

The Glass Ceiling is Made of Concrete: The Barriers to Promotion and Tenure of Women in American Academia

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Abstract

The focus of this research is to survey the literature in American higher education on the tenure and promotion of women and to suggest future problems that women may encounter as the American population grays. Anecdotally, women are not tenured and promoted in the same percentages of men in similar fields. In the social and natural sciences, women face greater obstacles than in some other fields. In the Humanities, recent research suggests that while women can become tenured they are less likely to be promoted to full professor than their male colleagues are. Are the differences due to lack of qualifications, financial constraints of the departments/universities, or, of greater concern, long held cultural biases of academia? No one yet has sufficient answers to these questions.

As the average age of American college professors is 59 years old and their gender male, it is important to note that a significant portion of this population should be retiring by the time they are 70. A gap between the numbers of professors who have “ownership” in their institution and those who remain disenfranchised may emerge. The time is right to make those changes in academia that will ensure that capable professional women are tenured and promoted in fair numbers to fill any gaps that result from the retirements.

Introduction

Women faculty report the greatest stress on women faculty comes from lack of support from administration, current economic conditions, biases of tenured colleagues, and family responsibilities. Anecdotal information over the years has indicated that women do not obtain tenure and promotions at the same rates as men in similar fields with similar academic credentials. The Association of American Colleges and Universities(AACU) released a comprehensive report in 2008 entitled, *A Measure of Equity: Women’s Progress in Higher Education*, in which the researchers made the claim that while women have made great strides they have not yet reached equity and parity with male colleagues¹. A question to be explored then is: Why do woman in academia report such concerns in 2009 and what progress has been made since Title IX was passed in 1972?

¹ Judy Touchton, Caryn McTighe Musil, and Kathryn Peltier Campbell. *A Measure of Equity: Women’s Progress in Higher Education* (Washington , DC: The Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2008).

Participation of Women in the American Academy: Past, Present, Future

Studies of women's participation in the American Academy did not coalesce until American women became politically active in the ERA movement in the 60's and 70's. Because the problems of women in the academy were not studied did not mean that they did not exist; women simply did not have a strong voice or the context to describe their circumstances. As the women's movement expanded in American culture, women felt freer to voice their concerns within their place in the academy. In 1977, Cook Freeman, in an article entitled, "Faculty Women in the American University: Up the Down Staircase" reported that "a declining birthrate, a sluggish economy, and diminishing financial support for education" were issues that reduced the importance of affirmative action concerns for women in academia². Cook Freeman reported that from 1920 to 1976, women's participation as full-time faculty in academia decreased from 26% to less than 20%³. Women made only modest strides over thirty years later when West and Curtis reported that in 2006 women comprised about 39% of full time faculty⁴. This change may appear to be progress; women in some fields, such as humanities and education, now earn the majority of doctorates, but they still occupy fewer than half of the full-time appointments⁵. A recent *Time* magazine article reiterates earlier claims that women have still not made the same progress as their male colleagues in the ranks of higher education despite an increasing number of women obtaining doctorates⁶.

Some have argued that this gap exists because women are late-comers to academia and inequities in their representation are due to a "catch-up" timeframe when numbers will remain skewed as inequities are addressed. While we do not argue with the basis of this reasoning, the numbers of women who are tenured to full professorships have not kept pace with women's growing inclusion in the academy.⁷ In "Promotion of Senior Women Faculty," Staiger, Stout, and Jennings make a similar claim that "evidence refutes the common wisdom in the academy that, if more women are hired at the junior levels, growth in the number of senior women faculty will happen with time. Women in the study expressed a sense of resignation and felt demoralized based on their experiences as assistant and associate professors in the academy"⁸. To suggest why promotion and tenure barriers persist, we intend to survey data and examine

² Bonnie Cook Freeman, "Faculty Women in the American University: Up the Down Staircase," *Higher Education* 6, no.2 (1977):186, <http://www.jstor.org/> (accessed June 12, 2009).

³ Ibid., 166.

⁴ Martha S. West and John W. Curtis, *AAUP Faculty Gender Equity Indicators 2006*, (Washington, DC: The American Association of University Professors, 2006), <http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/pubsres/research/geneq2006>, (accessed May 22, 2009).

