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SPECIAL FOCUS: GENDER AND THE PROFESSORIATE

May Babies and Posttenure Babies: Maternal Decisions of Women Professors

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Scholars have pointed out that childbearing leave policies are interpreted and implemented differently across departments within universities (Orel & Whitmore, 1998). Department chairs, who tend to be men, make discretionary decisions about a woman's leave time, and women's requests are not necessarily accommodated. Indeed, due to fear of reprisal, untenured women seem particularly vulnerable in their ability to seek and receive parental leave.

This article examines the ways in which Canadian women professors make decisions about combining the pursuit of tenure with childbearing and childrearing experiences. The women focus on the following questions: Do women academics have children before or after tenure? In what ways do the women's stories link the past and present experiences of senior and junior

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women professors? Supporting data are based on the narratives of women assistant, associate, and full professors.¹

To address the above questions, I employ a critical feminist theoretical framework that acknowledges the importance of the relationships among gender, power, organizational culture, and policy when seeking to improve women's status in the academy. Feminist critical policy analysts Bensimon and Marshall (1997) place the notion of the social construction of gender at the center of their study, critique theories that have conventionally not used gender analysis, pay greater attention to policy, and suggest that women's place in academe is far more complicated than previous research has proposed.

In general, the women in this study believe that having children before obtaining tenure is detrimental to their career prospects. Drawing on this consensus, I demonstrate that some women believe in the necessity of carefully planning their pregnancies around their demanding work timetables. Older women depict what they call the May baby phenomenon, meaning that as junior faculty women, they tried to give birth in the month of May. Younger women express a certain amount of anxiety associated with the prospect of pregnancy in the pretenure stage of their careers. These women have experienced or are currently experiencing what I call the hidden pregnancy phenomenon, meaning that they either attempt to hide their pretenure pregnancies or have posttenure babies. Hence, the hidden pregnancy phenomenon links the past and present experiences of different generations of women academics who blend the pursuit of scholarship with having and raising children.

I begin by reviewing the research literature on combining motherhood with an academic career. I argue that these writers do not attend to one important facet of the family/work dilemma for women academics, that is, childbirth timing. Next I present the personal experiences of the women in this study surrounding the timing of childbirth and its impact on career progression. From a critical feminist perspective, I explain the need for alternative models of academic careers and advocate the development of a different career path in academe that would accommodate both female and male faculty life courses.

TENURE AND CHILDREN

While many studies attempt to compare the effects of having children on the research productivity of faculty members, the cumulative results are

¹I use "junior" to refer to assistant professors and "senior" to refer to both associate and full professors. I also refer to "older" and "younger" women, meaning women who had turned twenty-five by 1985 and afterwards respectively.

inconclusive. Some researchers (e.g., Sonnert & Holton, 1995) report that having children has a negative impact on the publication rate of women faculty, while others (e.g., Cole & Zuckerman, 1987; Fox, 1995) found that the presence of children has no significant effect on the women's research productivity. According to Astin (1978), the discrepancies in these studies may be ascribed in part to variability in research productivity by discipline (natural sciences have higher publication rates), by rank (assistant professors publish less than associate professors who publish less than full professors), and by institutional setting (research universities have the highest publication rates). Similarly, Fox (1991) notes that productivity discrepancies may be explained by women's tendencies to hold lower ranks in the academy and to work in institutions with heavy teaching schedules and less research support.

Other quantitative research on the connection between academic careers and family life cite statistics to show that women academics are more likely than their male colleagues to have fewer children and to remain single and childless (e.g., Caplan, 1993; Cole & Zuckerman, 1987; Cooney & Uhlenberg, 1989). Caplan (1993) notes that while some women leave academe due to family-related responsibilities, "nearly half the women who stay are either single or childless" (p. 185). Similarly, Cooney and Uhlenberg (1989) show that 44% of White women faculty between ages 30 and 34 and 31% between ages 35 and 39 are childless. Several studies find that women are more likely than men to resign from the academy to care for children (e.g., Hensel, 1991; McElrath, 1992). Childless professional women (42%) are also found in the corporate sector (Hewlett, 2002). Of these women, only 14% chose not to have children. For many of the others, the long hours involved in establishing their careers, combined with the traditional division of household labor, and a fertility industry that led them to believe they could postpone having children meant that, when they were ready to have children, it was too late in life for pregnancy.

