

*Full Length Research Paper*

## **Queen Bees and Mommy Tracking: How's an Academic Woman Supposed to Get Ahead?**

**DR. HELENE A. CUMMINS**

Brescia University College, The University of Western Ontario  
1285 Western Road, London ON N6G 1H2  
Associate Professor, Sociology  
E-mail: [hcummins@uwo.ca](mailto:hcummins@uwo.ca)  
519 432 8353 Ext. 28055

The purpose of this article is to highlight the socio-cultural variables that detract from women's success in academe. The focus is on all women academics, whether partnered or not, and how mommy tracking and the queen bee may also work to hold women back. Implications of these issues for women academics are explored.

**Key words:** Women, Mommy track, queen bees, academe, Canada

Much has been written about the challenges women academics face in meshing work both with their intimate relationships and with the raising and socializing of their children (Altman, 2007; de Wet, Ashley and Kegel, 2002; Jackson, 2004; Leahey, 2007; Philipsen, 2008; Proctor Gerdes 2003; Stout, Staiger and Jennings, 2007; Williams, 2005). Less is understood about the mommy track and the movement of women academics, with or without children, through the system of academe (Cummins, 2005). While patriarchy and the old boys' network are still structural barriers to women's advancement, limited research examines barriers erected by women in positions of power against women who are climbing the ladder towards tenure and promotion. If women hold other women back, or are nasty in their relations with each other, one wonders how the female academic

can plan and navigate to get ahead? This paper examines both sides of this issue - both mommy tracking and the queen bee - and analyzes the hampering of women academics both structurally and by the lack of assistance offered by other women.

The concept of mommy tracking was first linked to female lawyers in a New York Times article and identifies "women who choose to put in fewer hours and spend more time with their families ... are considered less serious by their male colleagues" (Williams, 2000, p. 72). I will argue that all academic women whether single and childless, or married with dependents - are less successful in achieving promotion and tenure in the halls of academe because they are perceived to be mommy trackers. The new vocabulary that describes these barriers

includes the “sticky floor”, the “glass ceiling”, the “mommy track”, the “second shift” (Buchanan, 1996), and the “glass cliff” (Ryan, Haslam and Postmes, 2007).

Combined with these socio-structural issues facing women is the phenomenon of the “queen bee” – the woman who holds other women back or blocks them on the ladder of success. There is not always a “good old girls network” (Stufft and Coyne, 2009, p.3) that operates to align women with each other and leads them equally into positions of power.

As Williams (2005, p.101) highlights:

“the crucial point is that all women, non-mothers as well as mothers, are disadvantaged by a workplace that enshrines the ideal worker who starts to work in early adulthood and works, full time and over time, for forty years straight”. That work often parallels compulsory motherwork as part of the structural underpinnings of their work related roles and the societal demands that are placed upon them which disallows them from concentrating on the real needs of their academic profession. In addition to work outside of the home, many women are also providing elder care to an aging parent (Philipsen, 2008) and in doing so they undertake the mental hygiene function, the stroking function, emotion work, doing the intimacy and/or wifework (Maushart, 2001, p. 144) or what is also called doing mom work (Chrisler, Herr & Murstein, 1998, p. 198) both off and on the job. Academic men are assigned to committees that make and implement university policy, or on grievance committees, whereas academic women can be found on

committees that deal with students, social issues or with more routine matters (Chrisler et al., 1998; Eagly, Wood and Diekman, 2000).

Institutional housework takes women away from the real work that they need to be doing such as research and writing, and hence lessens their chances of climbing the academic ladder (Kulis and Miller-Loessi, 1992). Some women even suggest that the university is “family unfriendly” (Philipsen, 2008, p. 95). Interestingly, women with children often have ‘natural’ time barriers that prevent them from staying longer on the job or until meetings are completed as a result of the call away to see to their children (Astin and Davis, 1985). Childless women can thus be called upon to stay longer at work and to finish up the work that needs to be completed. In many cases this is seen as normative social behaviour. Furthermore, these same women suggest that all of their time is focused on achieving tenure or promotion and no time is available for networking, having fun, or dating (Philipsen, 2008).

