

Work and Family in Academia: Striking the Balance



—Introduction by Donna K. Ginther,
University of Kansas

Balancing a professional career with raising a family is a tricky proposition. Although academics have significant control over their time, it is often the case that we have the luxury of choosing which 60 hours a week that we can work. This is further complicated by coincident timing of the tenure track and a woman's fertility, creating a potential tradeoff between getting tenure and having a family. Unfortunately, colleges and universities are not leaders in providing family-friendly policies. This symposium describes research on the work-family climate in academia as well as the personal experiences of women economists who have chosen to have children pre- and post-tenure.

Robert Drago, Professor of Labor Studies and Employment Relations and Women's Studies at Pennsylvania State University summarizes his research with Carol Colbeck on the work-family climate in academia. They conducted a national survey of faculty to identify factors associated with bias against care-giving in academia and find extensive 'bias avoidance' on the part of male and female faculty. In particular, women faculty members are more likely to limit or delay having children and return to work too soon after childbirth than their male colleagues. More women than men did not request a reduced teaching load for family reasons because of the negative impact on their careers. Their research also documents 'daddy privilege' where male academics are praised for putting families ahead of careers whereas females are penalized. His essay concludes with a call for improved work-family policies on campus.

Lisa Wolf-Wendel, Professor of Education Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of Kansas and Kelly Ward, Associate Professor of Higher Education at Washington State University report on a series of qualitative studies of women faculty who have had children prior to tenure and their department administrators. These women find balancing a career and family both challenging and rewarding. However, Wolf-Wendel and Ward echo Drago's research, finding that academia does not, on balance, provide a family-friendly environment. Those women who did have children pre-tenure go to great lengths to make arrangements for parental leave, often presenting a solution to the department chair. In the previous CSWEP newsletter, Fiona Scott Morton described raising the topic of parental policies with department chairs as a 'difficult discussion' (<http://www.cswep.org/newsletters/CSWEPnsltrWinter2007.pdf>). Wolf-Wendel and Ward's research shows that these parental

leave policy discussions are difficult because they are often imbued with fear and cloaked in a culture of silence.

Terra McKinnish, Associate Professor of Economics at the University of Colorado, offers her personal perspective and advice on having children while on the tenure-track. At the top of her list is to know the university's parental leave policy. She recommends asking about the leave policy after receiving an offer but before accepting. McKinnish suggests being proactive in presenting a proposal for parental leave to one's department chair. She also advises to get the best childcare one can afford. Finally, Terra recommends setting limits on both work and family commitments. Although having children on the tenure-track adds to career uncertainty, she concludes that having a family allows one to have a better perspective on both work and family.

Anne Winkler, Professor of Economics and Public Policy Administration at the University of Missouri-St. Louis discusses the advantages of having children after the tenure decision. A strategy of getting tenure first gives a faculty member time to develop their research, teaching, and professional identity without the distraction of balancing work with childrearing. Furthermore, delaying children allows one to avoid the negative perceptions of colleagues and avoid some of the bias against care-giving discussed by Drago.

This collection of essays demonstrates the complexity of balancing an academic career with raising a family. Although the climate is at times difficult, it is possible to do both. My advice echoes the research and personal experiences discussed in the essays that follow. First, it is important to know and to be proactive about your institution's parental leave policy. Second, you cannot be a productive teacher or researcher if you are worried about your childcare arrangements. I recommend that you make inquiries about parental leave and childcare arrangements *before* you have a child. Third, set realistic expectations for yourself as a parent and faculty member. It is the rare infant that eats and sleeps according to plan. Likewise, it will take time (and consistent sleep) for you to return to your pre-parenthood productivity level. Finally, take time to enjoy the experience of being a parent and a faculty member—both are challenging yet extremely rewarding pursuits.

In closing, it is my sincere belief that the work-family climate will only improve if faculty are willing to take advantage of existing parental leave policies and to ask for and expect reasonable accommodations including stopping the tenure clock and reduced teaching loads. I hope that women who ask for parental accommodations receive the support of their senior colleagues in the profession.

Faculty and Family Commitments

—Robert Drago, Pennsylvania State University



In economics and many other professions, it is difficult to simultaneously achieve career success while making and meeting commitments to family. To change this situation requires an understanding of both the general issues and the specific institutional context involved. Below I summarize results of recent studies of faculty, discuss how these apply to economics, and discuss policy options.

The annual reports of CSWEP identify persistent leaks in the academic pipeline, with the percentages of women declining as we move from Ph.D. attainment to assistant to associate and finally to full professor. Until recently, many attributed women's slow advancement in this and other professions to sex discrimination. While it seems unlikely that discrimination has magically disappeared, it is also likely that prospective and actual family commitments inhibit women's advancement.