Qualitative research takes a closer look at the relationship between seeking tenure and having children and concludes that, for women faculty, the presence of children poses a threat to tenure. Considering that women professors continue to bear most of the responsibility for child care and household maintenance (Gmelch, Willse, & Lourich, 1986), it is not surprising that, in Davis and Astin's (1990) survey, women, and not men, identify "family responsibility" as an inhibitor to research productivity. Likewise, after surveying 124 women assistant professors at one American university, Finkel and Olswang (1996) report that women assistant professors perceive the "time required by children" as a serious detriment to tenure, especially if the children are under age six. Kyvik (1990) also finds that family responsibilities inhibit productivity during the critical stages of a woman's career course. For example, a woman who leaves the academy for long periods of

time to care for children may suffer cumulative disadvantage across her career. McElrath (1992) shows that the effects on tenure are negative for a woman who interrupts her career: "The probability of obtaining tenure decreases and the length of time to tenure increases" (pp. 277–278). McElrath speculates that the reason for this pattern is that tenure committee members may perceive work disruptions as an indication that the woman professor is not taking her work seriously and, hence, believe she may further interrupt her career in the future.

Still another body of qualitative literature examines the impact of motherhood on academic careers. Findings reveal that women academics experience considerable conflict when combining work and family. According to Duxbury, Heslop, and Marshall (1993), women faculty are more likely than their male counterparts to experience work overload and to report that their careers and family roles interfere with one another. Similarly, Sorcinelli and Billings (1993) find that pretenure women academics have more difficulty than men in balancing work and family activities as they are adjusting to academic life. Grant, Kennelly, and Ward (2000) report that women experience greater tension than men when combining scientific careers in academe and family life. Furthermore, some researchers note that the structure of academic careers assumes a male model (Grant et al., 2000) and that this structure serves to repress women's personal lives (Armenti, 2000). It appears that women's place in the academy still reflects what Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) call the "old norms," a set of historical beliefs and expectations that remain even as new understandings arise. The message of the old norms is that women faculty must choose between family life and work, rather than combining personal and professional lives.

Although quantitative findings are indecisive about whether having children affects research productivity, qualitative studies more clearly identify the difficulties inherent in combining work and family life. Needless to say, the productivity requirement for tenure and promotion, combined with assuming primary responsibility for childrearing, increase the workload experienced daily by women academics with children. Furthermore, these studies do not address the dilemma of childbirth timing. What my research shows is that the women's decisions on the timing of childbirth are central to their career progression.

ABOUT THE STUDY

A feminist perspective that involves a commitment to enhance women's lives guides feminist research. Qualitative feminist methods were suitable for this study because the issues explored deal with women's experiences on how childbirth influences academic careers. On the basis of Bloom's (1998) work and Bensimon and Marshall's (1997) framework, I selected a feminist

critical analysis that includes (a) gender as the fundamental category of attention, (b) data on the lived experiences and perceptions of women academics, (c) results that answer important questions about women's lives, and (d) research that is change oriented. More specifically, a feminist critical policy analysis considers the associations among critical theory analysis, feminist analysis, and policy analysis. Briefly, I begin with the critical theorist's assumption that institutions are established essentially to benefit the elite and disadvantage the non-elites by keeping them subordinates. Next, I add the radical feminist thought that institutions systemically favor White males and oppress females. Finally, I include the emphasis of critical policy analysis on political processes (micro and macro) that result in planned and unplanned consequences.

This work involved in-depth, qualitative interviews conducted with 19 women academics selected from different faculties and ranks at one Canadian university in 1996. The participants ranged in age from 30 to 60 and were all tenured or on tenure track: eight assistant, seven associate, and four full professors. I interviewed at least one representative from each rank in each of the four faculties of arts, social sciences, sciences, and professional schools. To maintain participant confidentiality, I have generalized faculty names and grouped the women accordingly, rather than using specific titles. Overall, my intent was to ensure valid comparisons among ranks and faculties.

Within Canadian academia² there are three basic ranks: assistant, associate, and full professor. An assistant professor is hired in a tenure-track position and is reviewed for tenure and promotion to associate professor usually in the sixth year. Scholarly publications are of primary importance in the tenure decision, since Canadian universities function as research-centered universities. Nontenure track positions, such as lecturer and adjunct instructor, are also available; but I did not include women in those ranks in this study.

While some women academics may choose not to have children, that is not the case for the women in this study. Since I indicated in my letter of invitation that I was interested in the "connection between family and careers," the respondents either had children or were planning to have children. Additionally, most of the participants were White and from middle-class backgrounds. One was an ethnic minority. Three were raised in working-class families.

