

Challenges *of the* Faculty Career *for* Women

Success & Sacrifice

Maike Ingrid
Philipsen

Foreword by
Mary Deane
Sorcinelli



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Challenges of the Faculty Career for Women

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*To Jasper, Jon Steven, Kendra, Niklas, and Sven,
and the hopes that come with a new generation*

Foreword

When Maike Philipsen first asked if I could write the Foreword for her book on how women balance academic careers and personal life, I almost said no. I had recently lost my mother. My siblings and I were now “taking shifts” in an effort to keep my father, alone and failing, at home. Our oldest daughter and her boyfriend had just announced their impending marriage and, a week later, our middle child and her boyfriend followed suit. Our youngest child had graduated from college, scarcely paused at our door, and was headed for the bright lights of New York City. And lest I forget to mention work, I’d been asked by our provost to lead a new campuswide initiative to create mentoring networks for new and underrepresented faculty. We all go through phases when work-life seems out of balance; the mere promise of a book that would shed light on how women faculty might better manage work and life demands enticed me to say yes. I am so very grateful that I did.

Challenges of the Faculty Career for Women: Success and Sacrifice engagingly addresses the broad topic of the nature of women faculty members’ lives and, more specifically, focuses on the challenges confronted by—and the strategies used by—women in faculty careers as they manage their professional roles and personal lives. In particular, it brings together contemporary research and personal narratives of work and life outside of work that expand the

reader's understanding of the kinds of issues that many women faculty members confront each day as they strive to fulfill multiple responsibilities at work and at home. In addition, it offers a wealth of creative personal strategies and gender-progressive institutional policies that may more fully support the recruitment, retention, and advancement of women faculty members working in universities and colleges.

Virtually all of the research and literature on faculty across the career stages, but especially new and diverse faculty, identifies numerous challenges to professional success and personal well-being. The majority of these potential "roadblocks" fall into five broad categories: understanding the institution, excelling at research and teaching, understanding tenure and evaluation, developing professional networks, and creating work-life balance. Women faculty, in particular, identify critical work-life dilemmas as they seek to balance their teaching, research, and service, develop time management skills, and attend to quality of life issues such as spousal or partner employment needs, parenting, child care, and elder care.

Why is it important to examine and proactively address these work-life concerns? Put simply, if we want to attract, develop, and retain the most talented scholars and teachers to academia, institutions will need to find ways to support a fuller integration of academic and personal lives, especially for women faculty. Women now earn half of all doctorates awarded to U.S. citizens from American institutions and represent nearly two-fifths of full-time faculty. Despite their growing proportions, however, women are still disproportionately relegated to the lowest ranks of the academic profession. At nearly every stage of their careers, married women leave academia at a higher rate than men; women faculty make career sacrifices for parenting and caregiving at a higher rate than their male colleagues; and women at all faculty ranks are significantly less satisfied than white males on measures of work life and career satisfaction (Bracken, Allen, & Dean, 2006).

The forty-six women faculty members interviewed for this book give full voice and rich timbre to the data cited above. What is most striking and quite remarkable about the book is the diversity of these women. They are white, of color, and international faculty. They are employed at a range of institutional types—from community colleges to research-intensive universities. Their disciplinary training is in the humanities and fine arts, social and behavioral sciences, natural sciences, and the professions. Their appointments include tenure-track and non-tenure-track positions and they span the entire career cycle—from entering faculty, to mid-career faculty, to faculty on the cusp of retirement. Even their living arrangements are widely divergent—single, married with children (from infants to twenty-somethings), single with children, adoptive parents, same-sex partners, dual career couples, caretakers for an ill spouse or elderly parents.

Yet despite their remarkable diversity and the unique pressures that each of them face, all of these women are linked by a shared triumph. Every one of them has beat the odds, stayed in the pipeline, and found some measure of success in their academic careers and personal lives, despite obstacles and costs along the way. And perhaps because of the prices paid and repaid, these women are also connected by a common desire. In one way or another, they are asking that the academy find ways to create more flexible career paths—from entry to retirement. Flexibility would allow responsiveness to life events such as pregnancy and childbirth, illness of a parent, a spouse, or a same-sex domestic partner. Flexibility would allow women to advance through the ranks—tenure and promotion—with less chance of stagnating, being marginalized, or leaving academia due to excessive personal or family responsibilities.