⁵ National Center for Educational Statistics, *United States Department of Education 2004 Faculty Survey*, <http://nces.ed.gov/datalab/quickstats/> (accessed August 28, 2009)

⁶ Laura Fitzpatrick, "Forget Math. Women Lag Behind in Becoming English Profs!," *Time*, April 27, 2009, <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1894025,00.html> (accessed June 15 2009).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Janet Staiger, Patricia Stout, and Nancy Jennings, "Promotion and Senior Women Faculty: A Study of the Status of Tenured Faculty Women," (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association, San Diego, CA, May 27, 2003), *All Academic Research* [online database], http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/1/1/1/9/1/p111916_index.html (accessed June 12 2009).

cultural paradigms of family and work that have perpetuated and may continue to perpetuate inequities in the system of higher education employment.

Present Situation of Women in Academia

Women earned 45% of all doctoral degrees in 2005-2006⁹. This is a growth of 22% in the past 33 years. Yet the academic fields in which women earn their doctorates are generally not the traditional “STEM” fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Most women still earn their degrees in the humanities, social sciences, health related fields, and education. The numbers of women in these fields create a “pink collar barrio” in academy. Coincidentally,, the number of women in these fields are growing as the number of tenure track positions declines¹⁰. These fields do not receive the corporate grant funding that STEM academic fields do. The problems are compounded because of the long time it takes to earn a PhD in these fields. English is the riskiest of these fields for academics who want a stable career. In a 2007 article, the Chronicle of Higher Education reported that it takes an average of ten years to get a PhD in English and only 40% of these English PhDs will ever get tenure-track positions¹¹. Toutkoushian, Bellas, and Moore reported that English is the lowest paying field in all the academic departments¹². As the majority of these PhDs are women, society is faced with well-educated citizens unable to find work equal to their training and to repay the often ten years of graduate education loans they have accumulated. In addition to lack of funding for all PhDs, these fields have lower base salary scales and too often professors in them lack graduate assistants for grading, proctoring, and research activities. Finally, “pink collar” lines do not afford as many promotion and tenure opportunities due to the overproduction of PhDs in these disciplines; when female workers do make it onto the tenure track, the race they run is hampered by hurdles their male colleagues rarely have to jump.

Though they are generally better funded and have access to research resources, women in STEM fields face roadblocks to parity as well. As recently as 2005, President of Harvard University Larry Summers (a current President Obama economic adviser) commented that “innate differences between the genders” could be the reason for fewer women in STEM¹³. The posited reason is no innate genetic difference, but, according to a 2002 NSF report, institutional barriers supported by male administration¹⁴. In 2005, the AAUP Committee on Women

⁹ Touchton, McTighe Musil, and Peltier Campbell, *A Measure of Equity*, 15.

¹⁰ West and Curtis, *AAUP Faculty Gender Equity Indicators*, 8.

¹¹ Emily Toth, “Should I Move On?,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 54, no. 11 (2007): C2-C3, <http://chronicle.com/jobs/news/2007/11/2007110601c.htm> (accessed June 12, 2009).

¹² Robert K. Toutkoushian Marcia L. Bellas and John V. Moore. “The Interaction Effects of Gender, Race, and Marital Status on Faculty Salaries.” *The Journal of Higher Education*, 78, no. 5(2007): 572. <http://www.jstor.org/> (accessed June 12, 2009).

¹³ Daniel J. Hemel, “Summers' Comments on Women and Science Draw Ire: Remarks at Private Conference Stir Criticism, Media Frenzy,” *The Harvard Crimson* January 14, 2005, <http://www.thecrimson.com/article.aspx?ref=505349> (accessed June 16, 2009).

¹⁴ American Association of University Professors, “Response to Harvard President’s Statement,” <http://www.aaup.org/About/newsroom/presskits/harvard.cfm> (accessed June 12, 2009).

responded to Summers' comments. They agreed with his statement that women continue to be represented in small numbers in these fields, but they strongly protested his reasoning. Echoing the NSF report, the Committee on Women asserted that discrimination is the greatest reason for the dearth of women in STEM fields. Summers and others in established administration fail to see the multidimensional obstacles that women academics face. The NSF *Women, Minorities, and Persons with Disabilities in Science and Engineering*, for example, reported that insufficient lab space, lower salaries than men at the same academic level, and issues of work life balance keep women from tenure and promotion success in science and engineering¹⁵.

