frame of reference, which Kuhn alternatively called paradigm and theory.

Kuhn’s analysis was aimed at the natural sciences, disciplinary fields that, until recently, offered the appearance of widespread agreement and conformity. In the social sciences, humanities, human service subject fields (e.g., social work, education, clinical psychology, public administration), and in physical education, widespread agreement and conformity are not the norm. There are visible disagreements among members of learned and human service professions as several approaches compete as the appropriate way to do research or complete work practices. Bucher and Strauss (1961) observed 30 years ago that groups of like workers frequently were characterized by internal divisiveness. They called competing subgroups segments and noted that these groups jockeyed for political position in an effort to make their definition of appropriate work and work practices the entire group’s definition. Freely translated, each segment endeavors to make its approach to problem setting the parent group’s approach.

Such competing approaches to problem setting and its products result in work gestalts. These competing worldviews may be categorized as dominant, residual (lingering from the past), and emergent (a nascent approach that may portend the future) (after Williams, 1977). For example, that there are competing and conflicting proposals for school physical education programs is well known; these approaches, together with their advocates and practitioners, can be categorized and analyzed as dominant, emergent, and residual (Lawson, 1988a). The same kind of analysis aimed at categorizing dominant, emergent, and residual groups among faculty in a given discipline or subdiscipline is revealing.
For example, Tinning (1990) recently provided an analysis of the dominant approach to sport pedagogy research and initiated theoretical work for an emergent paradigm. Earlier, Lawson (1983) had explored two paradigmatic communities in the same sport pedagogy domain. Whether in sport pedagogy or in other subdisciplines, such identifiable groups of like researchers or faculty constitute identifiable paradigmatic communities. These communities work and compete within the same disciplinary framework. Although research may be conducted impartially, the claims-making activities by faculty in these communities about the value of their work practices, their knowledge, and themselves are value laden and politically oriented. These claims are voiced by leaders of these paradigmatic communities in various efforts to persuade other members, thereby gaining power, authority, and prestige for themselves and their paradigmatic community.5

Paradigmatic communities categorized as emergent and residual may remain affiliated with the dominant group, but when unreconcilable differences arise, emergent and residual communities may divorce themselves from the dominant majority. Such separations are as likely to occur in the learned as in human service professions. In the latter case, we appear to be witnessing today the initiation of the health and fitness professions’ divorce from physical education, which is viewed as a group of school teachers and coaches. In the case of the learned professions, we recently have witnessed the birth of a new, applied sport psychology existing alongside a separate sport psychology (Martens, 1987). The applied group now has its own national association, conferences, and scholarly journals. It represents a paradigmatic community whose leaders and members could not find sustained compatibility as one segment competing against a dominant and powerful majority.

At the root of such separations are disagreements over problem setting. Such disagreements are especially likely to occur as a field of study matures. With the advancement of knowledge, requirements for technological and methodological sophistication increase, allowing a few pioneers to explore the frontiers of knowledge while others travel along well-charted scholarly trails. Increasingly, methodological and epistemological differences between the pioneers and the majority become manifest. This is a breeding ground for fragmentation (Van Maanen & Barley, 1984, p. 345). And when a new disciplinary group is formed among these pioneers, new frames of reference, concepts, methodologies, and names may be endorsed. Moreover, the occupational socialization of new members in relation to this novel problem-setting framework will be inaugurated or accelerated.

Such separations may or may not constitute the equivalent of what Kuhn (1975) called paradigm shifts, which are the equivalent of scientific revolutions. Because scientific revolutions are unusual by any account, such group separations are best characterized as changes in paradigmatic communities. These changes in paradigmatic communities result from different approaches to problem setting, and they are better described in these terms than by suggesting that they represent scientific revolutions. These separations are caused by quarrels over resources, power, authority, and prestige as much as by debates over scientific merit. To reiterate, the recent separation into two sport psychologies provides a case in point, and the same kind of internal differentiation is underway in other subdisciplines (e.g., exercise physiology, biomechanics).
Specialization and Fragmentation or Integration?

To recapitulate, in both learned and human service professions, leaders and their constituents engage in the process of problem setting. Such problem setting results in purposes or missions, together with identifiable reference frames, and a vocabulary of names. Definitions of knowledge, the core theoretical concepts, and the permissible methodologies for generating and using this knowledge also are derived from problem setting. Group-authored claims about their own privileged generation and use of this knowledge serve as the currency used in simultaneous attempts to constitute and control employment markets (e.g., position vacancies on university faculties) and cultural spaces of meaning and experience (e.g., exercise and sport practices). Problem setting, in short, sets the stage for the social, political, and economic organization of both learned and human service professions (i.e., for both discipline and profession). Disciplines and professions, thus, are more alike than different, and the successful creation of a discipline or subdiscipline is in essence a form of professionalization.

