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Seeking Coherence and Integrity: Personal and Professional Demands and Expectations of Senior Women Professors

Florence A. Hamrick
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This study of 26 senior women professors at a large research university suggests that, while their negotiation of professional and personal commitments involved calculated balancing acts and strategies, they primarily described searches for integrity and coherence in life. More effective personal management strategies, modified and more realistic expectations, and a refusal to dwell on past decisions were among the themes identified. Respondents described an almost uniform and longstanding self-sufficiency and acknowledged having more control over aspects of their work, lives, and time. However, for many, time was also increasingly spent on some level of attention to health, and retirement preparation.

Introduction

In studies of the career development or work lives of professional women, attention is often focused on the tensions between goals, demands and expectations associated with their professional and personal lives. As women have entered the workforce, beginning and maintaining professional careers, they have also continued to bear disproportionate responsibility for parenting, relationship accommodation and maintenance, and household management. Decisions regarding the cumulative nature of these roles and responsibilities have often been interpreted as choices made by professional women (and their partners or other family members). The availability and quality of structural and institutional resources that could partially offset the total work load—for example, child care services—have also come under increased scrutiny, with resulting conclusions that child care is often scarce, expensive, inflexible, and/or deemed unfeasible by working parents. The study of life tensions between and within personal and professional

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expectations and goals are particularly relevant among academic women. The years devoted to graduate study and subsequent establishment of an academic career often coincide with emphases on intimate partnership formation, middle to late childbearing years, and career establishment or advancement of partners.

Although it is certainly important to focus on the early career stages of how academic women construct and deal with professional and personal tensions, less is known about the kinds of personal and professional tensions involved in latter career stages for academic women. This study is a phenomenological exploration of how aspects of intertwined personal and professional lives are experienced among a group of 26 senior women professors at a large research university. This study is designed to explore and interpret the primary personal and professional issues for academic women at latter stages of their academic careers and work lives—after critical career markers such as tenure and promotion to professor status have been achieved. Since the issues involved are often ones of career development, adult development, and aspects of faculty membership and academic work, the following review focuses on these literature bases as contexts for this study.

Literature Review

Developmental models in general, and career development models in particular, have historically been based on studies of male experiences and male perspectives on worklives and careers (Gallos, 1989; Gilligan, 1993; Sharf, 2001). However, as Gallos (1989) stated, “Developmentally, women

are different from men. The claim has surfaced so often; it can no longer be denied. . . . Women construct their conceptions of themselves, their lives, and the world around them differently from men" (p. 110). Specific research on faculty career development is much the same. The research that exists is based mostly on studies of male professors (e.g., Baldwin & Blackburn, 1981; Gallos, 1989; Mathis, 1979). Gallos (1989) concluded that these theories "do women an injustice" (p. 124). Thus, the experience of women has been potentially devalued by virtue of its absence from developmental studies and career development models.

Some studies of faculty members suggest a developmental process that is both age-related as well as stage-related. For example, two studies of male professors indicated that full professors more than five years away from retirement and full professors within five years of retirement were likely to have some common characteristics such as decreased time on and enthusiasm for teaching and research and additional attention to professional activities and department and outside service (Baldwin, 1979; Baldwin & Blackburn, 1981). For those more than five years from retirement, however, reassessing their careers and considering career change occurred (Baldwin & Blackburn, 1981).

Specific developmental information and proposed models about female academics are limited. A study of women faculty members in schools of social work suggested that those embarking on academic careers as well as faculty and administrators in positions to improve the work environment consider some important issues in decision making about potential ongoing stressors that often are primarily controlled by the institution. These may include the compatibility and reality of personal and professional goals; skills to be cultivated such as proactive planning and establishing and maintaining limits; and attention to personal life (DiNitto, Aguilar, Franklin, & Jordan, 1995). A study of male college faculty in the Midwest identified five stages of an academic career, characterizing full professors with more than five years until retirement as making decisions about continuing teaching or diversifying their experiences (i.e., administrative roles) (Baldwin, 1979; Baldwin & Blackburn, 1981; Mathis, 1979). This stage of faculty life brings questions such as whether or not to maintain a career path similar to their current one or to attempt something new for the sake of variety and stimulation (Lawrence, 1984).