When women are extremely adept at certain things like teaching they might be labeled as mothering their students and even overlooked for awards related to outstanding teaching or not rehired (Carli, 1998). The courses female and males teach align with “gender schemas” (Valian, 1998) and these work-related roles align with gender appropriate behaviour. In sociology, for example, Eichler (2001) identifies how outstanding women in the field were taken away from valuable professional work to attend to family issues, even when they were childless. Helen Abell, for example, the founder of Canadian

rural sociology, left a prestigious government post to care for both her aging parents and an alcoholic brother. Ker Conway (2001) once Vice-President of the University of Toronto, and been President of Smith College, was childless; she however, kept busy by her husband's manic-depressive personality.

Caring work, institutional housework, and gender schemas contribute to the challenges women face in academia and lessens their pace and power in the halls of success.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Three theoretical constructs – human capital, social capital and boundary theory – may be used to explain how and why women are disadvantaged structurally and personally. The economic theory of human capital is premised on the ideology that the greater the investment of the employee in their own human capital, the greater the reward in the workplace. That is, the greater one's investment of time, energy and finances invested in education, skills building, and experience, the greater one's productivity in the work world. Investing in education not only increases knowledge, but it also links to ability and future expertise. When women academics put so much time into higher education it is understandable that they might consider their career as paramount, similar to other career professions such as law and medicine. What this often means for female workers is that with greater investments in human capital women will be less likely to rear children (Hakim, 1995; Kemkes-Grottenthaler, 2003). Even for women adamant to remain childless, Abma and Peterson (1995) found that significant numbers changed their minds

and decided voluntarily to have a child within a two-year time frame. This helps us to understand the types of choices men and women make with regards to their career portfolio and their parental desires (Probert, 2005).

Becker (1985, p. S35) claims that women's active household and childcare responsibilities clearly delimit their abilities in the workplace as a result of the energy expended in those directions. This helps explain the lessened human capital and decreased salaries of women. A lessened presence in the workplace and the call away from the job inhibits relations with others.

Human relations' theory aligns with social capital theory. Social capital theory suggests that the greater the access to social capital the greater one's chances in the workplace. Social capital is instrumental for academics seeking tenure and promotion. Things that might be taken for granted like "information and knowledge about institutional norms, expectations, and opportunities; access to and influence on key decision makers; certification and endorsement of an individual's qualifications; and emotional support and recognition" (Perna, 2005, p. 280) are required in order to climb the ladder to success.

Third, boundary theory assists to explain why there is such cumbersome interplay between ones work and home arena. When work life encumbers home life and vice versa the female worker becomes burdened and outright exhausted. Philipsen (2008) argues that women need to learn quickly to prioritize: the conflicting role of supermom and super-worker make for unhealthy living.

When the female academic at middle age might believe she can slow down because she has secured tenure and promotion, researchers like Heibrun (1988), believe women should make the most of that security and challenge, take risks and even become unpopular. Unpopularity obviously would not build social capital with the “in” group! Unpopularity can lead to female misogyny or negative relations between women (Mavin, 2006). Female misogyny is a reality that feminists must investigate, not downplay. This much under-researched area must be explored to ascertain how and why women may work against each other.

How these theories bear out in relation to the positioning of women in academe fits into more traditional work related roles. In Canada, between the years 1992-2002, women earned thirty-six percent of the doctoral degrees. In 2002 the United States had more women who held doctorates than did men (Hoffer et al., 2003, 2004). In 2004, the majority of Canadian women who earned a doctoral degree could be found in the discipline of psychology (70%), in the area of health sciences (72%) and education (65%). Males are more likely to be found pursuing degrees in engineering and computer sciences (Berkowitz, 2005, p. 37). Therefore, it is very uncommon to find women at the helm of schools such as law and medicine. Women in non-traditional fields such as geo-science find themselves isolated, and at the lower ranks of the university system (de Wet, Ashley, and Kegel, 2002). With such busy schedules how do these women balance their life’s work with their home and personal schedules?

