

# 6

*It is useful to examine the challenges that female faculty members face in international institutions as well as in American colleges and universities.*

## Female Faculty: Challenges and Choices in the United States and Beyond

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Substantial amounts of research and data detail the challenges female faculty face in the academy. These include unequal pay for similarly situated individuals, disparities between female representation within the professoriate and student population, and perceptions and accepted modes of behavior that have the effect of disenfranchising women as they pursue faculty careers (Barbezat and Hughes, 2006; Morley, 2005; West and Curtis, 2006). Continuing research is analyzing why these challenges occur and what can be done to change the trends.

This chapter analyzes a variety of challenges that American female faculty face, with an emphasis on ascribed gender roles as a limiting career factor. It then provides a comparative portrait of conditions for female faculty in select other countries. Finally, it provides advice from female faculty and administrators who have successfully navigated what often appear to be the dangerous waters for women in higher education.

### **Challenges Facing Women Faculty in the United States**

According to many scholars, there is a crisis in higher education (Gappa, Austin, and Trice, 2007; Hult, Callister, and Sullivan, 2005; Schuster and Finkelstein, 2006). Although the number of females who serve as faculty members has risen in the past two decades, projections of a noticeable

increase in tenured female professors have not come to fruition. This outcome has been attributed to a variety of factors. The changing nature of the professoriate, as evidenced by the increase of part-time, nontenure appointments, and more lucrative opportunities outside academia are two such conditions (Barbezat and Hughes, 2006; Bentley and Blackburn, 1993; West and Curtis, 2006).

There is some evidence that women's advancement opportunities may continue to be influenced by some of the biases that have kept their participation numbers below those of men for the past century (Drago and others, 2005; Haag, 2005; Williams, 2006). Gappa, Austin, and Trice (2007) state, "The traditional academic career leading toward tenure continues to be one that is based on a male model and on men's normative paths" (p. 75). Research supports the contention that "women face more obstacles as faculty in higher education than they do as managers and directors in corporate America" (West and Curtis, 2006, p. 4).

Aguirre (2000) outlines biasing factors that female faculty face. Among these are a reward system that fails to take into account the additional familiar responsibilities of women, social isolation, discredited research, and increased representation in service activities and committee appointments. Aguirre (2000) contends that the overrepresentation of women in these last two areas can lead to "tokenism" (p. 72). Women often encounter the undervaluing of many facets of the work that females are encouraged to do and face resistance in doing some other things they choose to do, such as research that is considered feminist or peripheral. Citing research by the American Association of University Professors, Aguirre states that "the salary gap between men and women faculty has not narrowed and in fact, has expanded at the assistant professor level" (p. 61).

Drago and others (2005) identify what they term a "bias against caregiving" (p. 22). They suggest that although family leave policies have been instituted in higher education institutions, faculty rarely use them because they fear a negative reaction during the tenure process if they take them. They also find that faculty construct strategies to avoid receiving negative feedback from their use of family workplace policies. Among these are returning to work sooner than required after the birth of a child or another family leave, failing to file an allowable tenure clock extension, and a deliberately guarded silence at the workplace regarding personal issues.

Williams (2006) contends that women are particularly reluctant to take advantage of policies that support their careers as professionals and mothers or spouses because women are already disproportionately disadvantaged by gender stereotypes that make their advancement more difficult than that of men. She identifies two limiting factors in particular: the often-cited glass ceiling and "the maternal wall" (p. 16). *Glass ceiling* has often been used to describe the limits to women's advancement identifiable by the unstated barriers that females face in advancing to the pinnacle of the profession.

Williams's explanation for this phenomenon leads her to use the additional term: *maternal wall*.

Williams asserts that the conditions associated with motherhood prevent many women from even approaching the glass ceiling. She identifies a "competency struggle" (p. 17), in which women are less likely to receive the benefit of the doubt, credit for being aggressive or creative, and are easily marginalized as individuals hired because of gender, not in spite of it. Williams suggested that the existence of these roadblocks makes it unlikely that women will use workplace leave policies.