Opportunities for possible career renewal may be available to these individuals, allowing them to achieve what Erickson identified as "generativity," a stage in middle adult life of choice-making about active engagement with society and the legacy that will be left (as cited in Evans, Forney & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). Those within five years of retirement were

characterized by fear that their knowledge is outdated, limited goals, withdrawal from responsibilities, and comfort with their departmental or college service roles (Baldwin, 1979; Baldwin & Blackburn, 1981). Other researchers offered a category of "midlife faculty," defined as faculty ". . . in their late 30's to mid or late 50's . . .," often coinciding with the associate and full professor ranks (Cytrynbaum, Lee, & Wadner, 1982, p. 15), who were described as being characteristically stagnant, withdrawn, and disinterested in such activities as teaching and research. According to Mathis (1979), this career stage involved a shift from focusing energy on acquiring promotion and tenure to an "increasing expenditure of energy required to maintain a career on the same terms by which it reached mid-point in the first place" (p. 22).

Productivity, as defined by publications, continues to be a concern but did not decline in later career stages, according to Astin and Davis (1993). Instead, they found full professors to be most productive along with a greater relative increase in publications for post-tenure women. In their study of social scientists, Astin and Davis found that married women were more productive than single women, and their productivity was comparable to married men. However, single women published more books and book chapters than married men or women, with married men and women producing more articles. "The study indicates that married women may learn early on what they need in terms of commitment to maintain their research and publishing activities" (Astin cited in Chamberlain, 1988, p. 269).

In one study of male and female faculty members at mid-career, some made and maintained strict differentiations between work and non-work lives while others preferred rather seamless connections between these aspects. The blurring was, in this study, more associated with men who had relatively traditional marital relationships (Quinn, O'Neill, & Debebe, 1996). A female reflective essayist observed that a satisfying personal life, as with a satisfying work life, does not simply happen without attention and appropriate strategies and management activities (Huff, 1996). However, demands of academic life include task and responsibility expectations that draw faculty members away from their research, and these competing demands for time and energy tend to increase over one's academic career (Quinn et al., 1996).

Women identified spouse and family as variables that helped, not hindered, their progress. However, in a subsample of highly productive academics from a study of 9,000 faculty at 92 institutions, Astin (cited in Chamberlain, 1988) noted that women identified expectations they could control, such as family, teaching and committees, as limitations, while men's identified limitations involved less personal control.

Although a faculty member may have a long career of 40 or more years, in which publishing could be a constant expectation, changes in professional and personal lives occur continually, resulting in complex configurations of major as well as minor transitions. When examining the various stages of faculty life, transitions seem frequent for individuals in these roles. Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) defined a transition as “. . . any event or nonevent that results in change in relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (p. 27). Types of stress cited include anticipated (e.g., achievement of promotion and tenure), unanticipated (e.g., denial of promotion and/or tenure), chronic hassles (e.g., everyday irritations, or experiences of “cultural taxation” experienced by women and under-represented faculty [Padilla as cited in Tierney & Bensimon, 1996]), and nonevents (e.g., unexpectedly delayed or unaccomplished goals) (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Echoing a broad perspective shared by phenomenological methodologists, understanding transitions requires examination of the type and context of the experience as well as the impact of the experience on daily life (Schlossberg et al., 1995). The nature of faculty work, their career stages, and the transitional aspects of an evolving faculty career can all affect the personal and professional balance for female faculty members. This information provides a context and background for examining the data.

Methodological Framework

Phenomenological and feminist methodologies and assumptions provided the overarching theoretical framework for this study. Proceeding from a phenomenological approach, primary attention was placed on understanding the phenomenon of balance in mid- to late-career lives of women professors through careful focus on participants' descriptions of episodes from their own experiences and the meanings participants ascribed to these experiences. Additionally, a feminist standpoint theoretical framework was adopted by proceeding from “the spoken experience of actual women speaking of and in the actualities of their everyday world” (Smith, 1987, p. 107) towards “exploring and explicating the relations in which our everyday worlds are embedded” (Smith, 1987, p. 111). The goal of this research project is to better understand and convey the social realities of mid- to late-career stage faculty life experienced by this group of respondents and the social and organizational practices that reinforce and affirm these realities. Additionally, this study provides insight into these respondents' social worlds (Bernard, 1973; Millman & Kanter, 1987) and the life and work circumstances that are crucial parts of these worlds.

