

## **smeeta mishra**

This paper explores the academic craftsmanship of two scholars: Prof. Pamela Shoemaker, the John Ben Snow Professor, an endowed research chair, at the S.I. Newhouse School of Communications at Syracuse University and Prof. Clement Henry, an expert on the political economy of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), who teaches in the Government department at the University of Texas at Austin. I chose to interview these two scholars because they are renowned in their respective fields of research. They took advantage of opportunities that came around. They have been phenomenally productive, consistently producing numerous journal articles and books. They also complement my multi-disciplinary research interest: I am studying the American media coverage of the Middle East. While Prof. Shoemaker's work gives me insight into the workings of the American press, media content, questions of legitimacy, research methods etc., Prof. Henry's research offers insights into the socio-political and economic transitions in the Middle East. It also makes an interesting study to compare academic craftsmanship of two scholars in two completely different fields as it entails examining styles used in area studies and comparative politics, on the one hand, and an emerging and dynamic social science discipline such as Mass Communication, on the other.

Prof. Shoemaker has been teaching for more than 21 years. Her research has been published in several books and monographs. Dr. Shoemaker's most recent book, *How to build Social Social Science Theories*, is co-authored by J. Tankard and D. Lasorsa and is planned for publication in December 2003. One of her books, *Mediating the Message: Theories of Influences on Mass Media Content*, which she co-authored with Prof. Steeve Reese, (1991, 1996, Longman), has been named by *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* as one of "the 30 Most Important Books in Journalism and Communication of the 20th Century." Apart from writing books that have tremendously influenced the direction and content of communication research, she has written 10 book chapters, 20 refereed journal articles, 11 other articles and essays, 9 book reviews, 42 refereed conference papers, 27 presentations and speeches, and directed 50 theses and dissertations. She has also found time to serve on various committees. She served as the president (1995-1996) of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (AEJMC). She is now the administrative co-editor of the *Communication Research Journal*.

Prof Henry's qualifications include a M.B.A. from the University of Michigan and a Ph.D. in Political Science from Harvard University. Prof. Henry wrote his most recent book *Globalization and the Politics of Development in the Middle East* with Robert Springborg (Cambridge University Press, 2001). One of his books *The Mediterranean Debt Crescent: Money and Power in Alegria, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, and Turkey* (University Press of Florida, 1991) explores the relationship between economic and political power in the five Muslim countries.

He examines the space and power occupied by commercial banks in patrimonial MENA politics which is characterized by a network of patron-client relationships. The book also examines Islamic finance and its possible role in the democratization of the Middle East. Prof. Henry co-edited *Oil in the New World Order* (University Press of Florida, 1996), edited the *Maghreb et Maitrise Technologique* (Tunis, CERP, 1995), and authored *Images of Development: Egyptian Engineers in Search of Industry* (2nd edition, American University in Cairo Press, 1994.) Prof. Henry has also contributed over 36 articles in other books and journals, including the *American Political Science Review*. Prof. Henry directed the business school at the American University of Beirut from 1981 to 1984. He has lived in the field for over 12 years in Algiers, Beirut, Cairo and Rabat. He speaks French, German and Arabic.

How did the two scholars manage to publish so many articles and books? What were their working hours like? Did they have a life outside their research area? Where did they get grants from? How did they balance teaching with research? Did they ever burn out? This paper seeks to find answers to such questions of academic craftsmanship.

Both Prof. Shoemaker and Prof. Henry made modest beginnings just like other graduate students today. They had similar dilemmas which they sorted out in time. Many graduate students worry about what they should do after completing their master's: work in the industry or do a Ph.D. It was no different for Dr. Shoemaker. In fact, she was the first person in her family to get a college degree. But she left graduate school after completing her master's to work with association publications. She edited and designed newsletters for various organizations, including the Federation for Prosthodontic Organizations and the American Association of Women Dentists. But she found her job incredibly boring. "It became physically painful to work in that field," she says. So she called her old adviser at Ohio University who advised her to do a Ph.D. at one of the three universities: Wisconsin, Michigan State or Stanford. Before she applied, she married a man who was living in Wisconsin, so she ended up at the University of Wisconsin for a Ph.D.

Both Prof. Shoemaker and Prof. Henry were open to inputs from other doctoral students and faculty. They were intellectually imaginative. They happened to identify their research interests by chance happenings. Something happened that sparked their interest in the area and they pursued it for the rest of their lives, probing deep, expanding and improving on their work. Prof. Shoemaker identified her research interest when a classmate, also a doctoral student like her, showed her an article on Legitimacy by Ralph Miliband. It got Dr. Shoemaker very interested in the problems of legitimacy. Her dissertation also dealt with the same topic: Political Deviance, the Media, and Legitimacy. She believes a doctoral student

should not only learn from professors but should also be open to inputs from fellow students. “We are all colleagues – the faculty and doctoral students” she says.