The Status Quo

Academic rewards, from those as vital as tenure to those as simple as an individual office printer, usually are allocated by male administrators who often reward faculty who behave according to gendered norms or who belong to the “old boys” social network. Men have been administrators, presidents, and deans in American academia for decades longer and in larger numbers than women have held these positions¹⁶. Many of these administrators are chosen by predominately male boards of trustees and search committees. Generally, these academic CEOs are most comfortable working alongside those with whom they share similar traits and backgrounds. They played in similar sports, belonged to similar fraternities, may have served in the military, and often attended university together. This “male only identification” is described by Kanter’s concept of homosocial reproduction¹⁷. According to Bellas, since individuals most likely to make hiring, tenure and promotion decisions are, most often “married men,” they are more likely to promote married men. They aim to maintain the “status quo” and, in many cases, are more concerned with the appearance of their institution in the business community than equity within the institution. For Bellas, Baron’s contention that “homosocial reproduction is more likely to occur as levels of ambiguity increase” means that a male administrator is more likely to chose someone whom he views “like himself” when job applicants or those up for promotion are matched in achievement and professional qualification¹⁸; generally, this means that he will chose a married man. Surveying a 2009 MLA report on the promotion of academic women, Fitzpatrick asserts that

Academic rewards... are still largely bestowed by men, who have had decades more time to become ensconced in positions of campus authority. And until more women get promoted to full professorships—the springboards to plum administrative posts—that's unlikely to change.

Off Track, Tenure Track: Hiring and Promotion

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶ Touchton, McTighe Musil, and Peltier Campbell, *A Measure of Equity*, 26.

¹⁷ Marcia Bellas, “The Effects of Marital Status and Wives’ Employment on the Salaries of Faculty Men: The (House) Wife Bonus,” *Gender and Society* 6, no. 4 (1992): 616. <http://www.jstor.org> (accessed June 12, 2009).

¹⁸ Ibid.

Being promoted to full professor is one of the biggest hurdles faced by academic women. As mentioned above, the “status quo” is against tenuring women and if they are tenured, the process requires more time than for male colleagues. Cook Freeman reported that women with doctoral degrees are four times more likely than a male with a doctoral degree to be unemployed¹⁹. Today, the situation is not as dire, but many women endure part-time and unsecured employment; a greater percentage of women are working as non-tenure track and adjunct faculty²⁰. The number of tenure line academic appointments is declining due to the reversal of financial fortunes of public and private institutions since 2007 and the decline in the number of college-aged individuals. *Inside Higher Ed* reported that many institutions do not even interview women for STEM positions with tenure lines²¹. Currently, women comprise 57% of the non-tenure track lecturer and instructor positions in degree granting institutions and about 53% of the non-tenure lines at graduate degree granting institutions²². These women are limited in opportunities for promotion, rank held, salary cap, research funding, and conference support. In some instances, these women do not have their own offices in which to meet with students or colleagues. As a result, these women may not have the institutional loyalty that comes with tenure-track job security. In many institutions, non-tenure track faculties do not participate in faculty governance, health care and retirement plans, and bargaining units if the institution has union protection²³. The ramifications for higher education may be loss of faculty near the start of a term due to accepting a better position, inability to find individuals to serve on committees in some fields, faculty without health care who teach while ill and thus infect the student population and the lack of experienced faculty to advise students in some majors. Wanda Warren Berry responding to an article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* about happy part timers wrote “the fact that, at most educational institutions, tenure does far more than grant job security. At most places, only tenured faculty members are fully empowered. Those who are tenured make the personnel decision that shape the future of our departments”²⁴.

Additionally, many academic women are hampered by social and family demands on their time. Few women are lucky enough to have someone who will “wash their socks,” “edit their papers,” and “entertain colleagues with deviled egg recipes plucked from Martha Stewart.” Cook Freeman; Wolfinger, Mason and Goulden; Bellas; and Touchton, McTigue Musil and Peltier Campbell found that even if married, women faculty still earn less than men and produce fewer journal articles and books. These are the only criteria for tenure and promotion in most institutions of higher education. In addition, many female academics who have gotten tenure

¹⁹ Pg. 186.

²⁰ West and Curtis; Wolfinger, Mason and Goulden; Touchton, McTigue Musil, and Peltier Campbell; and the Modern Language Association all report the same information.

²¹ Scott Jaschik, “Faring Well' or Disappearing?” *Inside Higher Ed*, June 3, 2009, <http://www.insidehighered.com/layout/set/print/news/2009/06/03/gender> (accessed August 20, 2009)

²² West and Curtis, 8-9.