She also cited conflicts in the relationship between women. If a female faculty member uses leave, she explains, another female member of the department may be asked to assume or share the additional responsibilities that have been created by the leave. This can create animosity or resentment if the faculty member with an increased load has deliberately postponed marriage or a family to pursue her career (Williams, 2006).

Williams (2006) suggests that women worry they will be perceived as the recipients of extra benefits that may strain relationships with colleagues. Gappa, Austin, and Trice (2007) found that "a very sizable proportion of women faculty members opt to avoid the dual challenge of work and family by deciding not to have children" (p. 75). The research of Drago and others shows that more women are delaying marriage or families to pursue academic promotion. With increased competition for the limited tenure and tenure-track appointments, women are attempting to become the "ideal worker" (Drago and others, 2005; Gappa, Austin, and Trice, 2007). This model requires long hours and commitment to a career that having family responsibilities may impede.

The nature of the tenure system itself encourages apprehension. According to Haag (2005), failure to receive tenure due to employment discrimination is difficult to prove in court. The reasons given for the denial of tenure may not be completely transparent. Women may be penalized for having assumed additional responsibilities in service or committee work that are not weighed heavily during this process. Haag also contends that some of the underlying reasons may be peripheral to faculty work, including reasons such as simple dislike, personality conflicts, or manner of dress. She is troubled that under the guise of collegiality, there are many ways in which a faculty member can be rejected that may not be related to her professional capacity.

Since 1991, when jury trials were allowed in the litigation of employment discrimination cases, such suits have increased (Haag, 2005). Because of the emotion involved, juries may rule in favor of the plaintiffs in such cases more often than judges might. However, suits involve risks. Institutions may be less willing to hire former plaintiffs. The potential that taking leave or delaying the tenure clock could be unofficially factored into the tenure decision is a reason that women, and men, may be unwilling to use such policies.

## Women Faculty in Selected Other Countries

According to the literature, many female faculty in Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom feel a keen sense of marginalization (Skelton, 2005; Kjeldal, Rindfleish, and Sheridan, 2005; Wyn, Acker, and Richards, 2000). Wyn, Acker, and Richards (2000) observe, "For a majority of [female faculty in management positions in these countries], a sense of otherness was openly and bluntly reinforced at a point early in their careers" (p. 38). The manifested forms of discrimination in these women's situations included nonacceptance of research proposals considered sympathetic to women's issues, pressure to change personality traits in order to be perceived as more feminine, and criticism of appearance and dress.

Women can be philosophically divided even within the female community. The division lines may be drawn by generation, position, or social activity with men (Skelton, 2005). It is important to note that "being a woman in academia does not mean being a feminist" (Skelton, 2005, p. 327). Skelton contends that women are pressured to determine their role as social actors. Her research found that women of different generations "recount incidents of sexism and masculinism in the academy and also identified where other, often more senior and often feminist, women had marginalized or subordinated them" (p. 329).