Methods and Data Analysis

Each of the 70 women with “professor” rank at a Research I Land Grant institution (1,395 full-time faculty, including 685 with professor rank at the time of data collection) were invited to participate in a study on a variety of characteristics, experiences, and perceptions of women professors. Twenty-six respondents representing a variety of academic disciplines and fields agreed to be interviewed. All respondents were white and non-Hispanic, as were approximately 88% of women at professor rank nationwide around the time of data collection (Knopp, 1995). Years at professor rank were similar between the groups of participants and non-participants. The social sciences and education areas were slightly over-represented while the arts and humanities disciplines were slightly under-represented (see Table 1).

Table 1.
Distributions Among Academic Disciplines, Fields, or Specialties

	Women at Professor Rank (70)	Respondent Group (26)
Arts and Humanities (AH)	26%	19%
Biological and Agricultural Sciences (BAS)	17%	19%
Physical and Mathematical Sciences and Engineering (PMSE)	6%	4%
Social Sciences and Education (SSE)	51%	58%

All interviews were audiotaped and fully transcribed to facilitate systematic analysis through use of the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to identify common themes and concepts (Rubin & Rubin, 1995) across the interviews. To ensure descriptive and interpretive validity, opportunities for clarification were presented during the interviews, and two forms of post-interview member-checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) were conducted.

In the discussion that follows, “discipline” is used when discussing academic discipline, professional field, or specialty in order to streamline the

presentation. Additionally, respondents were assured anonymity with respect to specific departmental affiliation, so the four aggregate categories in Table 1 are used to characterize respondents' academic backgrounds.

According to analysis of institutional data, women professors at the university received their terminal degrees between 1950 and 1988. The mean completion date was 1975, the mode was 1981, and the median was 1976. Among respondents, this range was 1950-1986, with a mean of 1974 and mode and median of 1975. Although a similar range was evident in the respondent group, more respondents were clustered in the earlier dates than in the target population. Additionally, respondents reported a variety of personal circumstances, ranging from unmarried or divorced to being involved in committed partnerships or marriages. The majority of respondents were in committed partnerships or marriages. Most respondents were mothers and/or stepmothers, but the ages of children at the time of data collection ranged from elementary school-aged to college-aged to adult.

One caution associated with this study is that the following discussion points cannot fully characterize all female professors' experiences or perceptions—much less the experiences of everyone in the respondent group. Not surprisingly, the respondents did not speak with one voice or share all of the same experiences or perspectives. In the following analysis and discussion, the “prevailing winds” across the data (Frye, 1990) are described while attempts are also made to convey the variety of perspectives within the respondent group.

Findings

Five major themes characterized respondents' experiences surrounding balance of personal and professional lives as senior faculty members. These themes are: modification of expectations; making peace with past decisions; self-sufficiency and choice; senior leadership opportunities and expectations; and personal health and well-being. In many ways, the first three themes describe personal viewpoints and/or self-management strategies predominantly characteristic among the respondent group while the fourth and fifth themes describe sets of new circumstances faced by respondents that have called their attention to issues of balance and life coherence.

The extent to which these themes were emphasized among respondents depended somewhat upon how they viewed and structured their work lives. While a small number of respondents described what one respondent termed an “interdigitated” life in which life roles were interwoven and largely commingled, most respondents spoke instead of the desirability and effectiveness associated with maintaining separation of personal and

professional lives. Some respondents were married to or shared life partnerships with fellow academics—a few with same-department colleagues. Others, however, expressed relief that their spouses or partners were not academics and/or had nothing to do with the university. Such separation introduced even more distance between one's career life and personal life, yet this also could be experienced as more fragmentary.