²³ American Association of University Professors. “The Status of Non-Tenure-Track Faculty,” June 1993, <http://www.aaup.org/aaup/comm/rep/nontenuretrack.htm> (accessed June 12 2009).

²⁴ Wanda Warren Berry, “Letter to the Editor,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 45, no. 2(1998): B10. <http://proquest.umi.com> (accessed August 23, 2009).

track jobs are unmarried and are encumbered by the family and social pressures that come from that role. They are assumed to have more free time than married colleagues and thus the care for elderly family members, the teaching of night courses, service on numerous committees, and advising large groups of students are foisted upon them.

The Future: The Glass Ceiling is Made on Concrete

In academia, the proverbial glass ceiling hindering women's professional progress is not made of glass at all. It is made of concrete. Instead of breaking through as they were called to do in the 60's and 70's, women have only been able to chip away at its surface. Why concrete and not glass for our metaphor? Glass is clear and a person hitting the ceiling could be dismayed because they did not see it coming in their ascension of the career ladder. This is not the case today. We can see the ceiling quite clearly and we know of what it is composed. Additionally, glass, if you wait long enough, becomes thin enough to break with the smallest tap; but that is not the case with the barriers and obstacles facing women who would achieve full tenure and/or promotion, the gatekeeper to administrative power in higher education. Women hired to non-tenure track jobs and those that "fail" to achieve tenure or promotion cannot achieve a powerful position in the institutional hierarchy that sets the conditions by which they work. They are further hampered by family issues precluding easy movement for jobs. This concrete ceiling is not just a product of the academy itself, but of American society as a whole. According to an AAUW poster, women are still paid "22% less on average than a man... just 78 cents to a man's dollar"²⁵. It is then imperative that women make wise if unpopular choices and begin to demand that institutions that profit from their work recognize fully and negotiate to meet their unique situations and needs as research and teaching professionals. Not enough has been done and it is for women, already overworked and underpaid, to make their needs and difficulties known.

Equity and parity have not been reached, especially in the ranks of full professors where the stakes are highest and matter most for the future of academic women. If women do not chip away the concrete ceiling more assiduously and at a faster pace, they may fall further behind. Some researchers have estimated that women will not achieve full parity in academia for another one hundred or more years²⁶; Carr in "The Gender Gap in Academic Labor Crisis" cites a study that suggests "equity in the sciences will not be reached until 2200—two hundred years from now" if current trends continue²⁷.

What Women Can Do Now

What are some of the solutions that can help women entering academic careers achieve tenure/promotion? Institutional change moves at a glacier's pace, so women are going to have to push for change on an individual and local level. They need to talk more openly among

²⁵ American Association of University Women, "When was the First Time You Found Out?" Poster. (Washington, DC: American Association of University Women).

²⁶ West and Curtis, 7.

²⁷ Felicia Carr. "The Gender Gap and the Academic Labor Crisis," *The Minnesota Review* 52-54, (2001), <http://www.theminnesotareview.org/journal/ns52/carr.htm> (accessed June 9, 2009).

themselves about the problems they face; though they will differ considerably across disciplines and because of life issues, patterns of discrimination may emerge which groups can address through negotiation with administrators. Here are some of the possible solutions that women can embrace in order to further their chances of tenure and promotion:

1. Negotiate resources necessary to complete publications needed for tenure and promotion. These resources are not just limited to graduate student support, allocated laboratory/library space for research, materials and supplies, support staff assistance, computing access and statistical programs, and necessary equipment. For women with children and elder care issues, it is imperative that the institution provides or funds child or elder care on campus. Ask what flex spending accounts are available at your institution and make use of them. Get the result of all negotiations in writing. Ask for course release time for family and elder care situations and advocate for campus elder and child day care. These are not commonly available in the United States, but on a college campus with a social science or education degree, they can be offered as internship opportunities.
2. Request and follow up on getting a mentor (in your field and female if possible). To be mentored by a female full professor would be ideal. However, as most statistics have shown²⁸, there are few female full professors. Thus, the options for female associate professors looking for promotion to full professor are limited. They can seek out a male full professor; however, male colleagues do not face the same issues in the promotion process or family constraints as women often do. Therefore, women associate professors, who are often looking for promotion, are left to mentor tenure-line assistant professors. Here they face a quandary: do they put aside their work for promotion to full professor or let the tenure-bound female assistant professors stumble?
3. Negotiate time to do your research. This is what will result in tenure and promotion. Demand a teaching schedule that fits your life and ask for course release when necessary. Let others teach unpopular times and days.
4. Work with other female colleagues and request your institution make a statement about the differing time and energy required of women in our society. In general, married women do more housework than their husbands do²⁹ and female academics are more often married to male academics and, therefore, support their spouse's career; the litmus test question for these debates can begin with: Who washes your socks or when was the last time you diapered a baby or bathed an elderly person?
5. Refuse extraneous or gendered requests for service. Reading to or instructing children, attending community events as a university representative, and attending admissions open houses are examples of time sinks that should not become regular parts of the service load carried by those on the tenure track. Avoid any one-day service work that requires an investment of time on your part but is not appreciated during reviews. In