I trace the role of families in academic careers to two gendered norms identified by Joan Williams (1999). The ideal worker norm generates expectations of total career commitment. The norm is reinforced in the academy by the rat-race dynamics of obtaining a tenure-track position at an elite university, career mobility in moving 'up' from one university to another, and most fundamentally through the tenure process. The motherhood norms yield expectations that women will and should bear and raise children and, more broadly, perform needed carework for love rather than money.

These norms collide in the academic workplace when women attempt to simultaneously perform as ideal workers and mothers. In part, this collision flows from continuing inequality in the division of household labor. But the collision also stems from a conflict between the tenure clock and the biological clock. Given the average woman Ph.D. recipient is aged 34, waiting to bear children until tenure is achieved would place childbearing at age 40 or beyond, a time when fertility declines dramatically.

Women who elect to rear children while on the tenure track may face what we label "bias against caregiving." Consider a male assistant professor who brags about working late at night to complete revisions to an article, and contrast that behavior to a woman who admits that she was up all night with an ill infant. The prior statement supports the

male's status as an ideal worker, while the latter statement may stir up biases against caregiving. It is irrelevant whether colleagues are sympathetic or hostile to the woman's caregiving commitments; if they respond to her comment with the claim that 'she will never make tenure' or 'she's not getting her research done,' then bias against caregiving is at work.

However, elements of this story are unrealistic. The assumption that colleagues would explicitly exhibit biases against caregiving in response to the woman's statement is problematic. Although a few curmudgeonly faculty might say something, perhaps almost in jest, most would likely keep quiet, perhaps waiting until the privacy of a promotion and tenure committee meeting to discuss the issue, or perhaps allowing their response to influence a promotion decision without any explicit discussion. An additional deficiency is the assumption that the woman would mention her ailing child. If she understands the dynamics of the situation, she will remain silent, thereby utilizing a strategy to avoid stirring up biases against caregiving, or engaging in what we label "bias avoidance."

For analytical purposes, bias avoidance is divided into the sub-categories of productive and unproductive bias avoidance. Common patterns among academic women of delaying or denying childbearing are forms of productive bias avoidance, i.e., behaviors that improve work performance at the expense of family commitments. Hiding family commitments in order to maintain the appearance of ideal worker performance with minimal or even adverse impacts on actual work performance represent unproductive bias avoidance.

Evidence of Bias Avoidance

To provide a quantitative context for bias avoidance, Carol Colbeck and I undertook a national survey of faculty. The survey was administered during 2002 to a random sample of 5,087 Chemistry and English faculty at 507 colleges and universities, with the institutions selected at random from within each of the Carnegie categories, except for oversampling of research universities and undersampling of small, 2-year schools.

Results for bias avoidance behaviors by gender are provided in Figure 1. The first item refers to whether the faculty member "stayed single because I did not have time for a family and a successful academic career." A full 16 percent

Stories of new mothers returning to the classroom in a matter of days or hours are not uncommon.

of women, but 10 percent of men denied themselves the opportunity for the most basic of family commitments as a form of productive bias avoidance. Further, around one-quarter of women had “fewer children than I wanted... to achieve academic success,” as did 13 percent of the men. When a reduced teaching load was needed for family reasons, a third of the women and almost one-fifth of the men did not request a reduction “because it would lead to adverse career repercussions.” Similarly, sizeable fractions of women, and smaller proportions of men, delayed a second child until after tenure or took no parental leave when needed. Productive bias avoidance is both common and gendered.

Turning to unproductive bias avoidance, relevant results for faculty parents are presented in Figure 2. Just under one-fifth of fathers and mothers did not stop the tenure clock for a new child “even though it would have helped me to take it.” Given that tenure clock stoppages are virtually costless for the institution, this finding strikes us as strong evidence of bias avoidance. Of greater prevalence, over a third of the fathers and over two-fifths of mothers “missed some of my children’s important events when they were young, because I did not want to appear uncommitted to my job.” Assuming