Modification of Expectations

The first theme focused on modifying one's expectations so that they were more realistic and manageable. Expectations at issue included respondents' amended expectations of realistic limits for work hours. One Biological and Agricultural Sciences (BAS) respondent noted: "[Work] gets done at night, early mornings, Saturdays and Sundays, and eventually one reaches a point to say, 'Enough. I can't do it.' . . . I need to strike a balance at some point." A Social Sciences and Education (SSE) respondent noted that she came to realize and validate her capacity for work and associated productivity: "I think what I have accomplished professionally is what I could accomplish. You know, I think I'm working at the level that I can work."

Other aspects of modifying expectations included a focus on the evolving nature of life as well as faculty life. A Physical and Mathematical Sciences and Engineering (PMSE) respondent discussed this aspect: "I don't think your career responsibilities stay static. And my personal life, my kids are going to get to the point where they're independent. They're going to be gone, . . . so I'll have more time to spend on my career." She also acknowledged, however, the need to anticipate and adapt to potentially discomfiting life changes, stating that she was reading about mid-life crises, or "mid-life growth experiences, I like to call them," that she and many of her colleagues were experiencing. She explained, "There's a lot of chaos going on in your head. . . . It's just sort of facing up to where you are in your life."

Children played important roles in respondents' setting of expectations for themselves as scholars as well as parents and community members. One Arts and Humanities (AH) respondent noted the difficulty of leaving relatively young children to engage in research as well as the pride in her subsequent scholarly accomplishments. Regarding leaving her child in order to travel to do her work, she stated, "I had to wait to get to that place until he was old enough for me to say, 'I'm ready to go now and do this.' It's the best thing I've ever done in my research."

In one rather unique example of evolving circumstances with children and accompanying modification of expectations, one SSE respondent noted

that her daughter provided community engagement and enforced leisure during her childhood:

Children at home tie you in differently and wonderfully to community. . . .
If you have children, you go to all their sporting events, you go to all their academic events. It requires you to have this whole leisure life.

Now, as an adult and fellow academic, this respondent's daughter provides collegiality that encompasses the respondent's husband as well: "Both my husband and I are involved, and my older daughter is involved in this particular international research program. Things sort of happen, and we try to make them happen so we can all do stuff together."

Making Peace With Past Decisions

Another strategy or perspective that respondents discussed was making peace with past decisions they had made. Most of the respondents did not nurse or dwell on regrets, but rather sought to interpret past choices or events as part of their unfolding careers and lives. Even if those choices or events had been disappointing or alarming at the time, respondents employed immediate perspective and/or contemporary hindsight to place the event in the larger context of their career or life and the accompanying priorities they placed on each. One SSE respondent discussed an invitation to apply for an endowed professorship at another university that would have involved expectations "to be public, to be available" which did not fit with her current role as a mother. She stated:

I really just like being a regular professor. I mean, it would have been totally cool to be an endowed chair and have—it was a \$2 million endowment, so there was a lot of money—but I like just doing my own thing in my office, and not having people that I have to satisfy.

A respondent from BAS echoed the general refrain among respondents that, since excessive worrying, preoccupation, and revisiting choices serve little purpose, one ought not engage in them. She said, "You have to make some decisions, and you simply make those decisions, and then you move on. . . . [I]f certain things don't happen because of that; that's all right. There are other good things that have happened."

Another SSE respondent described her own individual choices in the face of perceived social pressures to become more involved in her children's lives, concluding that she not only rejected the social pressures but also rejected the guilt that can otherwise accompany choices to focus on one's career. She declared that she did not feel guilt about not taking on roles, such as "den mother for the boy scouts." However, this professor recognized that

other women did feel guilty about not taking on such roles. She stated that these women then were angry at their jobs or their bosses: “And then they think it’s not fair, and how could the world not support them in doing this other thing, and it sort of feeds on itself. Doesn’t bother me.”

A third SSE respondent spoke about making peace with her work choices as a faculty member that resulted in fewer rewards, particularly in terms of remuneration:

I probably feel I haven’t been paid as well, and I’ve already addressed that, because I haven’t had the national reputation as a researcher, and that’s driven the salaries, I think, to a certain degree. In some ways, that sometimes bothers me, but it hasn’t been a big hangup. In other words, I don’t dwell on it.

