Book Review

Challenges of the Faculty Career for Women: Success and Sacrifice

Maike Ingrid Philipsen

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In *Challenges of the Faculty Career for Women: Success and Sacrifice*, Maike Ingrid Philipsen studies the relationship between women faculty members' personal and professional lives. The thrust of Philipsen's thesis is that the historic structure of the academy is incompatible with society's expectations of women in their personal lives, and she boldly states that the incompatibility lies in the 'assumption that the successful academic has a wife at home.' In Philipsen's estimation, previous research on women in higher education has been through the lens of aiding women to succeed within a male-dominated framework without addressing the faults of the framework itself. As much of the current research also focuses on women in their early career, this study is unique as it captures the voices of women from a variety of disciplines in all stages of their lives and careers, as well as lesbians, immigrant scholars and women who choose to be 'child-free.' With this book Philipsen opens a window on an area of the academy that is seldom addressed. *Challenges*

of the Faculty Career for Women is an important contribution to the growing body of research on gender equity in the academy.

The first three chapters of the book examine the experiences of women faculty in their early, mid, and late careers, respectively. Women in this qualitative study were asked to describe the relationship between their personal and professional lives, and to reflect on the challenges they have faced and the enabling conditions that have allowed them to succeed. The chapters are large and cover a myriad of issues within each career stage, but the main challenges for each cohort are linked by common themes. Women in their early career expressed difficulty in achieving a balance between their personal and professional lives, predominantly as a result of unclear expectations of the academy that left them unsure of how much they needed to accomplish in order to remain competitive for tenure positions. Mid-career faculty spoke of crushing workloads post-tenure and institutional and departmental policies

unfriendly to children and families. Although many of the late-career faculty had achieved a manageable balance between their personal and professional lives, some expressed regret at curbing career aspirations for a variety of reasons, or choosing to have a smaller family to ensure career success. Philipsen includes many poignant and sometimes heartbreaking excerpts from interviews to highlight the issues reported by women in each career stage. Women reported hiding pregnancy to avoid discrimination, isolation in the personal and professional spheres, sexual harassment, broken marriages and constant guilt from not spending enough time with children. In Chapter 4 Philipsen illustrates comparisons between the women's shared challenges to and enablers for success, and uses this information in Chapter 5 to offer practical advice for women to employ immediately in their professional and personal lives. This advice ranges from creating a research timeline to hiring a maid. However, according to Philipsen the ultimate necessity is a pervasive cultural reform of the academy, for which she also offers recommendations. The most interesting recommendation suggested by Philipsen is what she names the Exemplar Model. One of the overarching challenges for women in all three career stages is the lack of clear standards for success within academe. Philipsen acknowledges that prescribing specific benchmarks of the tenure process could encourage 'bean counting' and eliminate professional discretion, so instead of setting explicit objectives for success, individual departments could identify 'exemplars.' Exemplars would be faculty whose professional portfolios have been deemed successful

and could serve as guides for early-career faculty. This model allows for institutions to set standards for tenure according to institutional mission, for departments to show multiple avenues for success within academic fields, and presents realistic examples of professional achievement. The Exemplar Model would also alter the traditional tenure clock by allowing faculty at any career stage to set personal and professional goals without rigid limitations of the historical timeline for success in academia.

Challenges of the Faculty Career for Women is an important book for all stakeholders in academe. The book is a primer for success for young women discerning an academic vocation, female graduate students and women faculty in the earliest stages of their careers and should be a required reading for dissertation advisors, department chairpersons and deans. Women in their mid and late careers will find useful the coping mechanisms relayed by their peers, especially regarding parenthood, self-care and the care of aging parents. Late-career women will also hopefully find this book to be a gratifying testament to the ground-work they have laid for the success of future generations of women scholars. Arguably the most important audience of this book is men. Until men acknowledge the challenges faced by female faculty, as well as the invaluable contributions made by women to the intellectual life of institutions of higher education, there is ultimately no incentive for the academy to change. Men will continue to dominate the upper academic ranks and benefit from policies that continue to assume that women are primarily professors' wives and not professors themselves.

The American Association of University Professors reported that in 2005–2006 only 31 per cent of tenured positions in American colleges and universities were held by women, and that this gap would not close without substantial revisions in hiring and tenure practices (West and Curtis, 2006). *Challenges of the Faculty Career for Women* clearly presents how outmoded and patriarchal policies create obstacles in both the personal and professional lives of women faculty, and offers creative solutions for reform. Philipsen's major goal for this book was to give voice to

women's experiences that are so often unacknowledged within the academy. To this end she has succeeded and has initiated a discourse to create a more humane academy that allows equal achievement for both men and women.

REFERENCE

West, M.S. and Curtis, J.W. (2006) *AAUP Faculty Gender Equity Indicators 2006*. Washington DC: American Association of University Professors.

Allison Cruz
Vanderbilt University, Nashville, USA
E-mail: allison_drevich@yahoo.com