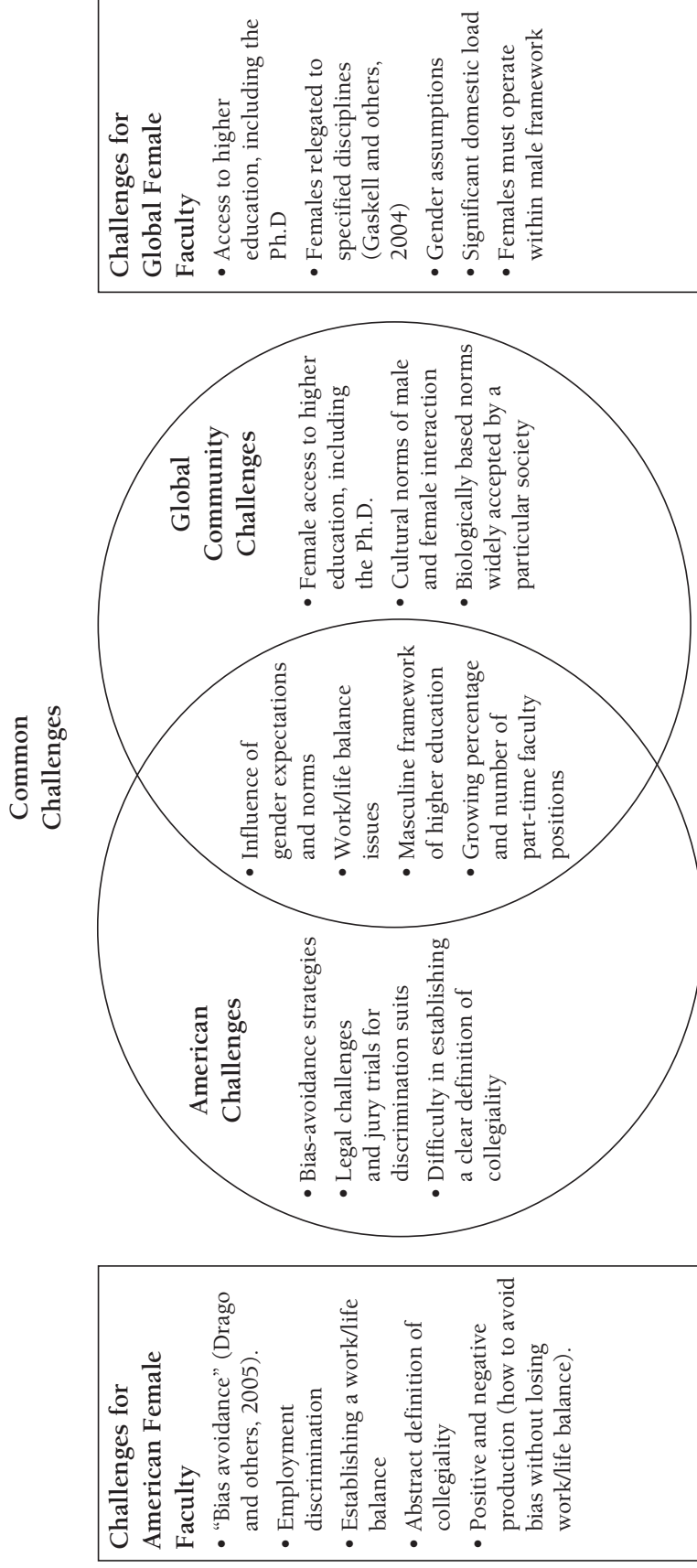
Australia has experienced a rise in part-time nontenure-type positions in its institutions similar to that in the United States. A national policy against discrimination and in support of gender equity has been in place since the 1980s. Yet female ascension to the upper ranks of senior academic positions has moved at a snail's pace. Inequity for females has manifested itself in the form of fewer advancement opportunities, lower pay, and increased teaching loads compared to males (Kjeldal, Rindfleish, and Sheridan, 2005).

The prevalence of men's gathering establishments in Australia has led some women to publicly voice their beliefs that "some males had been 'courting favours' with senior male colleagues and have been able to negotiate special deals for themselves that were not offered to women" (Kjeldal, Rindfleish, and Sheridan, p. 438). In this way, social norms in Australia may help maintain an unofficial policy of promotion of men over their female counterparts.

Chinese institutions of higher education offer the comparative perspective of a world power that has a political system and social traditions quite different from those of the West. In the area of women faculty, China has "put into place some policies conducive to the material equity between men and women" (Gaskell and others, 2004, p. 512).