During the interviews, my goal was to provide questions as starting points for the women to tell their stories but to encourage lengthy responses and

²Almost all Canadian universities are public and comparable to U.S. state universities (Lipset, 1990). About 25% of faculty in Canadian universities are women (Statistics Canada, 2000). In the past, women's representation in U.S. research universities has been likened to the Canadian figure (Park, 1996).

deeper reflection with some guidance in a semi-structured interview format. Some of my questions were preset, yet like the approach Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) used in interviewing women academics, I “let the interviewees’ responses determine the order of the subjects, the time spent on each, and the introduction of additional issues” (p. x). As a result the interviews lasted anywhere from 90 to 120 minutes, depending on the length of the responses and the amount of time that the particular participant had available. Interview questions centered on the relationship between personal and professional life, the timing of childbirth, child-care arrangements, accounts of career progression, strategies for time management, and the usefulness of family-centered university policies.

I tape-recorded the interviews, then transcribed and interpreted them by establishing a coding system that categorized various levels of information to develop themes. Typically, a coding system involves codes (which depict behaviors, activities, and attitudes) and subcodes (which break codes down into smaller groups) (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Feminist interpretation is particularly concerned with analyzing women’s experiences and presenting their voices. The transcripts captured words, phrases, sentences, and even paragraphs that revealed the personal experiences of the participants about a given phenomenon. I interpreted these experiences according to recurring patterns that related to the theme of career and family dynamics (Janesick, 1994).

I addressed the descriptive, interpretive, and theoretical credibility of the study by using such techniques as methods triangulation (Creswell, 1998) and “thick” description of the women’s stories (Lincoln & Denzin, 1994). Methods triangulation involves the use of multiple research methods in a single study so that one type of data verifies or supplements another, providing for a more accurate interpretation. I began with feminist interview research which was the primary method. At the end of each interview I collected background information by asking the woman to complete a brief questionnaire on age, academic degree, marital status, number of children (if any), field, position, tenure status, and number of years employed as an academic. At the final stage, I gathered documentation for content analysis that included organizational records (directories, calendars, handbooks, policies, and procedures) and university literature (newspapers, newsletters, pamphlets and flyers). I searched these documents for organizational policies and practices that perpetuate gender inequalities. For verification purposes, I compared interview findings with those from the questionnaires and printed documentation to confirm factual data such as the ratio of women to men in each department.

LINKING THE PAST AND THE PRESENT

While some of the literature cited earlier deals with the influence of childrearing on women's academic careers, I have found no research addressing questions such as: (a) How do women academics decide when to get pregnant—before or after tenure? (b) To what extent are those decisions based on such factors as fear of not obtaining an academic position, fear of not receiving tenure or promotion, and/or fear of being terminated from their employment? In essence, this article focuses on the maternal decisions and career perspectives of women academics.

Accordingly I first consider the meaning of May babies and posttenure babies. Then I demonstrate the necessity of acknowledging the female life course within the academic profession. I conclude by discussing the possibility for alternative career paths in academe.

May Babies

The dilemma of combining children and a career for women academics begins during pregnancy but is anticipated before then. Some of the older associate and full professors, who had their children before tenure, spoke of the May baby phenomenon, meaning that junior faculty at least ten years ago tried to time the births of their babies in May. Having babies in May, or for that matter at any time during the spring and summer months, was a window of opportunity that permitted women to have children without being forced to take time off from work or jeopardize their goals for achieving tenure. May was considered the optimal month for the birth of a child since it allowed the woman a few months to adjust to motherhood prior to the new teaching session.³ For these women, having children was a process that required careful planning. Their colleagues and superiors would regard openness about their pregnancies as a lack of commitment towards their careers because, at the time, the predominant ideology held that women could not handle both a career and a family. Irene,⁴ a full professor, described how she used a clothing strategy to conceal her pregnancy during the winter term:

I had it all very, very planned out, because in those days there wasn't any such thing as maternity leave. . . . In fact, I was walking across the campus and the

³The May baby phenomenon is related to the typical academic year in this and many other Canadian universities. Professors begin their normal teaching schedule in September, have a three-week teaching break in December, and resume teaching from early January to April. Only a few select courses are taught during the spring and summer months and not all professors teach such courses. Usually spring and summer months are reserved for research purposes. Those months provided some of the women in this study with a "window of opportunity" to have children without taking time away from their normal teaching schedule.

⁴All names are pseudonyms to protect the participants' identities.

Chair of the Department said, "What are you doing next year?" and I said, "I'm writing my thesis," and he said, "Well, how would you like a job?" So I thought this is not the moment to tell him that I'm expecting a baby, so then I said, "Yes, that would be nice." The baby was due in July, so . . . there were whole numbers in my Department that didn't seem to know, even by April, that I was pregnant because of the strategy that I had at the beginning, of wearing tight things one day and then voluminous things the next day. . . . By the time I was wearing lots of voluminous things nobody noticed that they were any different from what they had seen. Now of course women don't do that. . . . They're up front in planning. But I felt, I think, at the time that if I said to the chair, "Oh yes, I'm having a baby in July, but yes I would like a full time job," I think he would have thought, "Oh well, this is going to be too much for her, you know, this is probably not going to work out."