Figure 1: Productive Bias Avoidance

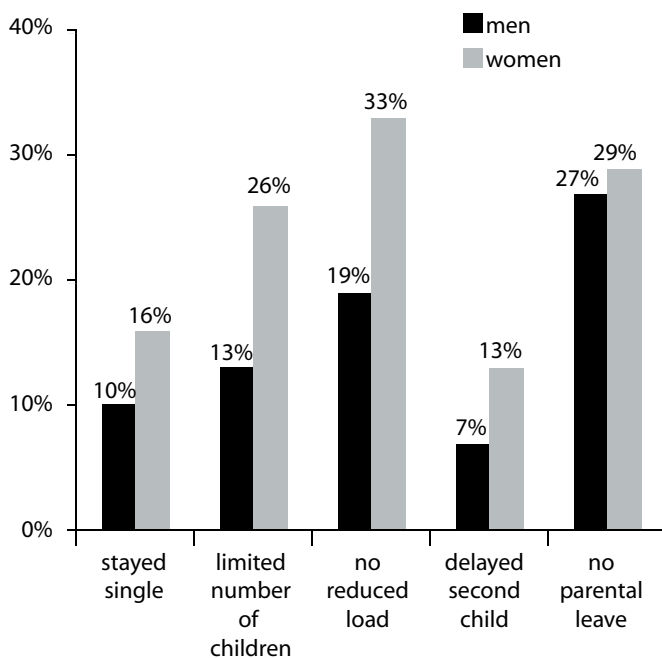
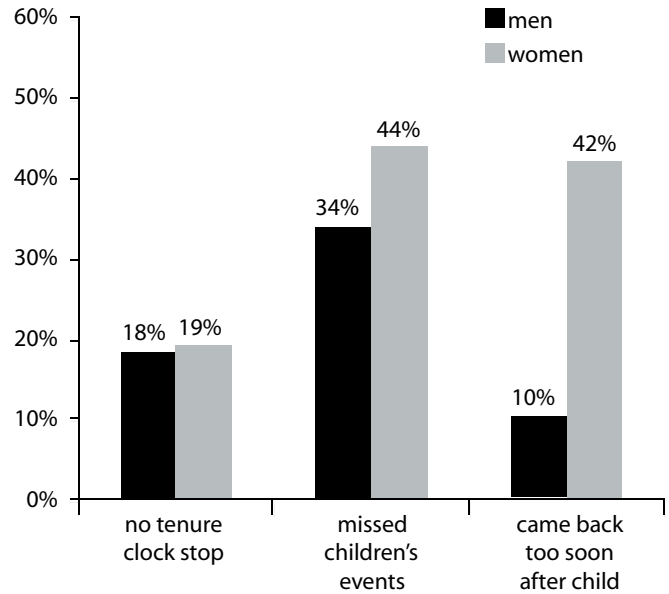


Figure 2: Unproductive Bias Avoidance




respondents interpreted “important events” as relatively rare, the time involved was minimal, but the behavior is undoubtedly a source of regret later in life. Finally, 10 percent of the fathers and over 40 percent of the mothers reported coming back to work too soon after a new child “because I wanted to be taken seriously as an academic.” Stories of new mothers returning to the classroom in a matter of days or hours are not uncommon.

We cannot know for certain that bias avoidance behaviors are prevalent in the economics profession, but the proposition seems reasonable. Much of the research discussed above was replicated in a survey of University of California faculty (with similar results), and for a comparable sample of Australian academics (who exhibited even higher levels of bias avoidance).

Other Responses to Bias Against Caregiving

In addition to the basic findings regarding bias avoidance, related qualitative research led us to discover three novel concepts that extend the theory of bias avoidance: 1) Bias acceptance: the making and meeting of family commitments with resulting career penalties either assumed or planned for. 2) Daddy privilege: circumstances wherein men are lauded for the intrusion of family on work commitments, while women



would experience bias against caregiving for similar intrusions. 3) Bias resistance: actions that challenge bias against caregiving involving either switching time and effort away from work and towards family, or by making commitments to family explicit in the workplace.

Bias acceptance first appeared in a focus group where a woman discussed moving through a series of jobs to facilitate her husband's career, and took as a given the "facts" that her career should be sacrificed in order to meet family commitments, and that neither the institutions involved nor her husband bore any responsibility for the situation. By extension, faculty engaging in bias acceptance might obtain a Ph.D. then seek contingent employment or a position at a school with relatively light demands.

Daddy privilege initially appeared in a focus group as well. Mentioned by both men and women as being unfair, it involves circumstances wherein men are viewed as leading a healthy, balanced life when admitting caregiving commitments in the workplace, while women are seen as less than ideal workers for similar admissions.

Bias resistance appeared in shadowing studies wherein some faculty viewed biases against caregiving as unfair, and challenged these biases either explicitly or implicitly. Explicitly, one faculty member made family commitments public during the hiring process. Implicitly, faculty members may "steal" time from work for family without letting others know. The gendered character of the ideal worker and motherhood norms, as well as the persistence of sex discrimination, suggest that men are in a stronger position to engage in bias resistance relative to women.

Implication for Economics

Many readers will be tempted to cast these issues in traditional economic terms. Bias acceptance might reflect a selection problem, with the pool of available talent effectively constrained by long hours—rather than quality—requirements. Bias avoidance can be cast in game-theoretic terms, with women (and some men) facing incentives to engage in strategic behavior. Bias against caregiving *per se* can either be viewed in terms of statistical discrimination—women are more likely to engage in caregiving at the expense of academic work—or in terms of traditional theories of discriminatory attitudes that the labor market may break down in a never-

ending search for high-quality faculty.

I deny none of these possibilities, but believe the issues should be seen in the broader light of norms. For an example, I recall speaking to an administrator who asked whether it was reasonable to expect a woman who bore three children while on the tenure track to achieve tenure. I winced at the time, believing such behavior was arguably crazy. Only later did I realize that it was the gendered framing of the question that generated my response; I would not have winced if the story concerned a man. My response reflected an implicit acceptance of the collision of the norms of the ideal worker and of motherhood in the academy.

