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Gender, Work-Family Overload, and Stigmatization: Academia as a Revealing Organizational Case

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Work and family are proverbially "greedy" domains (Coser, 1974). They claim time, energy, and allegiance—drawing heavily upon people's loyalty and absorption. These demands also compete in ways that are difficult to reconcile (Byron, 2005). Resulting is work-family conflict. The conflict is growing in the US and other industrialized nations, with women working outside, as well as inside, the home; and separate spheres of work and family, by gender, disappearing (Moen and Roehling, 2005). The conflict is also bidirectional—work-to-family and family-to-work. It is important to differentiate between the two because they are distinct (although related) constructs and can have different antecedents (Bellavia and Frone, 2005; Grzywacz et al., 2002).

Academia is a revealing, organizational case for the study of gender and work-family overload and conflict. First, normative expectations are that the "ideal academic" gives priority to work; has few outside interests; and pursues work single-mindedly (Bailyn, 2003: 139; Ward and Wolf-Wendel, 2004: 237).

Second, the work role is highly salient to faculty members' identity. The identification and involvement arise early in life, and those who persist through graduate school often set their sights on research careers (Fox and Stephan, 2001). The involvement shapes expressions of self and makes faculty responsive to work demands. In this sense, academic work can qualify for what is termed "work devotion" (Blair-Loy, 2003), with work standing in tension to other commitments, including family.

Third, organizational standards of evaluation and reward can heighten the striving for achievement. In academia, standards of evaluation are often both "absolute and subjective." This means that evaluative criteria can be vague and variable. The issue of "how much is enough" (Huber, 2002:78) is particularly salient for women who, on average, are less likely than men to report that criteria for tenure and promotion are "very clear" (Fox, 2015), and more likely to report that they do not understand the criteria for evaluation in their units (Roth and Sonnert, 2011). Further, a recent study points to informal factors, frequency of speaking with faculty and perceptions of being in a collegial department, as stronger factors in predicting clarity than formal factors of

seniority and rank. This means that social integration is shaping patterns of clarity of evaluation (Fox, 2015).

These organizational conditions and experiences and are not gender-neutral. Work and family conflict is especially salient for women faculty for at least two reasons. Women's pathway to the faculty role is frequently fraught with sacrifices and prices paid, and with heightened awareness of the penalties for shortfall in any dimension of work (Fox, 2003).

These can make women especially sensitive to performance. At the same time, compared to men, women are frequently subject to higher cultural and social expectations for attention to family. This operates whether or not they have demanding work roles (Boulis and Jacobs, 2008).

In a survey conducted with faculty in nine research universities, academic scientists reported bi-directional work-family conflict: family/household interferes with work, and work interferes with family, with variations by gender (Fox et al., 2011). Work to family conflict, on average, was higher than "moderate" for women and close to "moderate" for men. Family to work conflict was close to "moderate" for women and somewhat more than "little" for men.

Likely, the greater interference in the direction of work-to-family reflects broad, national pressure in the US for the precedence of work. Compared to family roles, work roles are organizational and are tied to people's social standing. In keeping with this, negative sanctions exist for allowing family to interfere with work. In comparison, few negative sanctions discourage focusing on work at home (Kelloway et al., 1999). Further, in the same study, factors predicting work-family conflict vary in interesting ways, by gender, in effects of marriage, ages of children, and senior compared to junior rank (Fox et al., 2011).

Marriage did not significantly raise or lower the probability of work-to-family conflict for either men or women. However, for conflict in the other direction—family-to-work—being married significantly increased the probability of conflict for men and not for women. How might we explain this? The pattern may relate to men's spouses (who tend to be outside academic and scientific occupations) being more likely than women's spouses to act as "social managers" who arrange engagements and activities that are not related to perceived needs to focus on work.

For conflict in the direction of work-to-family, the presence of children in two age groups (under age six and between six-eighteen) increased the probability of

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interference. However, for the direction of family-to-work conflict, the presence of children under age six significantly predicted interference among men and *not* among women.

Given the demands of small children, this is non-intuitive. How might we explain this? Women in academia who have preschool children and remain in full-time, tenured or tenure- track faculty positions may be a highly selective group in adjusting to demands of their work. This possibility is supported by prior research showing that, in academic science, women with preschool children exercise "disciplined choices" in management of their time, allocating hours to research activities, particularly (Fox, 2005). Bear in mind here that that we are assessing patterns only among those who are employed, that is, those who have survived. Attrition, owing to work-family conflict, may occur earlier, and these women do not appear among the employed group of faculty studied.

Academic rank is also a sensitive factor and operated in unexpected ways. Senior (associate/full professor), compared to junior (assistant professor), rank predicted work and family conflict among women, but not men. Further, the effect of rank operated differently depending on the direction/type of conflict. Holding senior rank *decreased* the likelihood of work to family conflict, but *increased* the likelihood of family-to-work conflict for women in the study.

The pattern of senior rank increasing the likelihood of women's family-to-work conflict may reflect potential demands of care for parents and aging family members among women at higher rank. The pattern may also reflect the experiences of women faculty, reported elsewhere, that personal or professional case does not necessarily accompany advancement in rank (MIT, 1999).

Implications exist for interventions of childcare supports; work expectations that accelerate with higher rank; and tenure leave policies that operate differently by gender. First, the presence of children of school aged children increased the probability of both work-to-family and family-to-work conflict for women and men. This suggests that childcare issues go beyond issues of pre-schoolers, and that work-family conflicts may be reduced by after-school programs and programs during "break" periods for school-aged children.

Second, the seemingly anomalous pattern of senior rank predicting higher family-to-work conflict for women is consistent with complex ways in which faculty positions operate. This calls for attention to issues of overload for senior women faculty.

Third, the high expectations that prevail mean that gender-neutral family leaves do not necessarily operate with shared benefit for both women and men. A recent investigation of faculty in 50 top economics departments over time (1980-2005) indicates that gender-neutral "stop the tenure clock" leaves for birth of children or care of ill family members benefit men more than women. The adoption of departments' gender-neutral policies significantly reduced women's tenure rates, and increased men's. The primary driving mechanism is that, after these policies are implemented, the men publish more in the top economics journals, and the women did not (Antecol et al., 2018). This suggests that the leave policies do not account for gender-specific productivity losses, and the can actually increase the gender gap in productivity and advancement of faculty. Just as conditions are not gender-neutral, neither are the effects of policies.

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