²⁸ National Center for Educational Statistics.

²⁹ Diane Swanbrow. "Exactly How Much Housework Does a Husband Create?," *University of Michigan News Service*. April 3 2008, <http://www.ns.umich.edu/htdocs/releases/story.php?id=6452> (accessed August 15, 2009).

addition, refuse large projects, especially ones with a pedagogical theme if you are not an education professor, which will also not be regarded as taking as much time and effort as they do. If service is mandatory at your institution, do committee work instead; within the committee, do not take on work others seem unwilling to do.

6. Make time and request funds to serve on national and international societies. Become part of the editorial or review staff of a print journal.
7. Be willing and able to let go of administrative service duties that eat up research time. Request staff support, graduate assistants, and work study students to cover any administrative work that can be delegated.
8. If available, take release time, apply for, and take sabbaticals. Apply for grants that will give you the funds to conduct research and allow you to buy out part of your contract.
9. Do not take on extra coursework unless mandated as part of your contract. This may also take the form of internship supervision and senior research projects. This is enticing to single-salary professors because they often need the money, but the investment in time does not pan out in reviews.
10. Do not allow over-enrollment of courses. If this occurs, demand students be divided into two sections, one of which can be taught by an adjunct. As an alternative, teach the second section and bargain for a class release in a semester when you will need the research time.

The future success of women in the American academy may depend on female academics demanding work and family life balance. In the future, the retirements of Baby Boomers will create both hardships and opportunity for women working at the lower levels of the tenure track and those working off the tenure track.

Aging of Aquarius: The Blind Spot

The American academy is entering a period when a great number of professors who have tenure and full professorships are between the ages of 55-64 years old (called the Baby Boomer generation); this group of professors is also overwhelmingly male. The National Center for Education Statistics 2004 Faculty survey shows that 17.8 % of full professors are 45-54, 31% are aged 55-64, 35% are aged 65-70, and 31% are 71 or over. Men hold 75% of positions of full professor³⁰. The tenure system in the United States, which protects academics from discrimination, and women's ability to succeed in it, will be at risk as these persons retire and are replaced in large numbers with non-tenure track female academics.

Current economic issues may delay Baby Boomer academics' retirement and it may take a number of years for the pension and retirements funds of many of today's faculty members to recover from recent economic downturns. Faculty in defined benefits plans may have less anxiety about retiring; but about 90% of US four-year colleges and universities provide TIAA-

³⁰ National Center for Educational Statistics.

CREF that has a defined contribution but variable benefit program³¹. Faculty in plans like TIAA-CREF may exhibit more anxiety about retirement and therefore delay full retirement into their 70's and beyond³². This upward drift in faculty age is evident as 31% of those holding the title of professor are over the age of 71; currently, administrators can only seek to buyout these professors as a US law forcing mandatory retirement of postsecondary faculty at the age of 70 expired in 1994³³. Many professors express high satisfaction with their jobs, so the incentives to accept a buyout or simply retire are low³⁴. Even with the lure of buyouts and negotiated phased retirements, tenured faculty theoretically can continue in their positions indefinitely. However, and in opposition to those stories of professors teaching well into their 80's and dying in their offices, health and family issues will require retirement for many despite the balances of retirement accounts or their desire to continue a full-time research and/or teaching agenda. While there is no mandatory retirement age for faculty in the United States³⁵, many professors in the 55-64 age group will begin to leave academia by age 70-75 if current economic conditions improve; that is, as many as 40% of the academy will retire within the next 15 -20 years³⁶. Given the difficulties of women in academia gaining full professorships³⁷, a gap may emerge during this time with few full professors remaining and many female assistant and associate professors with little hope of advancement along traditional lines of promotion and tenure. The American academy will undoubtedly change during this time. The nature of that change is up to the persons who remain in the academy.

