Chapter 11
Women Professors’ Ways of Working in Academia

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ABSTRACT

Faculty members face many challenges, among them maintaining a healthy work-life balance, and although this need is not gendered (i.e., males who have sole custody of their child(ren), gay couples with children), in this chapter, the authors have chosen to focus on the challenges women faculty members in higher education face, particularly balancing their work and personal lives. In the examination of research studies and literature, the authors sought to address their research questions, which concerned which women’s development theories might frame and explain women professors’ academic identity, the recognition of unique pressures faced by women faculty members in their quest for tenure and promotion, and how these issues impact faculty members who are striving to balance personal and professional lives. Several recommendations for institutions of higher education are discussed, among them employing an ethic of care to design and implement supportive mentoring and other programs for women faculty members.

INTRODUCTION

As seasoned faculty members can attest, the road to gaining promotion and tenure in institutions of higher education can be difficult and multifaceted. Faculty members who are also parents face many challenges, among them maintaining a healthy work-life balance. Work-life balance issues are complex, and although this need for balance is not gendered (i.e. males who have sole custody of their child(ren), gay couples with children), in this chapter, we have chosen to focus on the challenges women faculty members face, particularly balancing their work and personal lives. We pose various questions that assist us in exploring these issues. For example, what developmental theories frame and explain women professors’ academic identity? What are the unique pressures faced by women faculty members as they work...
towards tenure and promotion? What impact does the continuing expectations for research, service and teaching have on women professors who strive to balance their personal lives with career obligations? And finally, how do institutions of higher education place impediments to women professors and what can they do to better support them?

WOMEN’S DEVELOPMENTAL THEORIES

We are two women faculty members who are at different stages of our academic career and have experienced personally the struggle to balance work and personal life. To explore ways to manage our roles as faculty members with our personal lives, we examined some of the foundational developmental theories, Gilligan’s *A Different Voice* (1982), Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule’s *Women’s Ways of Knowing* (1986), Josselson’s *Finding Herself* (1987) as well as surveyed current literature.

**Women’s Voice**

Carol Gilligan, having studied human development for decades, found repeatedly within the literature that the qualities deemed essential for adulthood, such as independent thinking, sharp decision making and reliable action, are those associated with masculinity but considered undesirable as attributes of the feminine self (Gilligan, 1982). According to Gilligan, the stereotypes suggest a dividing of love and work that downgrades the expressive capacities essential for love to women while the instrumental abilities vital for work reside in the masculine domain. Yet, when viewed from a different perspective, these stereotypes reflect a conception of adulthood that is itself out of balance, favoring the separateness of the individual self over connection to others and leaning more toward an autonomous life of work than toward the interdependence of love and care. We present the idea that mothers can have a connection to others centered around love and care within their personal life and university work. A healthy balance between work and life can exist while successfully navigating promotion and tenure.

The role of gender has a significant influence on the development of females. Carol Gilligan’s work (1982) showed that characteristics such as empathy, intimacy, and a concern for preserving relationships are not necessarily signs of weakness, deficiency, and immaturity. She noticed that women are more likely to approach and understand problems in terms of an ethic of care, placing concern for others most important. Male counterparts are more likely to apply an ethic of justice, relying on rules and procedures to resolve problems. Consequently, when institutions of higher education primarily operate under this masculine ethic of justice, support and value of women as faculty members may be questionable.

To ascertain whether the feminine construction of the moral domain relies on a language different from that of males, but one which deserves equal credence in the definition of what constitutes development, it is essential first to find the conditions where women have the power to choose and thus are willing to speak in their own voice. While society may uphold publicly the woman’s right to choose for herself, the practice of such choice may bring her secretly into conflict with the contracts of femininity, particularly the moral equation of goodness with self-sacrifice. Women professors may pose such questions as: Should I continue to work in academia while raising children? Will my children be cared for to the extent they deserve? Am I capable of earning tenure and promotion as a parent? These questions,
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