In their struggle to balance it all, the place that most academic women in this book start is at the individual level, with a range of inspired, inventive, and resourceful coping strategies. However, personal strategies are not enough. Women in the most fortunate

of circumstances (e.g., a house-husband, a house-cleaner) still struggle to navigate the shoals of career and family. Solutions also require changes among the demands, structures, and policies of universities and colleges. Here, the reader will find a multiplicity of examples of real progress in the design of gender-sensitive, family-friendly policies and practices. Even still, the author suggests that institutional initiatives such as mentoring programs or policies such as tenure-clock extensions can't make all the difference. Ultimately, we need to cultivate the kind of campus culture that welcomes, integrates, and supports a diverse faculty throughout their careers.

As I write this foreword, my life has regained equilibrium. My parents are gone, one daughter is married, another wedding is on the horizon, and the son is back home. My university has just been awarded a generous grant from a private foundation to support new and underrepresented faculty through "mutual mentoring," a network-based model of support to encourage non-hierarchical, cross-cultural mentoring partnerships—at work and at home. Maïke Philipsen's book suggests many such innovative ways for academic women to combine productive work lives and satisfying personal lives. My hope is that her book will inspire even more initiatives and campus policies that support all faculty members in their multiple professional roles and personal lives. And I hope that institutions of higher education can continue to shape what this book's extraordinary women faculty and all faculty desire and deserve—a humane, productive, and satisfying academic career.

Mary Deane Sorcinelli
University of Massachusetts Amherst

Acknowledgments

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I would like to thank my graduate assistants for their work on the book, including Tim Bostic (by now no longer a graduate student but author of Appendix A in this book), Wayne Slough, Jaimee Woodall, and Shemeka Childress. You did work that may have seemed tedious at times but was essential for the project. Thank you also to my professional home, Virginia Commonwealth University, for the support that enabled me to engage in research as time consuming and intense as that which resulted in this book. I am so glad that some institutions are still willing to invest long-term in their faculty's ideas rather than insist on quick results in the name of scholarly productivity.

I am grateful to my children; they provide perspective, distraction, and hope, and they are simply wonderful people to be with. Finally, my deepest gratitude to my wonderful husband, Jon Wergin, who was there for me every step of the way. He listened to an endless stream of thoughts and ideas about this book, and if his eyes glazed over at times, he made sure I didn't see it. He also lent his expertise in higher education to improve the substance, and he carefully edited the entire thing. Plus, just sharing life with him makes any project so much easier.

About the Authors

Maike Ingrid Philipsen has been employed since 1993 at Virginia Commonwealth University, where she currently holds the position of professor in the social foundations of education. Born and raised in Germany and educated in Germany, the United States, and Canada, Dr. Philipsen came to Richmond after receiving her Ph.D. in social foundations at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She had previously earned her master's degree in political science at the Free University of Berlin.

Dr. Philipsen's research interests center on issues of social justice and equality in education, specifically the roles of race, gender, and social class in shaping schools and institutions of higher learning. She studies questions relating to equal opportunities at both the K–12 and college/university levels, employing primarily a sociological perspective and qualitative methodologies. One of her primary publications analyzed the cultural consequences of an African American school closing for the sake of desegregation. She teaches students at all levels ranging from undergraduate to doctoral studies and is the lead faculty member at the university's PFF (Preparing Future Faculty) program.

Maike Ingrid Philipsen is married to Jon F. Wergin, has three sons, and two adult stepchildren, and lives in Richmond, Virginia.

Tim Bostic has been employed at Old Dominion University (ODU) since completing his Ph.D. in 2006 at Virginia Commonwealth University. He earned an M.A. in humanities, focusing on feminist theater and English literature at Old Dominion University, received his post-baccalaureate certificate in education from Virginia Wesleyan, and taught high school English in Norfolk for six years. He also has a B.B.A. in finance from George Washington University and a B.A. in speech communication and theater arts.

After spending almost six years in an urban high school classroom, he decided to get his Ph.D. in education in order to work on creating more equitable learning environments for all students. He has conducted quantitative studies on barriers to males entering the teaching profession, teacher empathy's impact on standardized test scores, mobility's effect on elementary school achievement, and evaluation of an ESL curriculum implementation for adult learners. He also researches effective practices for teaching writing. Currently, he is the director of composition for the Department of English at ODU, where he teaches future secondary English teachers how to teach writing.

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