Only rarely does either a learned or human service profession’s problem setting begin with, or result in, unanimity among its members. Disagreements about problem setting and its products are responsible for the formation of segments within each learned and human service profession, segments that may be called paradigmatic communities. Dominant, residual, and emergent paradigmatic communities contest for control over the purposes, reference frames, knowledge bases, and names of the learned or human service profession that harbors them. These contests occur continuously in changing institutional and societal contexts. Each community’s problem-setting activities provide different readings or perceptions of the opportunities, constraints, and threats presented in these contexts. Then, each paradigmatic community makes deliberate attempts, via publications, conference presentations, and peer networking systems, to persuade others that their reading or perception ought to become the profession’s dominant worldview. A residual or emergent paradigmatic community becomes dominant when it is successful in persuading members of other paradigmatic communities to join it and when it gains control over the recruitment and socialization of new members.

Nevertheless, competing residual and emergent paradigmatic communities do not vanish. The once-dominant community becomes residual; it continues to exist until its advocates depart and the recruitment and socialization of new members ends. Emergent communities also remain and continue to evolve. Hence, contests over problem setting waged among competing paradigmatic communities constitute the norm in the learned and human service professions. These contests are endemic in learned professions, constituting the roots of fragmentation and specialization.

But there is more to specialization and fragmentation than such contests among paradigmatic leaders and their constituent faculty communities. The organizational contexts for these contests cannot be ignored.

Contests for control are waged in two organizational contexts. One is the professional association; the other is the university department. The structure and operations of university departments serve to intensify the effects of these contests, adding to specialization and fragmentation. Decisions about the
curriculum, priorities for hiring faculty, the selection of a chairperson, the criteria for faculty rewards, and similar operational decisions further polarize faculty identities and group affiliations (Campbell, 1969). Different frames of reference and different names or work vocabularies may render intellectual interchanges unintelligible. Political coalitions formed to gain control over a department’s culture, missions, and programs tend to be fragile, resting upon uneasy compromises reached among otherwise competing specialists. These are not fertile grounds for integration.

Separate professional associations and university departments may result. Faced with differences that are perceived to be irreconcilable, and mindful of its minority status as either a residual or emergent group, a paradigmatic community may separate from the larger learned or human service profession and department when it has gained a sufficient number of members and established its communication and recruiting networks. Although such a separation may be predicated in part upon scholarly, scientific, and moral grounds, it also is caused by concerns about power, authority, resources, and prestige.

Once separated from their former department or association, newly formed learned and human service professions also engage in professionalization, following the respective routes for learned professions or disciplines (Geiger, 1986) and human service professions (Bledstein, 1976). Even then, unanimity, if it is present in the first place, likely will not endure. With changing institutional and societal contexts, the problem setting of members will lead to differences between members, prompting the formation of emergent paradigmatic communities that later will contest for dominance. Later still, the once-dominant community may become residual or another separation may occur, or both will eventuate.

The existence of dominant, emergent, and residual paradigmatic communities within learned and human service professions means that persons bearing the same occupational titles and coveting the same occupational identities will display differences in their approaches to, and the actual performance of, their work responsibilities. Because occupational recruitment and socialization proceeds in part in relation to the demonstrated performances and practices of incumbents, these three kinds of paradigmatic communities will remain as long as they are able to recruit new members, socialize them, and defend their work gestalts against the competing claims offered by other communities. Such competing and conflicting approaches to work definitions and practices earn learned professions or disciplines labels such as “multi-paradigm science” (e.g., Ritzer, 1975). In the case of client-oriented human services, disagreements over work goals and practices characterize “minor professions” (Glazer, 1974). In both cases, internal fragmentation and specialization reduce the group’s political leverage and prestige, perhaps resulting in organizational and societal marginality.

Kinesiology, or exercise and sport science, is especially susceptible to the continuous formation of paradigmatic communities and, in turn, to increasing fragmentation and specialization. For example, claims about kinesiology’s status as a singular or umbrella discipline notwithstanding, the fact remains that its constituent subdisciplines function more like disciplines than does kinesiology. Above all, the occupational identities and career paths of faculty are formed in relation to the subdisciplines (e.g., sport psychology, exercise physiology). In other words, a discipline or subject field is supposed to give its faculty their master identities, and it would appear that faculty prefer their respective
subdisciplinary identities as sport psychologists, exercise physiologists, and so forth in lieu of a common designation as, for example, kinesiologists. Furthermore, multiple programs and programmatic specializations in departments nurture more fragmentation and specialization, not integration.