The Future Academy: Women's Work

If they are not able to call for substantive change within the academy during this time, women will remain in the pink-barrio and keep knocking their heads against the concrete ceiling. Female academics must become stronger advocates for a recognition of their multiple social roles and the work involved in them--house work, childcare, elder care, dependent care-- that sap valuable time and energy from research. They must also be more proactive in getting administrators to address those norms of the academy that cause biases against female caregivers and which can negatively affect the health and productivity of a woman's career. In a recent MLA survey, respondents lamented that continually increasing non-research and teaching work was "... a hindrance to advancement." Increasingly heavy service loads, including committee work, paperwork, student advising, and mentoring are impediments to promotion for many women³⁸. Along with work considerations, the MLA documents that female academics reported

³¹ Orley Ashenfelter and David Card. "Did the Elimination of Mandatory Retirement Affect Faculty Retirement?", *The American Economic Review* 92, no. 4 (2002): 958. <http://www.jstor.org> (accessed June 12 2009).

³² *Ibid.*, 977.

³³ *Ibid.*, 954.

³⁴ David L. Wheeler, "Colleges Explore New Ways to Manage Retirements," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 54, no. 40 (2008): A1, <http://proquest.umi.com/> (accessed August 22, 2009).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 958-959.

³⁶ National Center for Educational Statistics.

³⁷ Modern Language Association, *Standing Still: The Associate Professor Survey*, (New York, NY: Modern Language Association, 2009), http://www.mla.org/pdf/cswp_final042909.pdf (accessed August 20, 2009).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

that child rearing, elder care, and other family obligations also hurt career progress³⁹. From anecdotal and survey information, it appears that there are still problems in the academy and in American social life at large that adversely affect the careers of female academics⁴⁰.

The Panini Generation: The Future of Elder Care in America

One of the most overlooked avenues of inquiry into why women encounter difficulty succeeding in the current tenure system is elder care responsibilities. In the next decades, female academics, underpaid, overworked, and stymied in their career progress, will also be called on and burdened by care of elderly Baby Boomer family members and therefore will find it difficult to launch themselves into positions of power as efficaciously as they could in the past. Stephens and Franks surveying at least 25 years of work addressing the issues of women in their middle years, write that “for most women, this time in life is one of zest, personal growth, and enjoyment of freedom from childbearing and the responsibilities for young children”...yet “many women in midlife take on new family roles and responsibilities when aging parents or parents-in-law become ill and need their assistance”⁴¹.

They go onto to address the particular problems of Baby Boomer women:

The parents of these individuals are living longer than any generation in history, women in the boomer cohort are postponing childbearing later into adulthood, and they continue to participate in the paid labor force at record levels.⁴²

These problems are especially poignant for American women in academia who postpone childbearing longer than most American women and/or who are often single or divorced when they reach their middle years. These women also often start their careers later than male counterparts and have fewer years to participate in tenure and promotion level research, teaching, and service. While Stephens and Franks maintain that simultaneously occupying the role of mother, caregiver, worker, and wife is not the norm⁴³, for academic women it is more often the case that they are called upon to fulfill these roles at the same time or in a relatively short timeframe. Women in the generation behind the Baby Boomer female academics are going to be stressed even more as the pressures and likelihood of caring for their own boomer parents, heading up a household, and maintaining a hectic work schedule will take their toll. Instead of the Sandwich Generation that female Boomers have experienced taking care of both children and elders, this generation’s experience will be even more dire and as they become the Panini generation.

³⁹ Ibid., 13.

⁴⁰ June, Audrey Williams, “Not Moving On Up: Why Women Get Stuck at Associate Professor,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* April 27, 2009. <http://chronicle.com/section/Home/5> (accessed August 26, 2009).

⁴¹ Mary Ann Parris Stephens and Mellissa M. Franks, “All in the Family: Providing Care to Chronically Ill and Disabled Older Adults,” in *Aging Families and Care Giving*, eds. Sara Honn Qualls and Steven H. Zarit, 61-84, Wiley Series in Clinical Geropsychology, (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2009).

⁴² Ibid., 66.

⁴³ Ibid., 67

Today and Tomorrow: Who's Taking Care of Mom?

