



Faculty Fathers: Toward a New Ideal in the Research University

Sallee, Margaret W.
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Book Review

Tags: balancing teaching and research | balancing teaching and scholarship | faculty well-being

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In this insightful project, Sallee examines a largely unexamined area of gender equity in North American higher education. Sallee provides a compelling case for why faculty work-life balance considerations ought to include male faculty on the tenure-track. In eight chapters, Sallee analyzes her study of seventy male faculty members across various ranks and disciplines in four public research institutions within the Association of American Universities: Eastern University, Mid-West University, Southern University, and Western University. The study included forty-six white faculty, five Latinos and Asians respectively, and fourteen faculty of unknown ethnicity. Regrettably, other faculty of color declined participation. Interviewees serve in humanities and social sciences, sciences and engineering, and in professional schools (such as medicine and business).

The author claims that gender norms still prescribe work expectation and research universities in particular still prize the male worker as the ideal worker: she calls the phenomenon hegemonic masculinity in a gendered-university. This study suggests that male faculty have to choose between being an ideal worker or an ideal father – if they are or plan to be a parent. For this study, conscientious fatherhood inevitably shapes one’s scholarly engagement and thereby affects research productivity, quality of scholarship or depth of intellectual thought, and choice of a research project undertaken. An engaged father would have fewer uninterrupted blocks of time for research, thinking, and for formulating solutions to difficult problems. This study concludes that a faculty father would generally seek safer lines of inquiry, projects that are closer to home, or that require less travel and commitments. Consequently, male faculty -- particularly those from Generation X on the tenure track -- tend to lean more towards their family roles than towards becoming ideal scholar researchers. Male faculty

generally experience professional pressure and may feel penalized when they prioritize family commitments over research, publication, grant applications, and teaching. If a male faculty member prioritizes work, the study finds that their family will likely suffer. Some universities may grant accommodation for work-life balance, such as extending the tenure-clock or releasing faculty from teaching duties. Nonetheless, male faculty, especially those whose spouses are working (be it full-time or part-time in academic or non-academic appointments) tend not to use these privileges for fear that higher administration or their colleagues would regard them as less serious professionals and academics. While not all male faculty interviewed felt this pressure or experienced being shortchanged, most perceived inequitable expectations.

In light of her research, Sallee offers research universities policy proposals to catalyze change. She urges that universities set the standard and correct the entrenched, unhealthy culture of hegemonic masculinity and expectation in contemporary work-life tensions. I agree with Sallee. My question is how does the increasing trend of employing adjuncts complexify her inquiry, and what changes can higher education make to facilitate a healthy employment and education culture that genuinely benefits all stakeholders, not just in research universities but in most institutions of learning?

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