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The Juxtaposition of Career and Family: A Dilemma for Professional Women

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Many subtle restrictions exist that prevent women from acquiring promotions, tenure, and other forms of advancement.

The vocations of successful mother and professional are not necessarily mutually exclusive (Holt, 1981). However, the major segment of the workforce-women, comprising 52%-are struggling to balance these two most important forces in their lives. Drastic increases in the number of working women have thrust this issue to the workplace forefront. Resolution of such career and family concerns should definitely contribute not only to increased productivity, but also to the psychological well-being of a more successful workforce (AAWCJC, 1991).

The February 1, 1993 cover of Time magazine confronts us with the plight of the working professional woman, as we see a picture of the first female nominee for U.S. Attorney General. Zoe Baird was "drawn and quartered" for decisions she made regarding a family concern: quality child care. Regardless of personal beliefs about respect for the rules, integrity, or credibility, the fact remains: Had a male nominee ever been asked about his child care arrangements? The answer is no (Gibbs, 1993).

Research supports a history of limited success for professional, and especially university, women with families (Ezrati, 1983). In fact, conflicts involving expectations and family obligations appear to run rampant in institutions of higher education. Several pertinent statistics are esoteric to institutions of higher learning and the issue of family and employee gender: (1) Fewer married women achieve high academic rank than married men; (2) Men are more successful in combining parenthood and academic careers; in fact, the combination of family and career are the norm for men, not women, academicians; (3) The majority of university women remain childless, 50% as reported by Hensel (1991), with only 15% having

three or more children, as compared to 33% of men (Carnegie Commission as reported by Ezrati, 1983); and (4) The more children a woman has, the more difficult it is to balance family and career. In fact, career advancement for the professional woman often means limiting family size (Holt, 1981).

In an attempt not to only initiate but also perpetuate change, the American Association of Women in Community and Junior Colleges (AAWCJC) selected for its 1992 agenda the theme of "The New Workforce" in order to showcase issues pertinent to quality living for university women. This organization sees the need to promote optimum achievement of constituents, which means overcoming barriers to their success. Effective management of family and professional responsibilities is quickly emerging as a primary concern for university women across the nation (AAWCJC, 1991).

Covert Issues in Higher Education's Organizational Culture

Many subtle restrictions exist that prevent women from acquiring promotions, tenure, and other forms of advancement. Ezrati (1983) presented the following list of covert reasons why advancement for women in higher education may be limited.

Geographic Immobility

Few women have the luxury of relocating in order to attain job advancement. Ninety percent of women reported they would relocate only if their husbands secured employment. Seventy-five percent of men would relocate for a better job with or without the spouseÕs employment. In fact, our society "discourages family change for the sake of a wife's career" (107).

Limited Bargaining Power

Being confined to one location, women usually have little or no bargaining power in negotiating for position advancement. Administrators feel minimal pressure when faced with the possibility of losing versus regaining a productive female employee who is trapped in one location. This condition also perpetuates low salaries and infrequent promotions.

Limited Job Market

Job relocation is acceptable if precipitated by the husband, but not by the wife. Therefore, limited mobility perpetuates infinitesimal career options. To further limit female career choices, colleges and universities are seldom in close proximity to allow convenient commuting.

Nepotism and Institutional Inbreeding

Anti-nepotism policies are widespread in institutions of higher learning. These policies appear to be inordinately discriminatory to wives, usually due to the fact that husbands are employed first. Most policies are not specific; however, the majority of institutions covertly forbid the hiring of any relative even if the position in question does not involve a supervisor/subordinate relationship. In fact, special permission is sometimes required, especially in the case of hiring a spouse. In juxtaposition, a similar discriminatory action deals with inbreeding. Many institutions assume an inflexible stance in hiring their graduates, a mentality which handicaps married women because of their immobility.

Inability to Combine Family and Career

Even when university employment is secured, the female faculty member has many tough decisions to make. If there are plans for children, the employee must face necessary leaves of absence which are

usually at the convenience of the institution's schedule. Upon return, she finds herself lacking in scholarly activities necessary for promotion and tenure. Further, the ideal time for achieving quality professional status is between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-five which happens to coincide with the optimum years for bearing children.

Additionally, women's career and family choices tend to follow a pattern of fragmented phases rather than a smooth continuum descriptive of their male counterparts. This paradigm tends to characterize university women's careers as disjointed.

Public Mindsets

Society vehemently declares that childcare is the responsibility of women. Mothering, not fathering, is a prevalent societal norm creating personal role conflicts that permeate institutions of higher learning. Religion and mores further confound the problem facing women who desire to maintain a quality career and family life. Most women feel pressured by society to make a choice. Hampton (1982) states that women professors generally chose careers over marriage.

