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Reflections on Academic Lives: Identities, Struggles, and Triumphs in Graduate School and Beyond by Staci M. Zavattaro and Shannon K. Orr

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Zavattaro, S. M., & Orr, S. K. (2017). *Reflections on academic lives: Identities, struggles, and triumphs in graduate school and beyond*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan. \$139.99 (hardback), ISBN: 978-1-137-60008-0

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Staci M. Zavattaro, Ph.D., and Shannon Orr, Ph.D., editors of the book *Reflection on academic lives: Identities, struggles, and triumphs in graduate school and beyond*, weave a story of an academic's life through the Ph.D. journey—navigating rejection, developing a research agenda, job market intricacies, and balance (or lack thereof) between work and life. They use narratives from numerous professionals in academia, including tenured professors, junior faculty, administrators, and even graduate students, to offer advice and experiences on academic life. These narratives are organized across the aforementioned themes and are only lightly edited, which allows readers to immerse themselves in each unique situation. *Reflections on academic lives* is more than just a reflection but rather a deep dive into the mental, physical, and emotional journey that is graduate school and academic life.

This book cannot cover every possible variable in an academic career, but, by focusing on five themes, the authors highlight key tenets of a career in the academy. Choosing a Ph.D. program, working through rejection, job searching, creating a research agenda, and obtaining a healthy work-life balance are all essential aspects of a career in academia. Rooted in a passion for mentoring, this book aims to help others by looking beyond the experiences of the two authors to include a wide range of stories and viewpoints from those who are living or have lived through this academic journey. The editors asked contributors to “reflect on what you wish you knew in graduate school about the topic of your choosing” (Zavattaro & Orr, 2017, p. 2). As expected, this prompt produced numerous tips, stories, and advice from academics. It is this freedom to muse on their experiences that allowed the contributors to create a knowledge-rich and relatable book.

Dr. Zavattaro, an associate professor of public administration at the University of Central Florida, and Dr. Orr, an associate professor of political science at Bowling Green State University, became friends during their own academic careers. Dr. Zavattaro applied for a position at Bowling Green. It was during this interview that Dr. Zavattaro and Dr. Orr began a friendship that extends past university lines. Further, a discussion thread on Facebook regarding pedagogical choices led the two friends to embark upon writing this book. They channeled their experiences in academia to create the framework for the book. Rejection is something we all face as academics, and it was a key moment in the birth of the authors' friendship as well. As a result, the book opens with narratives on rejection, the first of which is the editors' own personal stories of rejection. This immediately sets the tone for the book as one that is vulnerable and honest about the lows and highs that come with academic life.

As stated above, this book tackles important topics in academia through a narrative storytelling lens. From successes in the job search and teaching breakthroughs, to the more sobering stories of rejection and mental health battles, this book evokes a range of emotions for the reader. Some readers may not fully understand the exact situation, but the narrative framework still allows the reader to empathize with the stories that are told. In particular, the stories of managing academic stress (pg. 162) and dealing with manuscript rejections (pg. 8) may resonate with current graduate students in a Ph.D. program or early-stage academics. Yet, for those currently job searching, other stories about improving job market chances and writing successful grant proposals may be more relatable.

The fact that this book expands across all stages of academic life is precisely why this book is a must-have for all academics' bookshelves. No matter the time or emotion, this book has a narrative from academics, new and seasoned, who have been through similar experiences that many may now be facing. This book recognizes the tribulations that academics face; thus, the book aids in making the academic journey feel less lonely. It celebrates successes and breakthroughs, showing progress is right around the corner if one simply keeps persevering. The book also acknowledges the lack of representation in academia by highlighting the lack of women, people of color, and people with disabilities in the field by highlighting narratives from these and other underrepresented groups. The editors acknowledge this lack of representation and continue an important conversation about creating a sense of belonging for all in academia.

One potential weakness of the book is the lack of empirical research articles to support the various narratives. While writing in a narrative style does not necessarily lend itself to the use of academic articles, several narratives touched on issues such as stress relief, grief, mental health, and other sensitive topics that often necessitate empirical research support. Further, each chapter could have benefited from concluding thoughts from the editors. Although each chapter follows a major theme, this is sometimes lost after reading multiple narratives in a row. Thus, a general conclusion section would have helped to synthesize the main points of each chapter. This would be especially beneficial for readers who choose to bounce between chapters.

In summary, *Reflections on academic lives: Identities, struggles, and triumphs in graduate school and beyond* provides a glimpse into the hidden world of academia. Dr. Zavattaro and Dr. Orr tackle some of the less-talked-about issues in academia by weaving together narratives from a variety of academics across different disciplines. These narratives evoke a sense of emotion and togetherness, as the stories are applicable to the experiences of nearly all academics. The themes of Ph.D. program selection, rejection, job searching, research agenda-building, and work-life balance highlight the intricate and continuous journey that is academic life. While not every story is applicable at every moment in time, the book lends itself to being revisited over time. For every moment in the academic trajectory—undertaking a Ph.D., becoming a new

professor, or establishing one's self as a seasoned faculty member—there is a narrative that speaks to the situation. Ultimately, this is a book that those new to academia, experienced, or even just considering an academic career path should read and hold onto, as the journey may evolve and change, but the lessons and advice in this book will last a lifetime.

Disclosure Statement

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest that relate to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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