During her interview, Janice, an associate professor, described her rationale for having a pretenure baby in May but a posttenure baby later in December. The latter appeared to cause a bit of a problem for the chair who seemed surprised to have to deal with the birth of a child and the inconveniences it imposed on the department:

Well, the first one [pretenure baby] was—you know, you don't want your colleagues to resent you when you come up for tenure, you're afraid to interfere with [the procedure] . . . and so I had this May baby and came back to work in August because we had 10 weeks maternity leave then. And then when the second one came along I had her in December and that really threw the chair for a loop. He was kind of, "Well, what are we going to do about this baby due on the 13th of December?" [That was] about ten months after I got tenure. My post tenure baby. . . . And I intentionally didn't have a May baby that time either, I had a December baby.

Additionally, Janice related how she discovered that other junior women, like her, were trying to have babies in May:

There was a time when I used to go to women's caucus meetings and they would talk about [May babies], so that was where I discovered that all the junior faculty were trying to have their babies in May so it wouldn't interfere with their teaching and upset their colleagues. The May baby phenomenon . . .

The difficulty with this strategy is that not all women can get pregnant exactly when they want to; nonetheless, the key point is that some of the women in this study attempted to control the childbirth timing for the sake of their careers. Another factor in pregnancy is the uncertainty of whether the baby will be healthy. For example, Paula planned to have her children after she became a full professor; however, she did not plan on having a child with Down's syndrome.

Natalie, an associate professor in the faculty of arts, believes that she was fortunate to have delivered her babies in May and June but noted that child-

birth timing should not have been accepted as a standard because some women have difficult pregnancy experiences:

I was lucky that everything worked out fine, that they were healthy, that the deliveries were uneventful and it's ridiculous to think that . . . young women should be expected to count on that kind of thing. The fact that it sometimes works out right is nice, but it shouldn't be taken as . . . something that you expect everybody to adhere to.

Natalie had two pretenure children. At the time, even though the maternity leave policy was newly established at the university, she believed that it was too risky to take the leave:

Maybe I was overly cautious. Maybe I could have taken maternity leave and not run into any difficulty. But it didn't seem like it was a risk worth taking. And so [Vicki] was born the evening I turned in my grades for regular term teaching and [Ken] was born the morning of the final exam for my summer school teaching.

Posttenure Babies

During the early 1980s, the women who were part of the Women's Caucus at the university worked hard to improve the maternity leave plan. As a result, Natalie, who is in her mid-forties, believes that women about ten years younger are having babies at various times throughout the year. While this random pattern may prevail in some faculties, most of the younger women in this study argued that it is best *not* having children prior to tenure. This is where the past and the present collide. While in the past women hid their desires to have children by having May babies, the current trend is toward posttenure babies. In both situations women are hiding their maternal desires to meet an unwritten professional standard that is geared toward the male life course. I refer to this situation as the hidden pregnancy phenomenon.

Both of the young assistant professors in the sciences, Cynthia and Rachel, noted that they will either wait for a grant renewal or for tenure before having children, believing that pregnancy before tenure would harm their career prospects. However, Cynthia said she wanted children before age thirty-five since, after that age, fertility decreases and the risk of having an unhealthy child increases. Having a disabled child, for instance, would certainly make an academic career more difficult:

A trend that I see in all [of my] male colleagues who've been hired in the last five years [is that] their wives have quit their jobs and moved. It does leave me sort of [alone]. I'm not going to get my husband to quit his job and move. . . . They all have houses [and] children. I can't have children at this point in time because it would really mess up my career. I plan to wait at least until I

have my grant renewal. . . . Even if my husband doesn't move here, I think I'm going to have kids because I don't want to wait. . . . I'm thirty-two now so I still have time. I definitely want to start trying to have kids before I'm thirty-five. . . . If I have kids in the next year, how would I ever write that grant? I mean, there is a reality . . . [in terms of] the number of hours you have to put in, because I'm writing three grants, trying to get my papers out, trying to keep the lab going, doing my teaching, doing the service, you know. There's no way I could have kids in the next year. I think if I already had them, it wouldn't be that bad. To actually give birth . . . and to lose the three months, I just don't have that time now. (Cynthia)

Tenure. Tenure, tenure first. I think, like ultimately it's very difficult to do it [have a baby] unless you know you are well established and when you're trying to establish yourself and establish family at the same time, I'm not convinced it's something I could have done. (Rachel)

Young women academics in other faculties are also likely to postpone having their children until after they have obtained tenured positions. For instance, Martha is a young assistant professor in a professional school who loves children but has put off having them for a long time due to her career. She reports that if she has a child, she may be unwilling to use maternity leave benefits. "If I had a baby over the summer, say, I might not even take time out from teaching."

