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Plate Spinning Everyday: A Review of Power Women

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Plate Spinning Everyday: A Review of Power Women

Abstract

"There are ways to live so that the tensions between your callings will not snap the connection."

Posting about the book *Power Women* from *In All Things* - an online journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation.

<https://inallthings.org/plate-spinning-everyday-a-review-of-power-women/>

Keywords

In All Things, book review, Power Women, stories, motherhood, faith, academy, Nancy Wang Yuen, Deshonna Collier-Goubil

Disciplines

Christianity

Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt University](#).

Plate Spinning Everyday: A Review of *Power Women*

Luralyn Helming

March 3, 2022

Title: *Power Women: Stories of Motherhood, Faith, and the Academy*

Editors: Nancy Wang Yuen, Deshonna Collier-Goubil

Publisher: IVP Academic

Publishing Date: October 5, 2021

Pages: 248 (Paperback)

ISBN: 978-0830853069

In celebration of March as Women’s History Month, a month dedicated to reflecting “on the often-overlooked contributions of women to United States history”¹, *All things* highlights the important voices of female professors at Dordt as they review the book, *Power Women: Stories of Motherhood, Faith, and the Academy*. Each writer focuses her response on one of the four sections: Navigating Academia, Navigating Motherhood, Navigating Multiple Callings, and Navigating Support. This multi-perspective review emerged from a book read where over twenty female faculty joined in valuable conversations across Dordt’s campus.

We all have multiple roles, multiple callings, different hats we are expected to wear. This past year, I have pictured my life like a plate spinning performer I once saw. The performer spins multiple plates on the end of sticks, and as the speed of the plates decreases, they start to wobble and must be sent spinning again or they will fall. One plate is impressive, but the performers add more and more plates until they are running up and down the line to maintain the spinning. Each of my commitments, roles, hats...was a plate. Some spun easily while others required frequent attention. But my husband was a deployed National Guard chaplain, and I was a full-time Psychology professor, and we had three children under ten. Our family had a lot of plates, and I was responsible for them.

In some ways my year was extreme—not many of my colleagues and peers have sent their spouses unarmed to a combat zone.² But in other ways, I have seen many colleagues struggle with their own times where their endurance was tested by too many plates or roles being their responsibility, or where they must maintain them longer than should be expected. In some ways, my year was easier. A prayer request for my family went to all faculty and staff. I told my

classes at the start of each semester. Everyone knew what was going on in my life. Though people did not necessarily know what to offer, particularly during a pandemic, they were there, trying to help. For my colleagues, sometimes their plates are hidden by propriety, cultural norms, or lack of awareness from others. For our friends and families outside academia, few realize the way academia will take all that you offer it and ask for more. Our time flexibility is often mistaken for a low demand job. We all have plates we are trying to keep spinning.

Reading Jenny Pak's chapter, "Juggling Multiple Roles: Narrative of a Korean Pastor's Wife, a Mother, and a Psychology Professor," I saw her plates—all the roles she had to maintain, even when they were in conflict with each other. She explains aspects of how her experiences brought her to where she is professionally, but also in terms of expectations for herself. She opened with an explanation of her many callings as answering one purpose. Regardless of all the hats she wears, her purpose is always "facilitating growth and the transformation of self and others to be more like Christ" (p. 123). She explains that understanding the underlying purpose of all of it decreases her stress about maintaining every role.

I appreciate what Dr. Pak is saying about how finding the underlying purpose relieves the internal pressure of competing roles. I appreciate the way that she said it, not making light of any of the loads, continuing to acknowledge that there are changes that can and should be made in academia. I appreciate that she said it in a book with many voices speaking to other aspects of navigating academia, motherhood, multiple callings, and support. Her story gives me hope; there are ways to live so that the tensions between your callings will not snap the connection. Her story counteracts the feelings of isolation: I am not the only one feeling this way. Writing this review has been a struggle. I do not want to sound whiney—I enjoy most of my work, I love my children, I adore my husband, and I admire my husband's passion for his calling. I know that I am blessed to work with colleagues and students who I enjoy in a field that I love. But the maintenance of the work-life rhythm, as my colleague calls it, can be exhausting. And as a mother of young children, even more so.

And when you add the extra situations of life, spouses called up for deployment, family cancer diagnoses, children struggling in school, divorces, and all the other things that happen in life, we all have plates to keep spinning. I hope at some point we can all see the forest and the trees, to see all of it as part of our life's calling rather than as disparate parts. Right now, Dr. Pak is serving as a guide to me. I hear her saying it is there, I just cannot always see it clearly.

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1. <https://www.history.com/topics/holidays/womens-history-month>
 2. *Chaplains are the only remaining noncombatants in the U.S. military.*