## **WORK LIFE BALANCE**

**Taking Time Away From Work.** The most recent Statistics Canada profile of women show that women who work outside the home are more likely to take time away for personal and/or family issues: “five percent of all full-time paid employees lost some time from work for these reasons, compared with just two percent of male employees” (Statistics Canada, 2005, p. 109). In 2004 that loss of work time translated into absenteeism amounting to a total of ten days versus one and a half days for the average male full-time worker (Statistics Canada, 2005). This might help to explain the higher incidence of unemployment rates of female versus male university teachers, particularly women with children under the age of six. In 2001, this category of women accounted for 10.3% versus 6.4% of men. In general, women with children were unemployed at a rate of 7 %, versus 2.6% for men. Women who had no children and were unemployed numbered 5.8% versus 4.4% for men. The average unemployment rate for all women was 6.3% versus 3.5% for men (Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, 2005, p. 109). The numbers are very clear: by comparison, overall, women in all fields of academia are more likely to be without work especially when they have young children as dependents in comparison with similar male colleagues.

Since at least one third of our lives are spent at work, women must learn how to manage time effectively and efficiently in order to get the most joy and satisfaction out of their life’s work. It is

essential for them to tap into the social policies and processes available in the workplace that can enable one to greet success.

**Work Policies.** It is here that women academics with children have a multitude of work option policies. The American Association of University Professors in their Statement of Principles on Family Responsibilities and Academic Work note that faculty should be treated equitably. They both recognize and support family life. In order to avoid stigmatization it is suggested that the probationary time allotted to faculty be extended for all faculty not just those planning a family (Philipsen, 2008). Some universities have concierge service that allows for the transportation of children to and from daycare (Fogg 2003) and after-school care on campus (Philipsen, 2008). Rosser (2007) found innovative policies such as that at the Georgia Institute of Technology where women scientists and engineers were encouraged in climbing the academic ladder by stopping the tenure clock and they provided services for emergencies that women may need.

Despite these policies, however, female professors may still find themselves challenged in the competitive marketplace. A female political science professor in Santa Barbara was denied tenure when she took advantage of her university's family policy to support women with children and to attend to her children as their care giver. In the end she achieved tenure detailing how her academic work refashioned the field of political science.

We must consider if single, childless academics also have policies in place to

protect them from work overload. Their caring work may extend to siblings or aging parents, to a relative with a disability, or to nieces and nephews after the death of a sibling. In addition, as a result of their single status they are often called upon for care extended to their colleagues when they are sick, or in need, and their students, which may result in them overlooking care for themselves. Williams (2005, p. 101) comments on how the childless woman may feel pained or even angry if asked to take over for a colleague who is on parental leave. Interestingly, Statistics Canada (2005) report in the last census that when marital status is considered, the largest group of individuals fall into the "single" category. Thus, there may be many more single academics in the pile than married ones over time. Kemkes-Grottenthaler (2003) and de Wet, Ashley and Kegel (2002) find that it is normative for female academics to postpone and even reject childrearing in order for them to achieve tenure and promotion. Oftentimes in doing so they found that this led to being involuntarily childless due to lost time in the process of procreation.

**Work-Life Strategies.** In addition to the challenges that exist between academic mothers and academic nonmothers, women need to learn the art of the separation of the self between the work sphere and the home sphere. Luna Brem (2001) and Ker Conway (2001) acknowledge that women generally do not separate the professional self from the personal self in the best ways possible. Hence, "pressure can be self-induced" (Luna Brem, 2001, p. 188). A global survey which focused on the work and life experiences of 30,000 women in thirty-

three different countries found that women require leisure time, and secondly financial independence (Luna Brem, 2001, p. 183). Balance in one's life allows for an enhanced quality of life (Brooks and Brooks, 1997). Women need and must learn the politics of play whether it be joining a golf club, exploring new areas of their life, going to a spa, or allowing for time bursts - "downtime, brainstorming, sorting out" (Briles, 1996, p. 168).

When women understand that the majority of professional women live hectic lives combining family and work life, that itself can be a stress reducer. When women deny this truth, they in effect live lives with false boundaries; not only does this delimit their worthwhile experiences but it denies them the pleasure of pushing beyond rigid boundaries, stretching and aspiring even higher (Briles, 1996). Once we understand what circumvents our lives, we can grow from these understandings and mobilize forward in more functional ways. The workplace needs to create "stretch opportunities for people" (Luna Brem, 2001, p. 179).