Another form of the hidden pregnancy phenomenon which links the past to the present is that young women academics continue to hide their pregnancies during job interviews (e.g., Irene above). Nancy, a young assistant professor in the Faculty of Arts, intentionally did not disclose her pregnancy during her job interview because she was worried about not being hired. When I asked if she feared not getting the position due to her pregnancy, she replied:

It was just at that five month stage where I could still get away with not . . . revealing that I was pregnant, but it took a lot of work. . . . I think it [getting the job] would have been more difficult. I mean . . . I think they would not have believed that I was going to finish my dissertation; they would never have believed that.

Hence, at the beginning of her career she had a newborn at home but no access to maternity leave or any other benefits. She continued:

I should have negotiated for some kind of maternity leave given that my daughter was born three weeks before my contract started which means that legally they're not required to provide me with any maternity leave. . . . They didn't offer me any kind of leave or teaching leave for that first year and my husband, who has just been offered a job, has already had his teaching load reduced for the first two years and I never had a smaller reduction offered to

me. . . . The fact that that . . . offer was not made to me in good faith and more explicitly that it was not made to me when I told them that I was having a child three weeks before my contract started suggests to me that there's no support mechanism in place for women around issues of maternity or, you know, childrearing in general.

The posttenure baby phenomenon may be, in part, due to the lack of benefits available to assist women professors in their childbearing and childrearing efforts. As Carol points out: "The faculty benefits are . . . mostly geared towards older men. For example, they [benefits] pay for tuition but not child care. The university daycare gives priority to undergraduates; faculty can be on the waiting list for years."

Furthermore, the women identify some problems with the university policy of attaching a year to the tenure clock for childbearing purposes. Janice believes that the tenure clock policy fails to eliminate the damaging effect of having children on the ability to obtain research funding. She notes, "Research grant people have told me they can only look at performance; they can't look at potential." To the extent that time spent caring for children results in fewer publications, tenure possibilities are also negatively influenced. Bridget, a young associate professor with pretenure children, reports that the extra year added to the tenure clock would not have been sufficient to permit her to generate additional publications due to the nature of her research. She obtained tenure by undergoing an appeal process that had harmful effects on her physical health and damaged the relationship with her colleagues.

Vivian, an associate professor, entered academe with a three-year-old toddler and an eleven-month-old baby. She received no benefits to help manage her child care responsibilities. To gain tenure, she too initiated an appeal procedure. She believes that the university should seek to accommodate women entering academe with young children:

If you have your children when you are in a tenure-track job they add a year to your tenure [process], but because my children were eleven months and three I got nothing, so I was competing on the same playing field as anybody else with no recognition. I think that's wrong. On the other hand, I don't want to say that I need handicapping, and I think one of the problems with changing it to a way that I think would be fair, is that it does lead to that "Oh well, they're just getting a handicap and that's not fair." I wouldn't want that either.

There are some exceptions to the hidden pregnancy phenomenon. Carol and Patricia are young assistant professors in the arts and social sciences respectively. Both of them had children before tenure, and both attribute this decision to their nontraditional marriages. Carol indicates that if she

did not have a spouse at home she would not have had children before tenure, because striving for tenure constitutes a stressful time in her life:

Well, when I was an undergraduate and then when I was in graduate school, I knew lots of women professors, I knew none with kids. Zero. So of the seven women I knew in my graduate program, none had kids. . . . Lots were married, and the same in my undergraduate. . . . I had people say, "Well, how do you manage to do it?" And the answer is that I've got a husband who does an awful lot; and before we decided to have children, I said I was only going to do it if it could be that way. And, that's worked very well . . . with our daughter. He takes care of her half the time and she's in daycare or preschool half the time. And we'll do the same thing with this guy [baby in her arms during the interview] so he's got sort of half time involvement in his career or university, so we talked about that in advance. So that's how I do it, that's how I was able to do it.

Patricia also has a spouse at home who assumes child care responsibilities. However, she also enlists the help of her sister and can afford to hire a woman full time to care for her two children:

I think my husband is very proud of me. He has two masters' . . . but he hasn't been able to find a teaching job here. . . . That was hard at first. . . . It was a source of conflict in terms of who was going to take care of the baby. He thought he would do it for a year, but he found he didn't enjoy it at all. And it turned out to be an awful lot more work than he thought it was, which isn't a surprise. So we made other arrangements. . . . Actually as they [the children] get older, he gets better; he has a harder time with the babies.