Self-sufficiency and Choice

This theme describes the underlying assumptions made across the respondent group of longstanding self-sufficiency with respect to most aspects of their lives. They emphasized choices and decisions that were disproportionately theirs to control, and they articulated few expectations of assistance from the university that were non-work-related. Some respondents indicated gratitude for the flexibility of schedule offered by the institution. As one AH respondent put it: “I’m eternally grateful for that kind of flexibility in my life [university schedules], because it’s allowed me to do some things.” However, most described choices about time, family, and personal investment that highlighted the challenges associated with “doing it all.” A PMSE respondent noted the challenges of balance, stating, “You know, it’s possible to do all this, but is it requiring you to be a superperson, a superwoman, I mean, in order to manage all these things? . . . [S]ome years are better than others.”

Issues of time also included issues related to family life. They also involved recognizing the limitations of available time for hobbies and other activities for enjoyment outside of work. One AH respondent commented on the stress associated with the amount of time she chose to spend preparing for classes, but also noted her responsibility for these decisions. This professor acknowledged stressors that she defined as “self-created,” such as her tendency to “overprepare or overrespond to students,” in addition to spending time with the students, grading papers, and completing other necessary tasks. “That’s a stress that I create and I don’t have to create. . . . I choose to be that kind of teacher. . . . I don’t feel like that’s caused by the institution. It’s caused by myself,” she admitted.

Making decisions about how to delegate her time between various projects focused on prioritization for one BAS respondent. She mentioned pressures from “outside the professional work” that present challenges to her

professional work. However, when making decisions about priorities and delegating her time, her work was highest on her list: “[M]y highest priority is to the work that I do for the university, and so other things are more or less relegated to less time.”

For some, their university work was the highest priority at this point in their lives. For others, their families took a higher priority, and for both groups, balance was the challenge. However, life choices were not always clear-cut or identified as personal versus professional domains, but instead involved interrelated professional and personal choices about bearing children as well as working to support them. According to one SSE respondent, putting off child-bearing until after tenure was a reality she accepted:

To me it has always seemed very arbitrary for people to say, ‘Well . . . you shouldn’t have to put off child-bearing until you have tenure, or until you have a good job’. . . . [T]o me, ‘Yes, you do.’ You need to have income. You need to be able to support [children], and so it’s really difficult or impossible to separate what you choose personally from what you’re doing professionally, because it’s all so interrelated.

Being a mother was a significant role for many of the respondents. Finding ways to establish balance between professional responsibilities and family obligations required careful decision-making for which respondents took ownership. One SSE respondent “put things on hold for being a parent” which she defined as positive because she chose to prioritize parenting. She stated, “That was what I wanted to do, so that was my primary emphasis.”

In some respondents’ estimation, family obligations were viewed as an impediment to professional progress as well as a sign of gender bias in academe. An AH respondent commented that her career may have moved less quickly due to her role as a mother “. . . [H]ad I not devoted the amount of time that I did to the children, maybe I would have gotten promoted faster. . . . Maybe that’s one of the reasons that things went slowly for me.” However, she stated that [time focused on her children instead of her career] “didn’t feel like a compromise at the time,” perhaps because she viewed both as “doable within the same life, and I just took for granted that I could have both.”

Choosing not to be involved in certain projects became an important realization and skill for these women. Learning to say “no”—either as a skill or as a struggle—was mentioned by a number of respondents. A BAS professor stated that she needed to permit herself to say “no” which likely would result in personal and professional benefits: “. . . I would be better off

as a person—I might be better off as a faculty member—if I would do fewer things than I do.”

Saying “no” came with the acknowledgement of the consequences, such as this case in which a SSE respondent discussed curtailing personal interests in favor of acknowledged priorities. According to her, “[It]’s not a matter of doing everything now. It’s a matter of doing it at the right time, and right now I have to focus on the family and career.” She accepted these sacrifices by reminding herself that she would participate in her desired hobbies and interests at a later time.