The MLA's *Standing Still: The Associate Professor Survey* did ask respondents about elder care. Surprisingly, male respondents reported more time spent in elder care: 3.8 hours a week to women's 2.9 hours⁴⁴. As the report states, "It should be noted, however, that the number of responses to this question was small (16 women and 9 men, only little more than 5% of the 351 respondents)"⁴⁵. Currently, elder care may only be a blip on the radar as many professors, surveyed by the MLA, are advanced in their careers to a sufficient degree that they are able to afford in-home and long term care for elders; they also may live far apart from family and not be able to provide direct care. Additionally, Baby Boomers professors have many more siblings available to shoulder the burden of caring for elderly parents and may not be called upon by extended families to chip in.

The number of professors who provide elder care will not remain small. 2004 Census Bureau data show that "between 2000 and 2050 the size of the population ages 65 and older is projected to increase from 35 million to 87 million, while the population ages 85 and older, which has the highest disability rate of any age group, is expected to increase from 4 million to 21 million"⁴⁶. Since Baby Boomers had far fewer children than their parents did⁴⁷, and their female children work outside the home, there will be fewer women to provide traditional types of caregiving for the elderly. Now and in the future, many employed women, including female academics, will provide elder care. Wolff and Kasper's data from 1999 show that in America about 67% of informal caregivers for disabled adults are female⁴⁸. It may be that the respondents to the 2009 MLA survey do not see the hours they put it on the phone, shuttling elders to doctor's appointments, making phone calls, doing laundry, and stocking refrigerators as elder care. But these all make up elder care and eat up time, money, and psychic energy. Johnson reported to a Joint Congressional Economic Committee that "more than half of unpaid caregivers to older people are their children or their children-in-law", and "daughters serve as primary caregivers for about two-thirds of widowed older care recipients"⁴⁹. Most caregivers are women who work outside the home and they often lose "income and give up chances for bonuses and promotions" because of their caregiving responsibilities. Some families can afford the often staggering costs of long term care and some are poor enough to qualify for Medicaid, but as Johnson reported, "the vast majority of families reside in a gap" between the two and caregiving

⁴⁴ Modern Language Association, 13.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁴⁶ Cited by Richard w. Johnson in Testimony Recorded for Joint Economic Committee of the Congress of the United States. *Are the Explosive Costs of Elder Care Hurting Family Finances and Business Competition?*, (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2007), 32.

⁴⁷ Peter Uhlenberg and Michelle Cheuk, "Demographic Change and the Future of Informal Caregiving" in *Caregiving Contexts: Cultural, Familial and Societal Implications*, eds. Maximiliane E. Szinovacz and Adam Davey (New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company, 2008), 27.

⁴⁸ Jennifer L. Wolff and Judith D. Kasper, "Caregivers of Frail Elders: Updating a National Profile," *the Gerontologist* 46, no.3 (2006):350. <http://gerontologist.gerontologyjournals.org/cgi/reprint/46/3/344.pdf> (accessed August 15 2009).

⁴⁹ Joint Economic Committee of the Congress of the United States, *Are the Explosive*, 5.

by families is their only option⁵⁰. Currently, that care is overwhelmingly provided by women in their middle years.

Readjusting tenure to make success possible for women on the track in the future is going to depend on a cultural acknowledgement that the gains of academics over the years has depended on the uncompensated and unrecognized work of women –wives, daughters, mothers, and colleagues. Female academics today are being held to culturally dubious standards and persistent promotion and tenure inequities are not due to the failings of women but to a harsh cultural situation that continues for the work of American women in and outside of academia.

Americans again face a sluggish economy, a decrease in college enrollments, and government slashing of support for education not unlike that documented by Cook Freeman in the 1970's. Problems in equity and basic barriers to career survival do persist. These will only be further complicated by the staggering out-of-pocket, out-of-mind, out-of-heart care that will be needed by ageing boomers over the next 15-20 years. Schumer told a Joint Congressional Committee on the aging of America's population that "It's estimated that the average caregiver loses more than \$650,000 in lifetime earnings and retirement savings as a direct result of their caregiving responsibilities"⁵¹. Academic women launching and maintaining their careers will not be happy to accept unemployment and staggering unrecoverable economic and status losses. As Collay writes, "Women must continue to educate their colleagues about the importance of recognizing complex lives beyond the academy"⁵². They will need to demand equal representation and assistance with family duties that are foisted upon women by extended families. While American academic women make difficult career sensitive decisions about whether to have children or not, all of them have parents, aunts, uncles, or grandparents whose care too often will fall to them; because they are perceived to work part-time flexible schedules with summers off and plenty of money, they often shoulder much of the family burden of caring for elders. These assumptions about academic work are patently untrue, but are the urban myths about work in the academy.