Women academics must learn to ask for help. They need to surround themselves with people who understand the work process that they engage in. They need to call upon their power network (Fisher and Vilas, 2000) or tap into the power tools (Sherman, 2001) that facilitate movement through the ranks. They need to use mentors and networks to access and empower oneself in the process. On occasion such assistance can be denied from other women.

Although women can and do help other women, there are certain women who are

not promoters of other women. Women need to be aware of Queen Bees, Princess Bees and Phantom Bees. The Queen Bee believes that she got to the top by her own fortitude and through being savvy. Queen Bees are non-mentors and non-supporting of other women. In this thinking they believe women get to the top on their own. The Queen Bee has achieved high rank on the job with associated high pay and social success. These women according to Staines et al (1974) are often popular with men, have looks going for them and are married. These women do not work for equality for other women and might even oppose programs that do. Mavin (2008, p. S75) identifies the Queen Bee as "a bitch who stings other women if her power is threatened", as she prefers to work with men (Cherne, 2003).

The Princess Bee will support other women as long as they do not violate her territory. Hence, she mentors others as long as they stay separate from her domain. The Phantom Bee will not facilitate finding another woman for a work position. Men, then, are allocated the job and fewer women are afforded access to new work roles (Briles, 1996, p. 241-242). Women can and do misuse power, "setting others up, sabotaging them, not giving them credit for appropriate work, or not respecting some of the unwritten rules such as connectedness in the workplace, they continue to poison the well" (Briles, 1996, p. 253). Mavin (2006) reports that the syndrome associated with the Queen Bee is alive and well in the workplace setting. "Bad behaviour" exists amongst senior women in management towards other women (352) and it is something very difficult to highlight, let alone discuss. However,

ignoring it does not mean that it will go away. Women, then, often do not mesh with each other as natural allies (Legge, 1987; Mavin, 2006: 2008).

### **THE SINGLE CHILDLESS ACADEMIC AND MOVEMENT THROUGH THE RANKS**

Acker (2004, p. 23) highlights that all academic women have had to struggle within their climb to academic success. Valian (1998) notes that it is often thought that women in academe are rising through the ranks at high speed, but clearly that perception is flawed.

While single childless academic women are seen to have the advantage of greater freedom of time, their publication record is actually recorded as lower than that of their married female colleagues. Toren (1999) studied Russian women immigrant scientists who in a twenty year time frame their publication record increased with children. Numerous researchers support this finding (Astin and Davis, 1985; Kyvic, 1990; Zuckerman and Cole, 1987: cited in Toren 1999).

Younger women academics can be advantaged by their youth, personal ambition, drive, and use of their time towards research or publication. However, even the social variables of age, appearance, attractiveness, weight, and dress sense, work against women as they perceive indifference towards women who have youth and style on their side (Mavin, 2008). Simultaneously, it is found that these same women who are young and ambitious are less productive in research as a result of their single status (Astin and Davis, 1985). They suggest that, “women without a male partner are more

likely to be further excluded from the ‘boys’ network, important connections, and critical information” (Astin and Davis, 1985, p. 140). Attractiveness and personal presentation can be a very large threat to any woman who is insecure about herself and lacks confidence and self-esteem.

In 2001, women continued to earn less than their male counterparts; that is, full-time women academics at all ranks earned .87 cents for every dollar their male colleague earned (Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, 2005). While there is no data in Canada that examines marital status and rank, again, overall women fall far behind. Mason and Goulden’s (2002) study of doctoral recipients found large numbers of women considering leaving academia when they had children. While marriage and children advance the careers of academic men, they detract from the careers of women. Tenured women often are single and childless (Mason and Goulden, 2002). In 2001-2002, 16% of women in Canadian universities were full professors, 32.8% were associate professors, 40.8% were assistant professors and 53.9% were categorized as other (Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, 2005).

