

Work-Life Balance of Tenured and Tenure-Track Women Engineering Professors

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Balancing the needs of family with career ambitions is often challenging for women who pursue science, technology, engineering, or mathematics (STEM) careers, particularly in academia. In these male-dominated workplaces, few incentives exist for women who decide to manage both work and family. In this basic qualitative research study, a modified approach combining in-depth interviewing with life-history interviewing was used to examine the work-life balance experiences of 12 tenured and tenure-track women engineering faculty who have children. The research question addressed participants' perceptions of engineering academia and experiences regarding family formation, child-raising, and the tenure process. Data were analyzed using the constant comparison method. The conceptual lens consisted of identity formation, feminine ethic of care, procedural knowing, and social learning. Four themes or key findings surfaced from this study: Participants experienced gender stereotyping in engineering academia, participants recognized overlap between the tenure and biological clocks, participants expressed a default arrangement in assuming the burden of childcare, and participants revealed that work-life balance is a false concept. The most significant finding was that the notion of work-life balance was inconsistent with participants' experiences with managing childcare and career; they described their experiences to be more about work-life integration. Implications for positive social change include improving gender diversity and the representation of women in engineering academia. Senior leaders and administrators at institutions of higher education may use study findings, for instance, to undertake program reform to recruit more women into engineering academia.

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