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Walking Out On The Boys



Synopsis

In May 1991, Frances K. Conley, the first female tenured professor of neurosurgery in the country, made headline news when she resigned from Stanford University to protest the medical school's unabashed gender discrimination. In this controversial, forthright memoir, Conley portrays the world of academic medicine in which women are still considered inferior; she also explains why, as a consequence, the research and treatment of women's health problems lag far behind those of men. In assessing why women's careers and psyches are suffering, Conley provides a first-person look into what it is like to be an accomplished woman within this restrictive medical world, offering invaluable advice to patients and future doctors alike.

Book Information

Paperback: 264 pages

Publisher: Farrar, Straus and Giroux (June 4, 1999)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0374525951

ISBN-13: 978-0374525958

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.6 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 13.9 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

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Customer Reviews

Reviewers criticize Conley for not offering solutions and focusing too much on academic politics. They miss the point. Harassment happens through politics -- dull but deadly. And there *are* no solutions. Conley shows us that even national press coverage can't make a dent in a determined university protected by a prestigious reputation (or -- as she doesn't say -- a winning sports team). My own experience suggests that many of Conley's criticisms of Stanford Medical School apply to other universities and to other professional schools. (How many women are teaching at your favorite business school?) Nor are women the only targets. Those who attack women are also likely to display hostility towards colleagues, students and clients who are ethnic minorities, gay/lesbian, disabled, or even childless by choice. The reality is that universities lag behind other institutions, including blue-collar and military, when it comes to integrating women into their

faculties. In her new book, *Fighting Fire*, Caroline Paul (a San Francisco fire fighter) shares with Conley the awareness that harassment can be subtle rather than violent. Yet, unlike Stanford Medical School, the SFFD shows progress. After a few years, a male colleague apologizes voluntarily for earlier hostility, admitting he's grown and changed since more women have arrived. Carol Ann Barkalow's book, *In the Men's House*, shows that West Point began making similar progress twenty years ago. Speaking about those expelled for harassment, a male cadet says, "We don't want those jerks in the army." These attitude shifts seem foreign to Conley's world -- and, I suspect, to many academic settings. Yet universities -- even private ones -- also receive considerable state and federal funds.

Men groping women. Men coming on to women, and making incredible jackasses of themselves in the process. Men getting drunk and acting like barbarians. Men with one thing in mind. Men whose compulsion to talk about sex is so strong that they do it at highly inappropriate times in public. Men who think that pressuring women is their God-given right. If you think that what I just described is a high school football team on an overdose of steroids, you're wrong. These sexual antics weren't perpetrated by adolescents with testosterone bubbling out their ears, they were committed by male doctors at Stanford University. Not being stupid, these demigods put two and two together and realized that they could use their power to pressure women. One of these men made a fatal mistake, though: he pressured Dr. Frances Conley, a topnotch neurosurgeon and renowned researcher at Stanford. Bad move, fella. I suppose that guy never learned that if you're going to pick a fight, you don't provoke someone who can whack you back so hard you just might rethink whether it's wise to be a bully. As publicity spread about Dr. Conley's fight, more and more women came forward to reveal their stories. This was certainly an eye-opening book. Before reading it, I'd never given much thought about the sexual harassment of women in medicine and allied healthcare fields. Perhaps we're more civilized here in Michigan, because I've never seen or heard of any such hanky-panky. Well, let me revise that last statement: I have witnessed a lot of sexual inducement, but what I saw was women chasing men not the other way around. But everyone knows that those California folks are trendsetters. Dr. Conley never envisioned herself as a trendsetter, though.

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