To recap, there are exceptions to the hidden pregnancy phenomenon, since some untenured women academics do have children even at the present time. These women cite their nontraditional marriages as the main reason for having children prior to tenure. Other factors may also have influenced Patricia's and Carol's decisions to have children before tenure. For instance, both of them are in faculties where feminism has taken root; therefore, they have support from other female colleagues. Both women have also taken maternity leave and are considering extending the tenure clock by one year. These are benefits to which many senior women had no access.⁵

When I asked Carol: "If you didn't have a husband who could [care for the children], would you still have had children?" she replied: "Not now. Later. After I had tenure . . . because this period is pretty stressful." Furthermore, none of the young assistant professors in this study had children earlier in life as they pursued their university studies.

⁵Acker and Feuerverger (1996) find that senior women professors sometimes have mixed feelings about benefits extended to younger women to which they had no access. Any such negativity toward younger faculty is unlikely to help their career prospects.

ACKNOWLEDGING THE FEMALE LIFE COURSE

Given that women currently entering academic careers are already in their thirties, a period which corresponds with their childbearing years (Committee on the Status of Women in Universities, 1988), the stories that the women in this study tell about combining the pursuit of tenure with having children are rather extraordinary. The difficulties that they encounter in balancing their personal and professional lives require close attention from the university administration.

I believe that the hidden pregnancy phenomenon (i.e., hiding pretenure babies in the past or having posttenure babies at present) is a direct result of the fact that the career path for senior and junior women academics has not undergone major change. Over the years, women academics have been tailoring their personal lives to fit their professional lives. For example, of the eleven older women in this study six had May babies, one had no children, two had children as students and delayed their careers, and two waited to have children after they became full professors. These numbers should be considered in light of the fact that those women who had May babies also tell of attending women's caucus meetings before 1985 and discovering much to their surprise that "all" (word used by the women) of the junior women at the time were trying to have babies in the month of May. In their perspective, this phenomenon was widespread at the university.

Of the six young assistant professors, three spoke of hoping to have posttenure babies (two are in science fields), two have children but also have stay-at-home spouses, and one has one child and would like to have another but has been advised by the women in her department to wait until she receives tenure. Both of the young associate professors had children, and both were denied tenure until they initiated appeal procedures. The women's stories reveal that while, in the past, untenured women academics avoided having babies during the academic year, at present women academics, especially in the sciences but also to a lesser extent in the other faculties, avoid having babies prior to tenure. This difference in the timing of pregnancy between older and younger women occurs for much the same reason: they are attempting to adapt to the male life course model which sets the taken-for-granted parameters of the academic career. Some might call this form of adaptation merely a way of "balancing family and work." Yet, how can women realistically balance the intricacies of life within a life course that does not belong to them?

In different ways, both senior and junior women attempt to accomplish this difficult feat of balancing their lives. In the past, women who were intentionally delaying pregnancy into their late twenties and thirties were virtually unheard of; instead, delaying their careers for their children and, consequently, deferring tenure was a more common practice. Irene illustrates this point:

In my case when I had my first child I was twenty-seven which now seems relatively young, but at the time when I was in the hospital, we had this, you know, bunch of people in the ward, and they said, "How old are you, Ingrid?" "Seventeen." "How old are you, Jane?" "Twenty." "How old are you, Mary?" "Nineteen." "How old are you, Irene?" "Twenty-seven." "Oh, come on. How old are you really?" [Laughter] Because I was, you know, presumably well past the point at twenty-seven they would have thought . . . [I]n that era, there were a lot of women that would have been having their first child at seventeen. . . . [I]f that was the choice you made, to have your first child at seventeen, you obviously weren't going to get into graduate school, so there were people who eventually deferred that and they came back and did stuff later when they were fifty. But the people that I knew—they would probably defer having their children until, you know, late twenties.

On the other hand, at present, with the advent of new medical technology in fertility, women are more likely to have children in their thirties or even forties. I asked Vivian: "Relative to your female colleagues, what do you think about the amount of time it took you to progress from assistant to associate professor?" She replied that she is at the "tail end" of rank progression because most of her women colleagues have had posttenure children. Despite this slower pace, she feels secure with the choices she made about the timing of her children's births because she does not have to worry about being too old to have children. Nor does she have to worry about whether she will be able to have a second child due to age-associated decline in fertility. Vivian explained:

Most of my colleagues had children after they got tenure. They didn't do it the same way I did, but I wouldn't change what I did, I mean I see all sorts of people not being able to have children. You know . . . they've left it so their biological clocks have just about ticked right out. I wouldn't change what I did.