If norms around ideal workers and motherhood are as important as I believe, then policy solutions alone will likely fail, because we also need to challenge norms. I therefore conclude with brief discussions of both *policies* and of *inclusive practices*.

Implications for Policy and Practice

A growing number of colleges and universities are addressing these problems with formal policies. Virtually all colleges and universities are covered by the Family and Medical Leave Act, a law that permits faculty up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave for a new child. Many and perhaps most institutions allow for paid maternity and sometimes paternity leave, stoppage of the tenure clock at least once for a new child, modified duties (typically involving no or a low teaching load) during the semester following the arrival of a new child. In each case, the question of whether the policy should be limited to women arises, and there are no simple answers. If men use the policy, adverse selection may result with borderline male faculty using the additional resources to pad a tenure file. If men are not allowed to use the policy, then we are implicitly accepting the norm of motherhood; caring is a 'woman-only' matter.

Some institutions are introducing a half-time tenure track, prorating workload, pay and benefits, while running the tenure clock at half-speed. The systems are controversial in part because of the potential for adverse selection (particularly for men using the system), but also because tenure files are often evaluated with a close eye on the timing of the Ph.D., employment, and publications. Nonetheless, the system appears to be catching on. In unpublished data col-

lected by Lotte Bailyn, April Jones, Joan Williams and myself in 2006, we discovered three universities where, collectively, almost 300 faculty had used the system. Whether the system will become pervasive, however, remains very much an open question.

Research on work and family indicates that, in practice these types of policies are rarely used. In retrospect, the main reason is obvious: policy utilization by faculty undercuts the appearance of ideal worker performance, particularly for women, thereby raising the probability of career penalties. To make policies usable, the employer (e.g., university or department) needs to recast the definition of ideal workers around indicators of performance quality rather than continuous levels of extreme commitment to career. A growing body of evidence suggests that inclusive processes can contribute to such a shift. For example, involving faculty in course scheduling allows individuals to bring non-work commitments into decision-making processes, thus highlighting that faculty are not simply ideal workers, and thereby humanizing the workplace. Using similar logic, the universities that have recently introduced a half-time tenure track have involved faculty heavily in the design of the systems, implicitly inviting individuals to challenge traditional understandings of ideal workers.

Are a majority of economists open to these possibilities? At present, I would guess the answer is 'no'. Regardless, much work lies before us if we are to achieve gender equity and a more humane academy.

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Managing to Have Children on the Tenure Track: A Qualitative Study

—Lisa Wolf-Wendel, University of Kansas and
Kelly Ward, Washington State University



The labor market is shifting and an increasing number of academics find themselves in dual career partnerships that make balancing the demands of work and family more precarious. In order for campuses to recruit and retain highly qualified faculty it is necessary to create an environment where faculty can combine work and family without risk to their careers and/or personal well being. Thus, while largely unnecessary when a majority of academic professionals were men with stay-at-home wives, colleges and universities must consider how to accommodate faculty with familial demands. A review of the current literature is heartening in that it reveals that institutions are starting to deal more forthrightly with work and family issues. But

for women faculty, the challenge of balancing work and family, and the harrowing decision to attempt such a feat while on the tenure track, is still a major issue — one that is largely a matter of individual responsibility. Part of the concern can be attributed to the unique academic context. Faculty members, particularly those on the tenure track, are known for working long hours, which have become an unwritten expectation of the profession. Tenure track faculty must prove themselves through their research productivity and demonstrate their commitment to their positions, departments, and institutions through "face time." It should come as no surprise that the "ideal" faculty member is often described as being "married to his work". While the faculty work load can quite literally never end—there are always papers to grade, grants to write, manuscripts to publish, and students to advise—this is juxtaposed against the considerable independence and autonomy a faculty career offers. This commentary addresses how this independence and autonomy interact with the unending expectations when family is added to the equation.

For the past five years, we have undertaken a research project on how junior women faculty members combine work and family while on the tenure track. Initially, the project included interviews with 120 women at four different types of institutions (research universities, regional/comprehensives, liberal arts colleges, and community colleges) and from a variety of disciplines. (See for example, Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006a & Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006b for the research findings). In an ongoing attempt to understand work and family more fully, we



also interviewed department chairs, senior faculty, and junior faculty (male and female) with and without children within given departmental contexts. In addition, we are now in the process of conducting follow-up interviews with the women in the initial study to learn more about ongoing work and family concerns. The purpose of this article is to briefly outline the major findings of our research.