The modern Communist tradition in China has generally stressed social equality and equal access to facilities. The increasingly global and commercial relationships that China has developed lately, however, have ironically led to the emergence of increasing gender discrimination:

**Figure 6.1. Challenges for Female Faculty and Strategies for Overcoming Them**



**Strategies for Female Faculty Success**

- Reinforce the importance of mentoring and networking opportunities.
- Provide information about job demands, and promote early family planning.
- Understand financial strategies and concepts and how they apply to career decisions.
- Secure tenure prior to revealing personal agenda (for example, nonmainstream research interests).

“An official party line on gender equality has given way to the expression of a much greater diversity of views about women in the public arena” (Gaskell and others, 2004, p. 515).

This variety of views has included many voiced by those who would like to see Chinese women remain in the background. “Overall they [societal norms] reveal a high degree of acceptance of gender differences and a belief that this difference is biologically based” (Gaskell and others, 2004, p. 524). It is important to note that such biological arguments of inferiority have and continue to be used in many parts of the world. In China, such views have simply been made more visible recently.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Although insights have been gathered from several countries, additional research is needed on the challenges female faculty face in nations where the formalized education of women and girls is relatively new.

Figure 6.1 displays similarities and differences in challenges that female faculty in the United States and globally face. The far left and right rectangles on the figure list challenges for American and global female faculty, respectively. The left side of the interlocking ovals notes the distinctive American female faculty issues and strategies. The right side of the interlocking ovals notes the distinctive female faculty issues. The overlapping area between the ovals notes similar challenges.

Figure 6.1 also addresses the final area analyzed in this chapter: what faculty can do to make the female faculty experience more equitable to that of the male faculty experience. Successful senior male and female faculty agree that achieving tenure is not an easy task, and it is particularly elusive for females (August and Waltman, 2006; Bentley and Blackburn, 1993; Gerdes, 2003; Hult, Callister, and Sullivan, 2005; Parma, 2006).

Hult, Callister, and Sullivan (2005, p. 55) suggest six steps to improve the climate for female faculty:

1. Assess all institutional departments to locate programs with poor gender representation and provide training to chairs on strategies for inclusion or recruiting of future faculty.
2. Make fiscal and faculty proceedings and decisions as transparent as possible.
3. Make work/life balance a priority, and seek ways to be flexible in faculty use of institutional family leave policies.
4. Include, but do not overrepresent, women on committees.
5. Create policies that encourage dual-career couples.
6. Encourage faculty collaboration on research within and outside departments.

Gerdes (2003) notes that not only advice but also action may be required of senior faculty to advance the quest for change. Citing recommendations from the American Psychological Association, she concedes that “responsibility for the situation of women in higher education rests primarily on the institutions rather than individuals” (p. 266). Yet, she contends, “Senior academic women must use their positions to influence institutions until the institutional structures fit women as well as men and until women’s issues truly become people’s issues” (p. 269). Gerdes cautions future female faculty against becoming too openly critical of institutional policies or revealing their personal agendas. The women cited in her study suggest that only after achieving tenure have female faculty reached the proper time to reveal their true motivations (Gerdes, 2003).

August and Waltman (2006) take the position that women should focus on methods of obtaining career satisfaction. They identified such factors as the nature of the job itself—teaching, research, community service, peer valuation, access to resources, and collegiality—as factors women should have in mind when they make career decisions. Work/life balance, mentoring opportunities, and a clear understanding of the tenure process can have significant impact for a faculty member.

Prospective faculty members, particularly females, have a difficult journey ahead in navigating the path to tenure. The changing nature of employment, legal and societal norms, and gender discrimination from males and females are impediments not easily removed. Achieving a work/life balance has been increasingly difficult as competition for and expectations of faculty have increased.

American female faculty are not alone. Global issues of access and equity exist, as do opportunities for collaboration in seeking solutions to domestic and international challenges. Women should heed the advice of those who have successfully achieved status as senior female faculty to provide guidance in their own quests. These experiences and future efforts may be used to bridge the gap of inequity in academia.

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