In other words, given the choice of extending the tenure clock by one year for the birth of a child or trying to retard the biological clock by a number of years to secure tenure prior to having children, women are more likely to choose the latter. This choice is based on at least two factors. Some women feel that the extra year added to the tenure clock for the birth of a baby is insufficient time to permit the attainment of tenure. Others believe that there is no real choice because the academic profession sets limits on the number of years that one can qualify for tenure and extend that time by only one year for the birth of a child. In contrast, advanced medical technology now gives a woman the possibility of a longer time span in which to become a mother, thereby allowing her to first pursue her career goals. Unfortunately, that longer time span often involves spending much time and money on infertility treatments because of the higher risk of infertility

over age thirty-five.⁶ Other risks of increased maternal age are chromosomal abnormality in the baby (Creasy & Resnick, 1994) or miscarriage (Gindoff & Jewelewicz, 1986). Bridget, a young associate professor, and Cynthia, a young assistant professor, speak to each of the above two beliefs respectively.

I think, I went up [for tenure] after six years and then . . . because of a maternity leave, I was potentially eligible for an additional year's extension, which I did not want to take. I was exhausted. . . . I didn't have journal articles like in the process that, if I waited a year and they got published, it would make or break my CV. (Bridget)

I mean, if you really think about child raising, the hard part is the pregnancy and giving birth, which is really one year and that shouldn't make or break a person's career. . . . [I]f you want to get into societal infertility—I mean, look at the society as a whole. Look at what we've done. We've made it very difficult for women to have children, . . . so women delay having children so that they can have their career and then they are infertile because they've waited so long. So then you come up with all these infertility clinics, all those infertility drugs, billions of dollars spent to try to get women to have babies. Why not take all that money, put it into daycare early on so that women in graduate school could have children? (Cynthia)

In other words, according to Cynthia, a woman's need for infertility treatments due to age would be virtually unnecessary if the professions were more accepting of, and accommodating to, women with young children. She added a historic example of accommodating mothers in the workforce:

In the forties during the war they were trying to get women to work in factories so they had daycare paid for by the factory. Women had the option of buying a cheap dinner to take home when they picked up their child. I mean that was fifty years ago and we are nowhere near doing that. It's not set up for us to be successful on many levels.

The stories of the women in this study support the critical feminist belief that educational institutions contribute to gender inequities, play a role in reinforcing sexism, and do not interrupt patriarchy. Policies like maternity leave provide the illusion that universities are working toward gender equity but these policies are flawed because department chairs (mostly privileged white males) have the discretion to interpret, implement, and enforce them. A feminist critical policy analysis argues that those in positions of power have failed to consider the needs of women on the issue of combining work

⁶Serono Laboratories (1997) has compiled a booklet of information about the increased risk of infertility above age 35 and treatment options available.

and family. In turn, women's possibilities to compete successfully in the workplace are diminished.

Valian (1999) asked why the advancement of professional women in fields such as business, law, academia, etc., has been so slow. She discovered that women and men have preconceived beliefs about gender differences (i.e., gender schemas) that produce differences in the evaluation, behaviors, and characteristics of women and men. As a result, within the professions, women tend to accumulate advantage at a slower rate than men. Motherhood, she argues, explains the existence of gender schemas; it is our "beliefs in sex differences, based on our preconception of a single difference, that create and amplify other sex differences" (p. 116). Recognizing the plight of women with children would serve the interests of all women because, on the basis of gender schemas, women are disadvantaged in their professional lives whether or not they choose to have children. Should it not be the responsibility of the academy to lead other professions in new directions by providing an example on how to treat such women's issues—especially given the fact that by the age of 40 about 50% of all professional women remain childless, often not by choice but to meet the demands of their careers? (Hewlett, 2002).

THE NEED FOR ALTERNATIVE MODELS OF ACADEMIC CAREERS

To paraphrase Glazer (1997), instead of stating that women professors are more likely to be single or childless, to work part-time, to leave the university, and to hold low-level leadership positions, "it would be appropriate to determine what it is about institutional structures that make them more compatible with men's lives" (p. 70). The development of women-friendly careers and universities would involve major attitudinal and behavioral changes. To date, university policies fail to facilitate the combined roles of work and family life. Women-friendly policies and practices are not often taken into consideration by the male-dominated leadership in academic institutions. Consequently, women are expected to adapt to institutional norms that do not accommodate their differences.

From a feminist critical policy analysis perspective, those in positions of power have the ultimate authority to encourage or derail efforts to achieve gender equity; and gender hierarchies continue to slow women's progress toward equity. What are considered gender-neutral policies and practices typically reinforce the male-defined culture (MacKinnon, 1989). For instance, the fact that childbearing and tenure-track years often occur simultaneously for women faculty is not an issue that has received much attention by the powers that be in academe; hence, the tenure and promotion system remains unaltered, continues to favor the male lifestyle, yet appears to be gender neutral by virtue of its focus on merit.