Faculty with young children are managing their roles quite admirably. The roles of faculty and mother are not impossible to reconcile and there are many successful examples of women who do both well. This is an important finding, as so much of the prior research literature stresses the “peril” and “doom” of attempting to have both an academic career and a family, especially for women. We found that being a parent can lead to being a better professor, certainly a more efficient one. Similarly, being a professor can mean being a better parent, at least a more patient one. Women talked about the joy of being a parent and the joy of being a professor. They explained that going home to a family (despite “second shift” obligations—like cooking, cleaning, taking care of children) offered reprieve from the endless amounts of work, the ambiguity of tenure and the high stakes nature of not being successful as a professor. Balancing multiple roles seems to offer these women a sense of perspective—tenure is important, but so are other parts of life.

Faculty careers offer autonomy and flexibility, but academic work never ends. Autonomy and flexibility are hallmarks of the academic career, and these characteristics are helpful and appreciated when it comes to combining work and family. New parents can be home with their sleeping newborn and work on an article simultaneously. Certainly, this is a privilege not afforded to many other careers or jobs. Workplace autonomy and flexibility, as compatible with combining work and family, was mentioned repeatedly in the interviews, as was the flipside—that academic work never ends. In an effort to get work done and also manage a new family, the women described getting up at 4am to work before the baby got up, staying up late to grade papers after the baby went to bed, and “sneaking” in work anytime it was possible.

Unclear expectations. Lack of clarity was particularly pronounced at institutions that were in some way shifting their mission (e.g., “moving up” the academic ladder, increasing emphasis on research). For women on these campuses,

there was uncertainty about how much work (and in what areas) was enough to get to tenure. To be sure, this was an issue for all faculty at these institutions, but was particularly pronounced for the new mothers we talked to who were suddenly not able to work all the time.

The situation is imbued with fear. We were struck and troubled by the extent to which the entire work process for new parents was imbued with fear. Faculty talked about fear of using policies, as well as fear about not getting tenure. Faculty also expressed fear that having a baby would be viewed as a sign of not being serious and fear that colleagues would be harsh critics about the choice to have a baby.

Don’t ask, don’t tell. A natural outgrowth of fear is silence. We found that there exists a culture of silence surrounding work and family in higher education. This silence was especially pronounced in our interviews with department chairs and senior colleagues, who felt uncomfortable talking to their colleagues about having children. No one wanted to talk about having a baby. Of course, niceties are exchanged and baby showers are planned, but straight talk about what type of leave arrangement a faculty member may need or how having a baby might affect productivity at work is a conversation that is avoided by all involved.

Faculty go to great lengths to “make it work” when it comes to having a baby. Faculty members manage work and family in spite of policy environments, not because of it. Our interview transcripts are replete with examples of individual women going to great lengths to make arrangements to “cover” for when they took leave associated with having a child. In many instances, chairs were the last to know about the solutions being created. The typical response we heard with regard to this finding is “I had everything worked out and then talked to my chair about what I planned to do.” While we are in favor of individual faculty members being proactive and taking initiative, the findings show that faculty members are going to great lengths to create solutions so that it appears that they do not need “help,” and they also endeavor to miss as little work as possible.

The department level is key to making work and family issues work for faculty members. Typically, work and family policies are created at the institutional level, but a recurring finding from our research is the importance of the departmental context to help faculty manage work and family.

Faculty and department chairs are not sure of the availability of policies and, in particular, are not sure how to create situations where they can use the policies. Departments are the key to arranging solutions to work and family for faculty. Faculty, as members of departments, need to work with their department chairs to find the best arrangements to use policies associated with work and family.

The findings in the project thus far point to the need for an institutionalized policy environment surrounding work and family concerns for faculty, as well as departmental level responses. Some campuses use an integrative model, in which a series of policies is adopted that can be used alone or in combination with one another as needed by employees (Academe, 2004). Such a model recognizes the way people work and supports the coherence faculty want with regard to work and home life. Creating appropriate and adequate institution-level policy is only the first step in creating a supportive work/family faculty climate. Indeed, research demonstrates that tenure track faculty members are frequently unaware of policies and, even if they know they exist, are hesitant to use them. Institutions need to also change their climate to be more receptive to faculty with work/family needs. These are important concerns and ones not easily solved—but every effort should be made to make higher education more family friendly—the recruitment and retention of the best faculty members demands that we take these issues seriously.

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A Survival Guide to Having Children While On Tenure Track

—Terra McKinnish, University of Colorado



I started my tenure track appointment at the University of Colorado in 1999, right out of graduate school at Carnegie Mellon University. I had a daughter two years later at the age of 29 and a son three years after that at 32. I received tenure this year and am due with my third child in September.

The decision of whether and when to have children is a matter of personal preference. Regardless of one's own preferences, I believe female economists should work to make our profession one that supports women who chose to have children earlier in their careers. Most CSWEP members would like to see growth in the number of female economists in tenured academic positions. This will be difficult if the eligible pool is largely restricted to those women willing to delay or forgo fertility. Real and perceived barriers to combining a family and a tenure-track position affect decisions talented women make about completing a PhD in economics and pursuing tenure-track jobs at top research departments.