Statistics Canada highlights at the administrative level, women totaled 29.7% of the senior administration on university campuses in Canada in 2005. They occupied 21% of all Canadian Research Chairs to June 2005 and made up 11.6% of Royal Society of Canada Fellows (Berkowitz, 2005, p. 36). Side and Robbins’ (2007) research on The Canada Research Chairs Program confirms the arduous struggle and

devaluing of women's research that female academics encounter in their bid for these prestigious research honors. Chesterman, Ross-Smith and Peters (2005) found in Australia that senior women executives in the university system exhibited "lack of confidence, reticence, ambivalence, seeking balance and resistance as playing a part in women's avoidance of senior jobs" (p. 178). While marital status is not identified it can be concluded that all women professionals in the halls of academe move slower and are less likely to climb as high through the ranks in comparison to men.

#### **IMMEDIATE AND FUTURE NEEDS OF ACADEMIC WOMEN**

In Canada, fifty-eight percent of the undergraduate students in the university system were female in 2006-2007, a figure which has remained constant since 2001 (Statistics Canada, 2009). The statistic is one to rejoice and applaud. In addition, there are more females with university degrees than ever before in the history of Canada and the United States. The key will be to retain females in academe and encourage them towards higher degrees at all levels and in all disciplines.

Women must renounce the roles of Queen, Princess and Phantom Bees. It is imperative to empower women and launch them forward to advanced education and mobility through the ranks. In suggesting this, one must not underestimate the need for academic men to assist in the process. Their assistance is absolutely required and essential to the process. Acker's (2003, p. 401) words are encouraging: "There is every sign that the proportion of women and minority groups (including women)

will be rising throughout that period as the generation dominated by white men retires in large numbers".

Women academics must find the courage, strength and drive to push forward, to continue to request policies that facilitate the balancing act of all the roles they play. In order to enjoy their life's work they need leisure and play, loyal colleagues, peer-to-peer learning, mentors, and e-mentoring, and if they have partners they require encouragement and support with domestic and child rearing practices.

The system that shapes and produces bright minds and encourages the enhancement of full lives touched by the gifts of education is of extreme importance. It is imperative that students and potential students succeed and climb through the ranks of possibility in academia. Society is on the threshold of incredible change. It is important to harness the energy and accomplishments of women as structural changes and policy changes continue in our social and academic worlds.

May society be successful in abolishing the mommy track in allowing women in academe to derive the best and fullest careers that they can master. It is important to support all women academics, be they single, married, divorced, separated, or widowed. Sharpening one's power tools, fine-tuning one's power networks, and building the old girls network will assist women of all social and ethnic backgrounds to break down the social and structural barriers in academe. May the sting be taken out of the Queen Bee and a neutralization of her demonic ways. As Luna Brem (2001, p. 165)



highlights: “A leader makes change happen”. All academic leaders must push to make these changes happen! It is imperative to question our leaders, be they male or female and squash the ugliness of unfairness and inequity. In occupying their roles they must: “Accept that the position of a leader is a position of power. Embrace power. Take it, and then give it away. The more power you give, the more you have. You lose power when you fail to empower others” (Marsden, 2008, p. 279). It is time for the leaders in academe to take note of all the work women do to make the university system run smooth, to recognize and reward all the caring work that makes for sound relations between all the players in the system, and to note women’s diverse contributions to the academic forum. It is time to work with women academics and allow them to be all that they want to be, because the happy worker is also a more productive worker. Everyone wins in the system when they are promoted to their full academic and human potential. Women need each other and more as they make their way through the halls of academe. We need leaders to build trust, show compassion, provide stability, and create hope (Rath and Conchie, 2008) if women are to advance in ways that circumvent the socio-structural workplace dynamics in academe.

More importantly, perhaps, is the absolute need for women in positions of leadership in academe during the downturn in the world economy. In nurturing female talent of the very brightest minds in the ivory towers of learning we position women better locally, nationally, and globally as the world searches for ways to counter the current economic crisis. It is imperative

to have women situated at the top of the university system as bold voices in the decision-making processes that enable other women to move up the ranks in educational attainment. In doing so, we encourage girls worldwide to access education and work to achieve universal literacy.

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