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**Review of Lisa Wolf-Wendel, Susan B. Twombly, and Suzanne Rice's
*The Two-Body Problem: Dual-Career-Couple Hiring Policies in Higher
Education*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2003**

Vivian Wagner

In physics, the “two-body problem” describes the complicated relationship between two masses (planets or stars, say) in their orbital dance, as they negotiate and accommodate, trying to find equilibrium in space, or wherever they find themselves. We all know where this is going, don’t we? At least, all of us coupled orbs do. And some of those single stars out there might have caught a glimpse now and then of the strange flashes and flares, starts and stops, of their galactic neighbors.

The epigraph of *The Two-Body Problem*, taken from an article by Michelle Thaller in the *Christian Science Monitor*, tells the story bluntly: “The bigger, more massive body moves the least, spending most of the time in the center of this dance. The smaller body has to careen all over the place, trying to find the right place to fit into the co-orbit” (1).

Ah, here’s the nub of it. The difficulty. The *problem*. Planets, stars, coupled humans: they tend to have different sizes. Or, at least, they’re at different points in their careers. Or, one gets a job before the other. Or, one gets offered a job in some far-flung place, and the other has to make a decision about whether, and how, to follow. In short, the one becomes an “initial hire,” and the other becomes an “accompanying spouse.”

This book, by Lisa Wolf-Wendel, Susan B. Twombly, and Suzanne Rice—all professors at the time of the book’s publication in the teaching and leadership department at the University of Kansas—takes a long, hard look at the practices and policies of several academic institutions when it comes to accommodating dual-career couples. It’s full of numbers, folks (wouldn’t we expect that from a book premised on a physics problem?), so if statistics and tables scare you, be warned. For those willing to wade through the quantitative data, however—or those willing to skip to the always-more-interesting case studies—the book has much to offer.

The authors began their research by conducting a survey, which provides much of the data upon which they based their book. They sent the survey to the chief academic officers at over 600 research universities, doctoral degree granting universities, comprehensive colleges and universities, and liberal arts colleges. With a 59 percent

response rate, they got a fair sampling of the latest trends in dealing with (or, at times, not dealing with) issues surrounding dual-career couples.

Though numbers can, in themselves, be fascinating—showing, for instance, that 20 percent of those institutions with dual-career policies regularly create tenure-track positions for spouses, and 6 percent of institutions without such policies do—I found the most interesting part of the book to be the case studies, and the practical information about ways that different institutions tackle the dual-body problem.

The fact is, most everyone the authors surveyed recognizes that it's important for faculty recruitment and retention to be aware of the needs of dual-career couples. As the authors say, "Most institutions consider the needs of dual-career couples important and are willing to offer them some type of assistance" (17). It's less a question of *whether* institutions recognize the issue as important, and more a question of *how*, in degree and kind, institutions provide help to these couples. Not surprisingly, research universities, with their larger budgets and need to attract the "best" candidates (a term the authors admit is fluid, depending on the type of institution doing the evaluating), tend to do more to aid the spouses of the people they hire. Even some small liberal arts colleges, however, have met the challenge, providing what assistance their limited budgets allow.

For the qualitative section of the book, the authors pick five academic institutions, re-named to be anonymous, and detail their methods, stories, and techniques. In this section, the authors identify, analyze, and exemplify five categories of assistance: relocation services, non-tenure-track/adjunct positions for spouses, split and shared positions, shared advertising of positions, and that "holy grail of dual-career accommodations" (103), tenure-track positions for spouses. In each category, they give case study examples (sometimes fictional composites) of couples who in various ways made use of the dual-career policies and procedures of their respective institutions. These chapters describe the experiences, emotions, and responses of these couples and comment on the outcomes, providing a realistic account of what these arrangements can feel like.

I enjoy stories, so this part of the book worked well for me. There's the story, for instance, of Jack and Cindy, who made use of "Riverdale University's" relocation office after Jack got a job in the physics department. Cindy worked closely with the relocation office, which helped her to apply for jobs, gave her information about churches and schools, and generally provided moral support during the process of relocation. What a wonderful service! Just reading about it made me want to go to this famed Riverdale University, to see it in action. With its Spousal Relocation Assistance Program (SRAP), the university provides a host of services to its candidates and their spouses, making the move both for the initial hire and the accompanying spouse less painful than it might otherwise be. "Heartland University" is the other institution described in this chapter, and its relocation specialist performs many of the same duties as Riverdale's SRAP. Through the case studies detailed in this chapter, and the analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of each program, the usefulness of relocation services—in whatever form they might take—becomes clear. The chapter could, actually, be used as a road map for institutions thinking of starting their own relocation services.

Through their analysis of each of the other categories of assistance, the authors provide similarly clear, engaging, and useful portraits of real-world—and sometimes imperfect—solutions to the complicated dilemmas faced by dual-career couples and the

institutions that woo them. They describe in detail the lives of spouses given adjunct or non-tenure track positions, showing how this quick-fix, low-cost method might not always be the best long-term solution for couples *or* their institutions. The chapter on split and shared positions goes into great detail about the hows and whys and whethers of such beasts, showing how this solution might—perhaps more than others—be in reach of smaller, liberal arts institutions with limited resources. And the chapter on those institutions that make efforts to create tenure-track positions for accompanying spouses offers a fascinating look inside the politics and economics of such magic-making—as well as the possible downsides (such as, what happens in case of a divorce?).

I must say, I'm impressed. Impressed by the lengths to which some institutions go to address the needs and desires of dual-career couples. You might, like me, be asking, "Are these places *for real*?" Well, though they're anonymous in the main text of the book, these colleges and universities get some recognition in an appendix, which lists those institutions that offer relocation services and shared and split positions, as well as those that have comprehensive policy statements on partner accommodation, along with their Web sites.

This book doesn't deny that we have a long way to go, that we're only just beginning to go down the road toward total accommodation of dual-career couples—and maybe, that perfect accommodation is impossible. But it does a great job of showing what some colleges and universities are doing, what works and what doesn't, and how schools that want to do more than they are now might do so without having to start entirely from scratch.

I got lucky, you know. Back in the day, my husband was the initial hire at a small liberal arts school, and I was, for a time, the accompanying spouse. I waited around, did a bit of adjunct work here and there, bided my time, found my own work as a writer, and created, over time, a life in this outback. One day, seven years later and out of the blue, a tenure-track job at the same institution just landed in my lap. (Oh, all right, it wasn't quite like that, but you get the idea). Sometimes, these things just happen—and believe me, while I read this book, I was thanking my lucky orbs that in my case things happened as they did.

We can't, however, rely on things to just happen. Sometimes, without a push or a shove or, better yet, a *policy*, things never do. This book puts us on a path toward policies, plans, and procedures, and though these words might not be the most beautiful in the English language, they embody the practical work we have before us. We can keep looking up to the stars, but we need to keep our feet planted firmly on the earth—where deer, antelope, and human couples roam. Or something like that. I never was very good at physics.