In this article, I describe some of the strategies I used to survive while having children on the tenure track. There is no one perfect path; I have seen women make very different choices on these matters. Network with other female academics with children to get more than one perspective. Here is my advice:

1) Know Your University's Leave Policy. I took a semester of leave for the birth of each child. I was allowed to delay my tenure decision one year for each leave I took (up to two delays), and ultimately chose to take only one year of delay before coming up for tenure. Unfortunately, parental leave policies vary tremendously across universities, and not all allow junior faculty to stop the tenure clock for parental leave. I asked in advance whether or not Colorado allowed stops: *after* I received the offer, but before I accepted. Pro-actively research your university's policy before you discuss the matter with your chair (who may not even be familiar with the policy). Based on the policy, develop your own proposal for your leave rather than asking your chair how he or she would like to handle it.

2) Accept the Uncertainty. Female economists are a talented bunch, used to taking charge and making their own way. We tend to assume that we will have an easy pregnancy, easy delivery and a baby that sleeps and eats on a perfect schedule because we will make it so. Oh, if it were only true! It does not



help that many of us know one of those very rare women who was running 5 miles a day merely one week after giving birth. We assume that if she can do it, we certainly can, too. I regularly hear of pregnant women making commitments to go on the job market, move across country, or attend a major conference within a month after the birth of a child.

The problem is that you have far less control over these matters than you would like. Many women have unrealistic expectations of how they will feel just a few weeks after delivery. It comes as a particular surprise to many professional moms that those little infants are born with their own little temperaments, and in those early months, are amazingly uninterested in changing to suit your needs. Some lucky mothers get a draw out of one tail of the distribution, bringing home sweet-tempered babies who sleep for long stretches and occasionally cry to signal their interest in a meal. I, on the other hand, got a draw out of the other tail of the distribution, and brought home a daughter who screamed so much and at such high volume for the first six months that I became concerned about permanent hearing damage. When my child was one month old, not only was I not presenting at a major conference, I threw out all my houseplants because watering them once a week was an insurmountable task.

3) Consider "Real" Leave. I took a relatively unorthodox approach to having children on the tenure track. I took six months off from work with each child. I had my children in the summer, took leave for the Fall semester, and during this time I did not do *any* research. I did check my email regularly, met (at my house) with students for whom I was a primary advisor, and occasionally fielded a phone call from a co-author or made minor revisions to a manuscript.

It is very difficult for tenure-track faculty to feel comfortable taking this sort of leave. It does not help that many senior faculty seem to assume that new parents have hours each day to work on the computer while the baby sleeps peacefully in a bassinet. And, in fact, there are babies with whom this arrangement is possible (see point #2). I, on the other hand, always had a good laugh over this image while I was rushing to get a sandwich or shower during a rare 30-min stretch of peace and quiet.


While my leave was costly in terms of my productivity, and I did get cabin fever, it paid off in other ways. I got six months to enjoy and get to know my new babies. I was bet-

ter rested and my children were in a more settled routine by the time I returned to work. I was able to make a more gradual transition of turning the childcare over to someone else. I did not experience the extreme exhaustion and stress that many women experience returning to work with younger infants. I enjoyed my work-life, in part because I felt less conflicted about how I was balancing work and family.

It would be great if all women had the option, whether or not they chose to exercise it, to take this type of leave without dire professional repercussions. I feel it would make our profession even more attractive to talented young women, and reduce the leakage of women out of the pipeline between graduate school and tenured positions. We seem, unfortunately, to be in an equilibrium where there are women (and some men) who would like to take more time off with a new child, but feel they can't because no one else is. I am a bit on the belligerent side and decided to ignore this pressure, and feel it paid off for me in terms of my mental health, my enjoyment of my family life, and my job satisfaction; nevertheless, it was a risk. Your senior colleagues are supposed to treat your leave as time off the clock when reviewing your tenure case, but there is little guarantee they will do so. If you take leave, you should ask your chair how the senior faculty will be advised to take your leave into account when they review your tenure case. Some universities have a specific policy on this matter, but at a minimum it should encourage your chair to think about his or her responsibilities in this matter.

4) Get the Best Childcare You Can Afford. My husband and I are very fortunate that, with some budgeting, we can afford an extremely experienced, reliable, and loving nanny. For me, this made the transition back to work particularly smooth. I was delighted with the quality of care my children were receiving. An additional bonus was that my husband and I could still go to work on days when our children had mild illnesses that would have kept them out of daycare. The point that I am making is not that you must hire a nanny, but that your comfort level with your childcare will hugely affect your satisfaction with your work-family balance. Research your options and go over your budget. This is not the place to skimp.