Addressing the needs of caregivers in general, Stephens and Franks report that "working caregivers often state that their supervisors and coworkers are sometimes insensitive about attempts to balance parent care and work, or they fail to understand the difficulties of providing parent care"⁵³. For academic women, a misunderstanding about the multiple roles they occupy often extends to the attitudes of family members who demand career success and also the fulfillment of traditional female roles within the family. These pressures can lead academic women into a type of behavior called bias avoidance. Drago et al. argue that "because biases are often hidden, faculty who even inquire about relevant [caregiving] policies risk damaging their academic reputation." They criticize the current system arguing that, "when careers are structured so that only workers with few family responsibilities can succeed, there is indeed a

⁵⁰ Ibid., 7.

⁵¹ Ibid., 26.

⁵² Michelle Collay "Balancing Work and Family," in *Tenure in the Sacred Grove: Issues and Strategies for Women and Minority Faculty*, eds. Joanne E. Cooper and Dannelle D. Stevens, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), 105.

⁵³ Stephen and Franks, 74.

bias against caregiving. That bias is gendered in that women face more demands than men on the home front when a spouse or children are present.” It turns out that bias avoidance behaviors especially among women are usually rewarded⁵⁴. Though this behavior may help individuals in the short-term sprint toward tenure, long term, relationships may be hurt and bitterness towards institutions and colleagues may erupt. Female academics need to find ways to make it acceptable to seek out and use policies that aid in work/life balance.

What Can Be Done

Testifying before a Congressional Committee in 2007, Scott Weisberg, Vice President Compensation, Benefits, and Staffing for General Mills, reported that his company has adopted a policy to go above and beyond the Federal Family and Medical Leave Act because it values the talented workers it attracts. He relates that a war for talent may erupt as boomers exit the workplace and that General Mills has moved to make sure that they do not lose talented employees to schedules that cannot bend to meet the demands of elder caregiving. General Mills Employee Assistance Program (EAP) gives information to employees about coping with the aging process and understanding Medicare and Medicaid. Employees at General Mills can purchase Long Term Care insurance. And most importantly, General Mills offers superior paid time off policies and sabbaticals for employees with more than 7 years with the company to deal with elder care and other family issues⁵⁵. Mr. Weisberg also states that General Mills does “try to be kind of a cradle-to-grave employer. If you are going to employ people for the long haul, you know that people are going to have life happen to them”⁵⁶. Academia has long been a cradle-to-grave employer and many universities and colleges have begun to address through paid, but more often unpaid, leave, the flexibility faculty need in addressing elder care issues⁵⁷. More needs to be done, though, and the discussion about how to do it needs to begin immediately.

Further Considerations

More research on the number and age of tenured women and their time in the pipeline needs to be done. Added to this research should be models for what demographically is going to happen in the next 20 years as male full professors retire and/or reduce their research and teaching workloads. We need more on the empirical reasons single female associate professors do not obtain tenure and promotion to full professor. Is it due to their age at completion of degree, responsibilities caring for the children and/or elderly, or constraints because of their single status, in other words, fewer monetary and personal resources?

It may be that the failure of single female associate professors to get tenure is due to oblique but crushing cultural and institutional expectations that need to be carefully documented.

⁵⁴ Robert Drago et al., “Bias Against Caregiving,” *Academe* 91, no. 5 (2005), <http://proquest.umi.com> (accessed June 5, 2009)

⁵⁵ Joint Economic Committee of the Congress of the United States, *Are the Explosive*, 11-12.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁵⁷ Wheeler, David, “The Art and Science of Managing Faculty Retirements,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 54, no. 40 (2008): A15, <http://proquest.umi.com/> (accessed August 22, 2009).

Increased elder care demands as a component of tenure failure will become a more pressing issue as the United States population grays. The generation of American academic women who will care for their Boomer parents, the Panini generation, may be hard pressed to meet competing demands from family and the academy, and reconciling them with their own need to guarantee careers and economic security. As the demographics of the American population and the American higher education institution shift massively in the next 20 years, women will be called upon to step up and serve; it is up to them to decide the nature of that service and how they will be compensated for it.

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