Housework

Even though female academicians have greater earning power than most other women in the workplace, they continue to bear the burden of the caretaking responsibilities of the home. In fact, socioeconomic status is negatively correlated with the amount of hours spent in housework activities. Hensel (1991) reports the addition of a child and household responsibilities increase the workload of an average professor from 55 to 70 or more hours per week.

Part-time Employment

Most part -time employees are women , a choice that is often family-driven. Therefore they receive lower salaries, fewer promotions, and suffer from reduced productivity.

Childcare Provisions

Few institutions of higher education provide childcare facilities, thereby requiring women to acquire childcare on their own. When such programs do exist on college campuses, implementation was historically initiated as a result of student versus faculty needs. The unavailability of onsite quality childcare is pervasive in institutions of higher education. It appears once again that our patriarchal society is restricting women faculty who are attempting to combine family and career.

Extraneous Implications

Hensel (1991) noted that women are as productive and scholarly as men, although women suffer from higher attrition rates and slower mobility in higher education. Gender discrimination is prevalent and appears to be exacerbated by the perplexing responsibilities of university women attempting to balance family life and professional career. Most institutions continue to be male-dominated with athletic and military overtones. Women are, however, quietly breaking into the male-controlled society in a subtle manner but are required to utilize male rules and mores for successful integration. In fact, women who secure administrative positions must capitalize on the typical paths derived from their male predecessors.

Holt (1991) also addressed the issue of juggling the demands of family and position in the advancement process. Only those female university administrators who had secured quality childcare arrangements and had a supportive husband felt any relief from the career pressures they must endure. In addition, for those

who are family women in management positions, their greatest expenditure of energy was directed at resolving conflict about priorities of family and career. Most of them felt that eventually a choice was forthcoming (Hampton, 1981).

Strategies for Successful Career Integration

The community of higher education and society as a whole can benefit from utilizing the untapped female academic talent of individuals who experience the conflict of family and career responsibilities. Selected strategies which follow must be incorporated into the policies and activities of the higher education community to accomplish this endeavor and provide support for the universal family needs.

Higher Aspirations by Women

Women sometimes do not "actively work toward promotion" (Hampton, 1992, 22). The psychological perspective of women must reflect higher aspirations and thinning patterns which support the achievement of non-traditional female fields of employment (Parker, 1991). Women must begin to change their mentality about professional opportunities and advancement (Hampton, 1982).

Financial Independence

Women must seek to achieve and maintain financial independence because of expected additional years in the workforce (Parker, 1991).

Experience Enhancement

To enhance career opportunities and remain current, women must take advantage of internships, volunteer for opportunities which lead to additional experiences and seek advice of experts in the field when available (Parker, 1991).

Family Response Surveys

Family response surveys administered by universities should be utilized to identify family conflict issues and family support factors, followed by the development of policies to eliminate unfavorable practices (Hensel, 1991).

Dual Career Couples' Recruitment

The development of placement policies which recruit dual career couples must be encouraged. Such measures will provide an easier transition for couples with families who move for career enhancement (Hensel, 1991).

Family Leave Policies

Alternative student assignments during periods of time when childbirth occurs during the semester should be utilized. Both parents should be allowed to participate (Hensel 1991).

Maternity Leave Policies

Women need at least three months access to leave with pay upon the birth of a child (Hensel, 1991).

Load Reduction

At the birth of a child, the woman may select a reduced teaching load or committee assignments for the semester or year (Hensel, 1991).

Tenure Clock Adjustment

The tenure clock must be adjusted for women one (Hensel, 1991) or two years (Graham, 1983) per childbirth to allow adequate review time.

Class Schedule Options

Parents should be permitted to select class schedule adaptations such as reduction of early morning, evening or Saturday classes (Hensel, 1991).

Leave of Absence

Child bearing, child rearing and family emergencies are legitimate reasons for discontinuous service without negative consequences (Ezrati, 1983). Self-selection for leave time by either parent is advisable.

Networking with Colleagues

Women must align themselves with productive employees of the university and be participating members of a network of female colleges (Holt, 1981).

Mentorship

Mentor relationships and new programs for new women professionals offer assistance, contacts and critiques of activities (Holt, 1981).

Throughout this article, we have attempted to share the concerns women have expressed as they attempt to balance their professional lives with their personal lives. With the suggested strategies women can begin to onsider how they can remedy some of the issues surrounding the juxtaposition between family and work.

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