To continue with the example of kinesiology, an integrated and holistic conception of it is further complicated by its lingering connections with physical education. Both program and faculty identities associated with physical education shadow kinesiology's present and future claims regarding field independence and uniqueness. These residual connections, together with now-firm faculty identities and career tracks in the constituent subdisciplines, suggest that kinesiology by any name is far from a singular, reified, and naturalized disciplinary entity. Despite the recent proclamation of the American Academy (of Physical Education!) in its behalf, kinesiology's structural and relational features do not appear to encourage integration and the end of specialization and fragmentation. To the contrary, kinesiology, exercise and sport science, physical education in schools and related agencies, and the new sport and exercise careers appear ripe for the continuous formation of paradigmatic communities and the kinds of fragmentation and specialization they auger.

Today's institutional and societal contexts also must be taken into account when considering proposals aimed at integration. Biomechanical imagery associated with centripetal and centrifugal influences may be used to illustrate this claim.

There are what might be called centripetal influences supportive of integration, including (a) imitative behaviors by departments, academic divisions, and entire universities in the quest for prestige, dominance, and survival; (b) accreditation and certification standards offered by professional associations; (c) so-called core undergraduate and graduate curricula aimed at synthesizing knowledge and providing students a common denominator of knowledge and experience; (d) special conferences, publications, presentations, and networking activities aimed at integration; and (e) a continuing hunger for one best system among university faculty amidst an organizational climate of uncertainty, turmoil, and rapid change. There also are pulls in the opposite direction.

The equivalent of centrifugal influences include (a) the structural ambiguity confronting not only specific departments but entire professional schools and colleges (see Clifford & Guthrie, 1988; Lawson, 1988b, 1990); (b) strategic academic planning, with its requirements for selective excellence and program reductions, as initiated by universities and required by states; (c) a new wave of university "managerialism" and accountability systems, both of which isolate programs and faculty for analysis; (d) state-initiated reforms of teacher education and other kinds of professional education, together with state-specific requirements (e.g., to receive certification to teach physical education, a student must complete an undergraduate major in a discipline and complete a master's degree); (e) the intrusive postures and actions of state-wide coordinating bodies for higher education in determining the kinds of programs offered in a state or region, their idealized location, and appropriate support levels; (f) especially in the prestigious, research-oriented multiversities, the structural expectations for departments and faculty to secure external revenue from grants, contracts, and gifts; (g) the increasing professionalization of faculty in all specializations and the concomitant erosion of loyalties and commitments to sponsoring universities,
schools and colleges, and departments; (h) the aforementioned subdisciplinary orientations of faculty and subdisciplinary programs of study; and (i) employment markets available to kinesiology and physical education doctoral students in other university departments and in organizations (e.g., medical centers) other than universities. The mere presence of such opposing and ambiguous institutional and societal influences favors specialization and increasing fragmentation rather than integration. Furthermore, these centrifugal influences are in all likelihood more powerful than their centripetal counterparts.

In conclusion, it is important to reemphasize that specialization and fragmentation are not limited to faculty in physical education, kinesiology, and related fields. Indeed, Burton Clark (1987) characterized professors in all fields as inhabiting "small and different worlds," a finding that has been extended recently to physical education (Lawson, 1991). The preceding analysis of the relationship among professionalization, problem setting, and paradigmatic communities provides one perspective that helps to explain this specialization and fragmentation. In this perspective, fragmentation and specialization are endemic in learned and human service professions. Even the most elegant proposals do not promise to eliminate them. Short of agendas for change characterized by a Luddite-like retreatism, reformist proposals for the 1990s, which are aimed at integration, must accommodate faculty specialization and fragmentation.

References


BRESSAN, E. (1979). The profession is dead—was it murder or suicide? Quest, 31, 77-82.


---

Notes

1See, for example, the responses to Karl Newell’s recent proposals for kinesiology (*Quest*, 42[3], 1990).

2Henceforth, *learned* profession refers to the discipline; *human service* profession refers to profession.

3I am indebted to John Loy for insights related to Campbell’s work.
Debates over *kinesiology* versus *exercise and sport science(s)*, for example, are more than name games; at issue are reference frames, boundary mapping, and central knowledge concepts.

See Larson’s (1984) discussion of how an oligarch or oligarchies rule scientific fields, competing for the right to speak ‘‘in the name of science’’ as well as control markets and practices.

The importance of career identities and work orientations for faculty and other career concepts has been identified in a related work (Lawson, 1991). Proposals aimed at integration must accommodate or change these career identities and orientations.