Some respondents stated alternate views, including critiques of a system premised on male lives as models, with no consideration of the variations and different consequences for women. Particularly with respect to health, one PMSE respondent stated that she was fortunate to have had healthy pregnancies because she was able to meet her professional responsibilities. However, she concluded, “[I]t’s not easy to plan all this and then expect your body to agree with this plan that you have. I think there’s really no flexibility in the system.”

The small-town location of the campus—plus the perceived conservative nature of the university—provided for many an incompatibility with their more liberal values and interests, while for others it provided a sense of comfort and family. For those who found it incompatible, the result was fewer readily available opportunities to act on social values and commitments, yet for some this amounted to fewer distractions from their scholarly work. For this AH respondent, there are no barriers to prevent her acting on her commitments and values, but she expects to be dismissed because she perceived that she was viewed as “a well-known liberal and troublemaker, a person who will open her mouth maybe when she shouldn’t.” She cited, as an example, participating in faculty senate meetings. When she raised an issue, she felt that it was ignored, but when a “conservative male picks up that same point 20 minutes later, then they do pay attention to it.” This professor was uncertain as to whether she was dismissed because of her gender or because of her political ideology. However, she identified her institution as being more conservative, and stated, “You know, this is [university name]. I sort of expect the liberal position to be dismissed. . . .”

For those who found the community comfortable, some also found that their social situations within the community were comprised of people—in many cases university colleagues—whom they referred to as almost like family. One AH respondent observed, “My life is also very wrapped up in this department socially, too. My husband also teaches in this department. Most of our friends are in this department. . . . [I]t’s our own little

community now.” She identified the benefits of this “community” as having people with whom she shared common interests and concerns. “We complain about the same things,” she stated.

An SSE respondent compared the distractions in the community with the potential distractions in other communities in which she had lived or might have lived, noting that the current community did not distract her in the same way as she would have anticipated elsewhere. She stated that it would be more challenging to stay focused on her work in a larger community that offered opportunities beyond the university community to compete for her attention.

Institutional distractions for one SSE faculty member came in the form of male chauvinism. This professor also identified this issue at the state level and on the campus. She indicated that some comments by men “just absolutely boggle [her] mind” and that “to be sort of colloquial about it, they just don’t get it yet.” This professor believed that, on the campus and within the state, a change in this chauvinism would take a long time.

Senior Leadership Opportunities and Expectations

As senior professors, most acknowledged having more control over aspects of their work, lives, and time, although this expression was less prevalent among the respondents who had school-aged children. But even among the respondents with older or adult children, this did not mean that time they had earlier devoted to their young children’s needs was now “freed up.” Instead, that time was filled with additional career involvements such as administrative appointments, leadership within their field or discipline, or teaching loads. With respect to these commitments, most respondents also characterized these as choices to an extent. They were also quick to point out that they were among the individuals best positioned to contribute to the work and advancement of their departments and/or disciplines because of their senior professor status. Respondents understood that they were now in a position to take leadership roles that others not similarly situated in terms of rank could do. For example, one PMSE respondent discussed her leadership role in her professional society and potential leadership within her home department, due in part to her rank as well as the small number of full professors. She stated, “My new department head is relying a lot on me because I’m the only other full professor. . . . All of a sudden I will become a senior person, and not just in terms of rank but in age.”

Some opportunities for leadership on the campus, primarily increased administrative appointments and committee work, were accepted with somewhat less enthusiasm by respondents, as shown by a BAS faculty member who indicated that she was “being pulled in that direction much

stronger than I really want to be.” While this professor stated that she prefers to work in her lab, she also acknowledged that she is one of the senior members who can, and is expected to, do that type of work.

Several respondents, though, noted the positives of new and unanticipated challenges as new opportunities for leadership or learning. An SSE respondent echoed the enthusiasm about facing new (and more) challenges as a senior professor. She identified dramatic changes since being promoted, although she was not certain if the promotion was the only reason for the change: “[T]hings have really gone into high gear. . . . I do know that I have been approached for certain things because I am—people will say, we need a full professor for this.”

In their research agendas in particular, respondents also relished the freedom of being more selective in their choices without pressure to turn around publications quickly. According to one SSE respondent, she was able to be more thoughtful about choosing what to work on: “. . . [I]n the life cycle of research, I’m at a stage where I’m starting more activities, and I’m being a little more careful about ‘Is this an area that I really want to study, that I personally want to work on?’” These reports of rejuvenation and fresh challenges, however, were somewhat tempered by respondents’ increased attention to their own health and providing care for aging family members.