5) Contract with Your Spouse. Babies and children make a whole host of demands that are very disruptive to the workday. They expect to be taken to doctor's and dentist's appointments, they expect to be taken care of when they are sick, and they



get a ludicrous number of days off from school. For those of us that are partnered with individuals outside of academia, the risk is that we will always be the ones to take on these responsibilities because our workday is more flexible. If you are in this situation, it is important that you and your partner reach an agreement about how these duties are divided and, if you take on a larger role, how you will recoup this time outside of normal business hours.

6) Say “No” at Work. Every hour of work is precious. The opportunity cost is too high to over-allocate time to teaching, service or research projects with low return. Negotiate hard to keep teaching preparations to a minimum. Recognize that you can get acceptable teaching evaluations both with modest inputs or with enormous inputs. I chose to replace homework and papers with ungraded in-class exercises. I found that not only did this save me time grading; students enjoyed the break from lecture and retained more of the day’s material. Some service assignments, such as faculty recruiting, are important and must be given appropriate effort. In all others, you must ruthlessly evaluate whether your time input is warranted. The truth is many junior women are doing too much service, and will be surprised to realize that no one notices if they start doing much less.

Write out a list of your research ideas and evaluate each one for potential payoff and for how much initial investment must be made before you can determine if the project will be viable. Don’t say yes to participate in research projects proposed by others just to be collegial; use the same system of evaluation. I found it helpful to focus my attention on a few projects at a time, given that I was planning around two 6-month disruptions. With only a few projects to manage, I generally got new submissions and revisions off to journals right before a baby came. This way papers were sitting with editors and referees rather than on my desk during my leave. Focusing on a few projects at a time made it easier to pick up where I left off after my leaves.

7) But, Stay Visible at Work. One strategy for combining work and family is to work from home, come in to teach class, and avoid most department activities. There can be benefits to this strategy in terms of productivity, but, particularly for junior women, there are also costs in how one is perceived by their department. I was out of sight during my leaves, but once I returned I was in the office during normal business hours and actively participated in key faculty events (seminars, meetings, lunches). I worked hard to communicate to my faculty that my time off the clock had been used to care for children and not for teaching-free time for research. Once I

returned, I wanted to also communicate that I was successfully combining work and family, that I was making progress on my research, and that I was a contributing member of the department. Remaining visible in the department allowed me to remain in the loop on department matters, make sure the department was aware of my successes, receive mentoring, and develop supporters among the faculty.

8) Say “No” at Home. I live in Boulder, CO, where birthday parties are gala events and children are considered deprived if they aren’t proficient at the violin, skiing and rock-climbing at the age of 4. Think about how much you remember from your second birthday before you spend 80 hours making hand-made invitations and personalized gift bags for 30 of your two-year-old’s closest friends. Someday my kids may sue me for the fact that they spend much of their afternoons and weekends playing with sand, flowers and sticks in our yard instead of learning yoga and calligraphy, but so far they seem pretty darned happy.

9) Keep Some Perspective. The tenure track has many ups and downs. I spent my first few years on the tenure track bouncing right up and down with them. One of the great things about having children is that it encourages you to evaluate what is important about your life. I realized that while I was ambitious and wanted to succeed in my job, in the absolute worst-case scenario I would almost certainly still end up with a job that was interesting and that paid pretty well. Looking around the world, few people can say that. So, I decided to choose projects I enjoyed, work hard, deal with praise and rejection as it came, and at the end of the day leave work behind me and go home and enjoy my family.

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“Tenure First” as an Optimizing Strategy

—Anne Winkler, University of Missouri-St. Louis



My personal story is one of “tenure first, think about children later,” where this strategy, fortunately, worked. I started as a new assistant professor at University of Missouri-St. Louis in 1989, at age 28, shortly after receiving my Ph.D. from University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. My position required both teaching (a 2-2 load) and research. Given the dual demands of teaching and research (and some service, but not a lot), I could not even envision children as part of mine or my husband’s lives at that point. Teaching was a particular challenge for me because I had spent most of my graduate years as a research assistant. As you quickly learn, teaching can consume all of your time, if you are not careful. To get research done, I found that I needed to work in large blocks of time. Our graduate program and some undergraduate offerings are in the evenings, and I regularly chose courses taught at those times to leave my days free for research projects.

After six years at U.M.-St. Louis, as my tenure case was going forward, I had a planned pregnancy. My first son was born in May 1995 (when I was age 34) and my second son in June 1997. After the birth of each son, I was granted a teaching leave for the following fall semester. Each leave was negotiated between my Department Chair and the College Dean. A number of factors contributed to the success of my plan. First, I was fairly young when I started my tenure-track position so this strategy could potentially work. Second, I have a supportive husband. He wanted to have children sooner, but patiently waited. Third my senior female colleagues, Sharon Levin and Susan Feigenbaum, provided me with well-needed advice about balancing family and career based on their own experiences, and helped me understand how to navigate the waters at our own institution. Finally, I became pregnant immediately, as planned. Of course, the reality is that despite the best planning, things do not always work out.