Prof. Henry also identified his area of research by a chance incident. After graduating from Harvard, he spent a year in France when he was expelled from the country for the nature of his participation in Algerian student politics. He was expressing solidarity with Algerian interests and their perception of the consequences of French colonialism. “I was given 48 hours to leave France,” he said. He was back at Harvard to pursue graduate studies in the Government Department. Since then, he has researched on the Middle East and North Africa with particular focus on Algeria.

The examples of how these two scholars discovered their research interests, shows that one must learn to use one’s life experiences in one’s intellectual work. “In this sense, craftsmanship is the center of yourself and you are personally involved in every intellectual product upon which you may work....As a social scientist, you have to control this rather elaborate interplay, to capture what you experience and sort it out; only in this way can you hope to use it to guide and test your reflection, and in the process shape yourself as an intellectual craftsman” (Mills, 1959, p.196)

Once they identified their research interest, they focused on being productive in their field. They balanced their teaching assignments with their research. After completing her doctorate, Shoemaker got a job at the University of Texas at Austin through the AEJMC placement service. As an assistant professor at UT, she taught two classes a semester. Teaching and office hours took up about fifty percent of her time. But she identified a “research day” every week when she would stay at home and work on what she calls her “own stuff.” “I never considered teaching my own stuff,” she said. “My heart is in doing my own research. It’s my own stuff.” Dr. Shoemaker calls herself a theoretician. She loves building theories to explain phenomena. In his tips on intellectual craftsmanship, Mill argues that every social scientist should be his own methodologist, his own theorist (1959, p. 214). Prof. Shoemaker loves content analysis. She has been using content analysis since her days as a doctoral student at the University of Wisconsin.

Prof Henry also found it difficult to do research during the semester when he kept busy with his teaching assignments. But he says that a lot depended on what he was teaching in a particular semester. “When I am teaching a class on Israel-Palestine conflict, it does not help me in research,” he said. “But my graduate seminar courses feed off my research.”

According to Prof. Shoemaker, she managed to be so productive because she was

“internally motivated.” Many assistant and associate professors may be externally motivated, i.e., they are doing research because they are meeting a certain requirement. But she just loved doing research. Her pace of doing research did not decline when she got tenure. Instead, she changed the product of her research from conference papers to books. “After getting tenure, Steve and I decided to work on a book,” she recollected. “The emphasis was now on books.” She had more time and the tenure clock did not bother her anymore. Dr. Shoemaker hardly writes conference papers anymore. She regrets the fact that she is unable to meet younger scholars. But she gives a reason for not attending association conferences: “They are deadly boring,” she says. With or without conference papers, Shoemaker gives a lot of time and energy to her work. She taught every summer for extra money for a very long time. She calls it a trap because the extra money became a part of her budget and she could not do without it.

Prof. Henry offers research productivity tips to graduate students and assistant professors. He believes several journal articles can be drawn from a well-documented dissertation or theses. This can help a young assistant officer in meeting tenure requirements. The assistant professor has to constructively address the pressure to publish during tenure clock.

But there may be times when balancing research, teaching and life in general can become highly demanding. Prof Shoemaker admits she burned out once. Though she does not remember the exact year, it was during her tenure at the University of Texas at Austin, between 1982 and 1991. She refers to it as the summer of the nervous breakdown. She broke down just before she resigned as the director of the Survey Research Center at UT. It was a time she stayed at home and stared at walls. “I started the research center. I had to bring it half a million dollars to maintain the staff. I had asked the dean to give a course reduction. He said no. I came to the realization that money was less important. Time was more important. I was spending too much time on the research center. I couldn’t have a life. I couldn’t do research. I resigned. It was very unusual for me,” she says.

Prof. Henry says he has avoided a burn out so far. He has never really separated his work from his life. “There are always trade offs between leisure and work but academic work is relatively leisurely and over the years my research and life in general tend to blend nicely - like seeing old friends in Algeria last year at the beginning of what may turn out to be an interesting research project,” he says.