The necessity for change is obvious when we consider the low proportion of women faculty in the upper echelons of academe. Since women have limited access to academic administration, their ability to obtain presidencies, chairs, full professorships, and large grants is left to the discretion of males in positions of power. But at a time when those in power are concerned with efficiency and diminishing resources, gender equity seems to be a low priority (Glazer, 1997). Despite existing policies such as maternity leave and stop-the-tenure-clock, the women in this study confirm that combining a personal life that includes children with a rewarding academic career seems more difficult than ever to achieve, perhaps as a result of the increased expectations placed on an academic career, especially by research-centered universities.

An innovative and progressive academic career trajectory would acknowledge women's life course as well as that of men. This different career path would allow faculty members to move between part-time and full-time tenure-track positions as well as consider whether job sharing might help balance their work and family responsibilities. For instance, in the first scenario a full-time tenure-track faculty member could be permitted to work part-time when she or he is caring for young children. The move from full-time to part-time would be optional and could consist of a percentage of the standard responsibilities; that is, 25 to 50% of the expectations for committee work, teaching load, and scholarship production. At the same time, the salary and benefits package would be reduced and the number of years to tenure could be increased in direct correspondence to the amount of time that the faculty member is working. This system should also allow the person to return to full-time work at his or her earliest convenience. In the second scenario, two people would share one academic position. Some guidelines could be set for the expectations from each member and each member would be evaluated based on that predetermined course of action.

A problem that both of these alternative career paths encounter is that the essential activities included in faculty work (research, teaching, and service) are vague in terms of their requirements for tenure assessment. Tierney and Bensimon (1996) note that junior faculty are socialized to think that teaching is undervalued; research is important, but ambiguity surrounds the quantity and quality of publications required for tenure. Service is not rewarded but has symbolic importance in that it permits senior faculty to become acquainted with junior faculty. The requirements for teaching, scholarly publication, and service would have to be clarified for each of the three possible career trajectories: full-time, part-time, and job sharing.

In the past, men with children in academe have succeeded with the support of stay-at-home wives. Similarly, at present men are much more likely than women to have spouses at home to care for the children (Duxbury, Heslop, & Marshall, 1993). According to Tierney and Bensimon (1996), the

tenure and promotion system tends to socialize pretenure candidates to the organizational culture, for if they deviate from the established norms, they risk losing the opportunity for tenure. Women academics experience marginalization primarily as a result of having to conform to the male model of life in the academy, which can be defined as devoting most of one's time to her or his career and pursuing work-related activities unencumbered by family commitments. Indeed, it is time that universities acknowledge the importance of a home and family in a balanced life. Family-friendly innovations may help to "increase the retention of women faculty . . . and generally initiate a new climate of cooperation and collegiality" (Kolodny, 1998, p. 301).

CONCLUSION

Despite some of the exceptions to the hidden pregnancy phenomenon, the fact remains that, in the past, many senior women academics before achieving tenure tried to time childbirth for May. More recently many junior women academics hide their desire to have children until after they are tenured (posttenure babies). Hence, the May baby phenomenon has become the posttenure baby phenomenon. In addition, as in the past, women academics today do not disclose their state of being pregnant during job interviews. I refer to all of the above situations as the hidden pregnancy phenomenon. In other words, women of both generations are tailoring their childbirth decisions to the schedule of the profession.

At least part of the reason for this hidden pregnancy phenomenon is the way in which benefits for pregnant women academics are viewed. In the past, those benefits did not exist and women feared requesting time off for their special circumstances. At present, benefits such as maternity leave and adding a year to the tenure clock still exclude some women, and some women fear taking advantage of those benefits. One reason women may not want an extra year before tenure is that colleagues' expectations concerning their productivity may increase. This perception extends from the ambiguity that surrounds tenure—that is, "how much is enough" in terms of publications. Moreover, the fear of taking advantage of those benefits remains grounded in the same rationale as in the past—that the women will be perceived as having a lesser commitment to their careers and a greater commitment to their children. In turn, this perception is based on the underlying view that unequally distributed benefits provide a form of privileged opportunity for some groups of people who would otherwise be unqualified to perform a certain occupation. In other words, opponents believe that extending benefits to a select group, such as women academics with children, is not based on the meritocratic system, while proponents view the two (benefits and merit) as separate entities. It is this negative perception of benefits, com-

bined with the unclear criteria surrounding tenure and volume of publications, that I believe underlies the hidden pregnancy phenomenon and impedes change in this area. Put simply, this phenomenon persists because the academic profession does not allow women a significantly different career path than the standard one developed around the male life course.

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