Personal Health and Well Being

Respondents were increasingly aware of their health and well being as an important aspect of their lives and as a key condition that would enable them to continue their work and fulfill their chosen commitments. Given that respondents ranged from mid-40s to 60s, physical signs related to aging could be expected. Consequently, for many respondents, larger proportions of their available time and energy were spent on some level of attention to health and well being. Thoughts of retirement and planning for retirement were also discussed. For one PMSE respondent, menopause and its implications had recently become a concern, specifically regarding having higher levels of responsibility at that stage in life: “I keep hearing about this post-menopausal zest. I can’t wait to get to be 51, 52. . . . I’m trying to talk to other women, too, about ‘How did you get through it?’”

Decisions focused on personal well being were mentioned by some respondents. Whether that took the form of physical exercise/activity, meditation, or quiet time alone, these women identified the values and necessity of their choices. For one SSE respondent, her exercise time also brings stress relief and the benefit of community with other women. She commented on the value of the relationships that resulted from her daily

noon swim: “[T]here’s such a nice group of women over there, and it’s so nice to talk to women after being in this male-dominated department.”

Taking care of self was coupled with taking care of parents for some respondents. Some were actively engaged in care giving or overseeing arrangements for care, while others had experienced deaths of parents. An SSE respondent described her current care arrangements for her elderly parents, which involved heavy time commitments on her part such as assisting them in packing to move to a care facility. She described using vacation time and taking extended weekends to help them, but lamented the fact that she could not be with them more regularly.

Personal well being, in the form of planning for the future, also emerged during the interviews. Retirement and the impact of outside forces, and how retirement may affect their work, was discussed by the following SSE respondent who indicated she was “fretting over the stock market, ‘Will it hold up long enough for us to retire?’”

Aspects of aging that involve even slight deterioration in capabilities or a generalized slowing down were noted by almost all respondents as concerns in their own right. Additionally, however, health and care-giving issues also called attention to respondents’ abilities to continue their academic work and fulfill the professional commitments that they had either made or envisioned for themselves. Despite the focus on health and well being, most respondents remained optimistic about the remainders of their careers into retirement. They also envisioned the remainders of their working lives as full and productive.

Discussion

Schlossberg, Troll, and Leibowitz (1978) documented a shift during adulthood from thinking of life in terms of time since birth to thinking of life remaining until death. Many respondents echoed this perspective by focusing on their future time, and time until retirement. Some have made careful and strategic plans, particularly for research projects and undertakings for what they consider to be their remaining years. For several respondents, their health and bodies are complicating factors as they also experience aging. The respondents’ having made peace with past decisions and judgments as indicated above may be making such a shift towards thinking in terms of time remaining. For most respondents, the forward thinking is focused professionally on research projects and what can be accomplished in the time remaining. The personal aspects related to time remaining included aging, retirement planning, and evolving care considerations. Respondents discussed these professional and personal considerations as mutually-

influential, but the more commonly articulated dynamic focused on impacts of personal health on energy and abilities to fulfill professional commitments.

Compartmentalization also was a valuable skill for respondents in managing personal and professional demands/life. Only a few respondents described a life that blended professional life with personal life; most often respondents spoke of the considered and deliberate trade-offs. However, in their reminiscences, respondents also accepted their decisions and voiced few regrets about past decisions. Many choices centered on desires to be involved in their children's lives. Respondents also discussed being involved in their spouse or partner's life, yet spouse or partner involvement was seen as posing fewer, and less pressing, time and energy demands. Compartmentalization was also apparent in aspects of their professional lives, as respondents who also held administrative appointments discussed segmenting their research time and their administrative time as a strategy to address the demands of both. In many ways, respondents developed the skills of "throwing switches" numerous times in a day as they assumed one role or another. Respondents also became adept at selective focusing depending upon the "switched on" situation. Additionally, the temporal and evolving nature of commitments was also highlighted as respondents discussed the attention and energy on children that would abate (or had abated) as their children became adults. Analogously, they discussed the need to work hard early on to establish a strong scholarly foundation and then make subsequent decisions about research project involvements, funding cycles, and related priorities that tended to ebb and flow over their academic careers.