Except during the brief burn out period, Prof. Shoemaker has been successful in balancing her work time with her time spent at home. She says she is able to keep a balance because she is a very efficient person. She is introverted. She does not

enjoy spending too much time surrounded by people. As she spends a lot of time alone, she believes she gets a lot of work done. “When I enrolled in the doctoral program, my husband realized I had the potential of being a workaholic. So he suggested I begin work when he leaves for office, that is, at 7:30 a.m. and complete work by 5:30 p.m. when he returns. So I would go into my office at home at 7:30 a.m. and come out at 5:30 p.m. This helped me develop a habit of normal working hours. Of course, there were exceptions like when I was writing my dissertation.”

Prof. Shoemaker is a good example for women in the academy who are juggling the roles of researcher, teacher, wife and mother in their everyday lives. Prof. Shoemaker has balanced every role of her life. And, she still loves her work. So does Prof. Henry. They are both passionate about their research.

Thus, the scholars emphasize that it is important to do research in the area that interests the scholar. One should not do research on a particular topic just because it gets easy funding. Prof. Shoemaker emphasizes that the amount of research money available from foundations has dropped substantially in the past 20 years, and the near future does not promise anything different. She points out that the vast amount of research in mass communications has been done with little or no funding. Much of the research started out as class projects, and sometimes university departments offered assistance in the form of money and supplies. “Lucky people like me have their own budgets and therefore substantial freedom to study almost anything I want,” she says.

She admits that now there is more and more pressure on faculty and management in universities to get outside funding. Prof. Shoemaker makes a distinction between hard sciences and social science disciplines in this regard. Ensuring outside funding makes more sense in hard science disciplines that require laboratory surroundings and heavy equipment for research. However, in social sciences, a little financial help can go a long way in ensuring completion of major research projects. It bothers Dr. Shoemaker that the upper administration does not understand the difference in need and extent of outside funding across various disciplines. “So, those very few mass communication faculty who are able to bring in outside money are considered flowers in the weed bed, at least for the length of the grant. I think those people are real suck-ups,” she says. She points out that there’s federal money available for specific projects, if scholars are willing to study areas that interest the government or grant agencies. Such scholars should also be willing to study in the way the government or grant agency wants them to study the area. However, she does not recommend such craftsmanship. Instead, she advises assistant professors and graduate students to find ways to fund what they want to study, rather than compromising their research interest to ensure funding.

“I’ve always followed my own path and have little interest in that kind of money. If I wanted to be a social scientist with a GS grade for the government, I’d go do that instead of being at a university. Actually, I have a deal with Steve to shoot me if I ever even think of such a thing. Follow your heart. The money may not come, but maybe a few volunteer coders or interviewers will drop by,” she says.

Prof. Henry has similar ideals. For instance, though he did not get funding for researching on Islamic Finance, he continued work in the area whenever funds were available. He traveled to various parts of the world with limited money. During Maymester this year, Prof. Henry will be in Morocco as visiting faculty. UT will pay for it. He says that researchers should keep an eye on both little and big grants in the area of their research interest, on organizations that dole out money for research. In the area of Middle Eastern Studies, the American Institute of Maghreb Studies, is a good source.

As an academician, Prof. Henry also maintains the distinction between a scholar and a polemicist. “I have never written a work on the Arab-Isreali conflict,” he said. However, he believes ideology cannot be completely kept out of the classroom. “I won’t mobilize students and make them march,” he says. “But I will remind them of the anti-colonial heritage of the United States.”

Prof. Shoemaker primarily teaches research methods and statistics, courses have very little to do with ideology. She is careful about giving example hypotheses about politics to alternate her party preferences. “But that’s an excuse,” she says. “I also teach a media sociology theory class, and it’s apparent from the reading list to my snide comments in class that I am liberal, verging on socialist. However, since I don’t expect others to agree with me, I encourage a lively debate and that can be a lot of fun. But remember that I teach only doctoral and advanced master’s students. I might be more reticent if dealing with undergraduates and potentially their angry parents. I try not to make my life any more difficult than necessary. I’m definitely not an ‘in your face’ ideologue.”

Finally, the interviews drew to a close with the scholars offering some advice for graduate students. Prof. Shoemaker advises graduate students not to enter the program with a closed mind about their area of interest but to be open to ideas and influences. “Allow yourself to be open,” she says. According to her, graduate students should strike a balance between being focused and being open to new area of research. Being open and imaginative ensures that the mind becomes “a moving prism catching light from as many angles as possible” (Mills, 1959, p. 214). Prof Henry points out the importance of reading in a focused way once scholars have identified their research interest. He believes research should end up as a written product. Graduate students should no longer read too much for

pleasure alone. They should have an objective, a goal. They should begin to identify narrow fields of academic discourse where they intend to specialize. They should discipline themselves, he says.

## References

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