In my experience, the strategy of “obtain tenure first and think about children later” brings with it many professional advantages. Principally, you can concentrate on the new job. A first tenure-track job out of a Ph.D. program can be overwhelming. When September arrives, you must prepare lectures and syllabi, often for courses you are teaching for the first time, get acquainted with a new department and campus culture, and, in most cases, initiate a serious research program.


These first months and years are critical in establishing your professional reputation.

The actions you take or don’t take during these first years provide signals to your department colleagues about your current and future productivity. These are the same people who will later be asked to assess your teaching and research accomplishments and vote on tenure. An advantage of delaying children is that you do not have to worry about whether your colleagues negatively perceive the choice to have children pre-tenure, nor must you concern yourself with how to counteract such views. Regrettably, I think it is still the case that more senior (generally male) faculty question the choice of motherhood for female colleagues on the tenure track, but do not feel the same way regarding fatherhood for junior male colleagues. For young women, delaying family obviates this problem, although this is not a satisfactory reason, in and of itself, to wait.

Another advantage of putting tenure first is that you can exclusively focus on your research without the distraction of children. The time right after graduate school is a prime opportunity to get ideas and projects based on your dissertation and other work started in graduate school into shape for journal review and to get started on new projects. Time away from research is extremely costly because it is so hard to gear up on a project after being away from it for some time. There are also advantages to getting your teaching “going” right away. Right after graduate school, while the knowledge is still fresh, is the time to teach new preps. It is amazing how fast knowledge depreciates if you don’t regularly use it.

It is also a whole lot easier to attend conferences without worrying about the well-being of your children, especially when they are small. Without question, the IT revolution has brought remarkable changes and made it much easier to “virtually” connect, but conference participation continues to play a central role during the first years in establishing professional relationships, disseminating your research, and receiving feedback.

In sum, a “tenure first” strategy gives you an opportunity to figure out how to successfully balance the demands of teaching and research before adding children into the equation. Moreover, after tenure, you can more readily take advantage of the perks associated with the flexibility of an academic job, such as attending children’s daytime perfor-



mances and school parties.

Yet this strategy is not without risks. In light of the fact that fertility difficulties and birth risks rise with maternal age, I think that women on the tenure track who think they may want to have children at some point should at least *consider the possibility* of juggling tenure and children. My recommendation is to learn more about how your institution operates, and how other women at your institution, if not in your department, have combined career and family. The importance of networking and learning from others cannot be underestimated in making an informed decision.

Here are questions that you need to get answered about your institution before having children:

- Can the tenure clock be stopped and for how long? What has been the experience of women in the department and college who have followed this path? Did they feel like more research was expected of them, when all was said and done, because they “had an extra year?”
- Is the process for obtaining a leave formal or informal? If formal, understand the policy and see if there is any room for further negotiation. If informal, talk to other women on campus and find out what arrangement they negotiated.

For women academics, both pre- and post-tenure, there is also the all important question: How will you get back “on track” after the birth? A plan to minimize future start-up costs is essential. Also, you have to be thinking well in advance about infant care and back-up care. If you plan to use organized care, you should sign up the *moment* you find out you are pregnant. Also, you have to be realistic and realize that with children you have to “expect the unexpected.” Planning only goes so far.

While my personal experience is anecdotal, it provides some useful lessons to academic women who give birth to or adopt children both pre- or post-tenure. As it turns out, I very much needed the leave following the birth of my children because I found the days, weeks, and even months after childbirth exhausting, and at times, overwhelming. Sleep deprivation can be cruel, and babies are totally unpredictable. I know of academic women who quickly return to their professional activities, but I was not able to do this, even with my first child, who it turns out was a lot easier to take care of than my second child. In both cases it took me several

months to resume my research projects at the previous level of intensity, even without a teaching load to manage. A crucial ingredient in my ability to return to work with peace of mind and remain productive is that I had the benefit of an excellent child development center on campus, about a 15 minute walk from my office. The faculty and staff at the center became our extended family (neither my husband nor I are from St. Louis). Without family nearby, it can be tricky to figure out care arrangements for a sick child, or organize a pick-up at school. It took time but we have developed a network of friends (often colleagues from work), neighbors, and our children’s friends’ parents, who we can call upon. It is a constant juggling act, but the rewards are immense.

In conclusion, for someone who starts their first job at about the same age as I did, the path I took is one to seriously consider, but it is not risk-free. Whatever decision you make, it is important to fully understand the tradeoffs. After writing about my own experience and thoughts on this topic, I went back and read CSWEP articles that preceded the birth of my own children.¹ What is so striking to me is that the issues that are raised in my piece are very much the same as those discussed 13 to 16 years ago.

[1] See articles on combining family and career by Jennifer F. Reinganum and Beth Ingram from Fall 1991 and Summer 1993, respectively at <http://www.cswep.org/newsletters.htm>.

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