Even among the respondents who were within a few years of retirement, a sense of downshifting accompanied by resignation or despair was not apparent in the respondent group. Those respondents who were primarily teachers discussed new methods of teaching and the energy that they gave and received from students. With respect to their scholarly work and laboratories, some respondents discussed projects or alternate careers that they would continue to pursue past retirement. Far from the bitterness or fear associated with retirement among Baldwin and Blackburn's (1981) respondents, the career denouement among respondents discussing retirement was associated with senses of satisfaction and in some cases renewal that was focused into their retirement years. Exceptions to this pattern included respondents with health challenges that were debilitating on some level, drawing attention to the diminished capabilities or endurance that would not allow them to keep up with their plans.

Implications

Problems with balancing personal and professional lives are often associated with early career years in which childbearing, child rearing, intimate relationship formation, and career establishment are frequently occurring. As this study makes clear, balancing professional and personal expectations and goals are not only an early career phenomenon. The nature of professional demands and expectations change as academic careers evolve, and family and personal commitments evolve as well, but the need for setting priorities and making choices continues. More studies are needed to determine the nature of the challenges, demands, and successful negotiations of academic life at all career stages as well as how institutions can encourage and benefit from the kinds of prime-career and late-career generativity that characterized most of the respondents in this study.

Particularly among the women faculty members studied, the strategies of modifying expectations, making peace with the past, and compartmentalizing personal and professional lives were discussed frequently and characterized as effective. The compartmentalization is consistent with Quinn et al.'s (1996) findings on female faculty members' structuring of their lives. Based on prior studies establishing the (male) gendered nature of academic life (e.g., Park, 1996), perhaps the bridge between many women's personal lives and their lives as academics remains too long to span comfortably, much less combine into a relatively seamless existence. In such cases when aspects of one's life are not seen as readily reconcilable, the technique of throwing switches without dwelling overmuch on the distances spanned during these switching occurrences may help avoid perceptions of or emphasis on role disjunctures. Respondents did not discuss the acquisition of these techniques. Consequently, it is also not clear from this study whether these switching techniques were learned or otherwise adopted during the course of their careers and lives, or perhaps whether a measure of their successful advancement in this particular work environment may be accountable to their successful exercise of these techniques.

Further study is also needed on the possible gender differences in how end-of-career time is constructed or regarded. Although prior studies characterized full professors as stagnant and disinterested (Cytrynbaum et al., 1982) or fearful and withdrawn (Baldwin & Blackburn, 1981), respondents in this study instead expressed relative degrees of optimism and pleasure in facing new challenges and learning new things. Although gender differences may exist with respect to interpretations of aging and one's relative contributions and usefulness, it may additionally be the case that the nature and experience of faculty work have changed and evolved since studies

conducted in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Respondents in the current study received their terminal degrees, on average, in 1974. This is approximately the same time frame in which Baldwin (1979), and Baldwin and Blackburn (1981), conducted their studies of academic life stages. Almost 30 years ago, female Ph.D. students (particularly in male-dominated fields) may not have regarded faculty members in their departments as the (sole) role models on which their assumptions about academic life would be based. This could particularly be the case if female graduate students were also searching for models of what strategies, given their personal as well as professional goals, would work best for them, or examples of what their careers and lives as future faculty members might be like. Research that explores evolving academic socialization as well as strategies for balancing professional and personal lives in attempts to create one's own coherent life may advance understanding of ranges of possible strategies for pursuing career and personal success.

Finally, if large numbers of senior women professors desire to continue working in some professional capacity into their retirement years, institutional implications for faculty emerita status, lab space, and departmental support may also arise. Institutions of higher education may have access to previously unrealized potentials for leadership, scholarship, and role modeling in their senior faculty ranks. However, if such potential is to be tapped, local if not institutional facilities to promote wellness and health, plus time and support for their use, also appear to be critical resources for senior faculty members.

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