Having It All

Women, Work, Family, and the Academic Career
D. Lynn O'Brien Hallstein and Andrea O'Reilly, eds., *Academic Motherhood in a Post-Second Wave Context: Challenges, Strategies, and Possibilities* (Bradford, ON: Demeter Press, 2012)
Maureen Baker, *Academic Careers and the Gender Gap* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2012)

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Citer cette note

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THE GENDER GAP IN ACADEMIC CAREERS at colleges and universities has been persistent and resistant to change. While women have made significant progress as incoming faculty, their ascent in the academic hierarchy, their quest for pay equity, and their move into senior academic and administrative positions has been slow. To be certain, there has been ongoing attention to, and improvement of progress for, women in the workplace in all sectors and at all levels, yet challenges remain and they have been stubborn. The integration of faculty work and family life, particularly for female faculty in postsecondary institutions, has been and remains a major focus of faculty members, academic researchers, administrators, and institutions and plays a significant role for increased representation and equity for female faculty.

The challenges facing women who yearn for an academic career, particularly a tenure-track one, can be associated with melding family and career. On the basis of insights from qualitative and quantitative research, it is clear that academic mothers face challenges at home and in the workplace when it comes to achieving greater parity and representation. Although faculty positions are flexible and enjoy great autonomy, tenure-track positions are time-consuming and can be difficult to manage. Structural impediments, workplace norms, and gender stereotypes can make the path for female faculty additionally

challenging. Women with children, in particular, can find traditional paths to academic success difficult to navigate.

Recent years have seen a significant research focus on work and family in the academic context as well as gender and academic careers. The topics range from pipeline perspectives,[1] academic mothers,[2] academic fathers,[3] and policy environments[4] to name a few. There have also been compendiums of personal narratives that address different aspects of motherhood,[5] fatherhood,[6] and motherhood[7] in various disciplines. Alongside these works stand the books that are the focus of this review essay, the edited volume by D. Lynn O'Brien Hallstein and Andrea O'Reilly, *Academic Motherhood in a Post-Second Wave Context: Challenges, Strategies, and Possibilities*, and Maureen Baker's *Academic Careers and the Gender Gap.* The former is focused on work and family issues while the latter addresses academic careers in general. A well-rounded conversation about work, family, and academic careers needs to consider individual, institutional, and societal perspectives. Reading these books in tandem provides a holistic and grounded perspective about the many facets that shape academic careers. The intent of this review is to use the information and insights from the books to highlight key issues related to work, family, and academic careers.

Academic Careers and the Gender Gap investigates different aspects of the academic gender gap – the difference between men and women as faculty. The book provides the necessary information to situate the gender gap over time, in different disciplinary contexts, in comparison to other careers, and in different countries. While not comparative in nature, it does draw on literature from liberal states (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, United Kingdom, and the United States) as a way to frame academic issues and to show persistence of the issues across contexts. Such a view points to the structural elements of colleges

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1. Mary Ann Mason, Nicholas H. Wolfinger, and Marc Goulden, *Do Babies Matter? Gender and Family in the Ivory Tower* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2013).

2. See my recent book with Lisa Wolf-Wendel, *Academic Motherhood: How Faculty Manage Work and Family* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012).

3. Margaret W. Sallee, "Ideal Worker or Ideal Father: Organizational Structures and Culture in the Gendered University," *Research in Higher Education*, 53, no. 7 (2012), 782–802.

4. Jaime Lester and Margaret Sallee, eds., *Establishing the Family Friendly Campus: Models for Effective Practice* (Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2009).

5. Elrena Evans and Caroline Grant, eds., *Mama Ph.D: Women Write About Motherhood and Academic Life* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008); Rachel Hile Bassett, ed., *Parenting and Professing: Balancing Family Work with an Academic Career* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005).

6. Mary Ruth Marotte, Paige Reynolds, and Ralph Savarese, eds., *Papa Ph.D.: Essays on Fatherhood by Men in the Academy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010).

7. Emily Monosson, ed., *Motherhood, the Elephant in the Laboratory: Women Scientists Speak Out* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008).

and university that are common in the liberal states. Researchers of academic careers are sure to benefit from the literature review alone as it is comprehensive and enhances the academic careers discourse with new information and broadened perspectives. As well, Baker uses the data from studies of Canada in 1973 and New Zealand in 2008 to provide examples and to show change (or lack thereof) over time. The theoretical grounding is derived from feminist political economy, social capital theory, and interpretive frameworks. The strength of the book derives from these different approaches and sources – a comprehensive literature review, unique theoretical grounding, data from two studies twenty-five years separated, and Baker's wealth of experience. In addition, Baker offers critical consideration of the academic context and postsecondary institutions overall. Any conversation about contemporary academic careers needs to consider academic structures, restructuring, and academic practices. Collectively, the data, theory, and background information in Baker's book provide a comprehensive perspective on the persistence of the gender gap, progress made, and the policies and practices in place to close the gap.

Hallstein and O'Reilly's edited collection, *Academic Motherhood in a Post-Second Wave Context: Challenges, Strategies, and Possibilities*, covers a broad range of topics related to work and family for female faculty including the personal and institutional challenges women face, the strategies women use to overcome the challenges, and the exploration of different theoretical possibilities. The book is by far the most comprehensive of the edited volumes that are related to work and family.[8] Also unique to this volume is the theoretical and methodological rigour that cuts across most of the chapters. The chapters relay personal experiences, but many also draw upon data from empirical studies and are grounded in a rich base of theoretical perspectives. Readers looking to relate to, and to learn from, personal narratives will find a wealth of connections while researchers looking for theoretical and empirical richness to augment existing research are sure to find new insights. The volume is far-reaching in terms of topics addressed. The authors provide perspectives on work and family and cover topics not always included in work and family volumes, including depression, widowhood, and dual career couples. In addition there are chapters related to policy and practice, intersectionality, theory, part-time work, full-time tenure-track positions, full-time non-tenure track, and organizational culture. The introduction to the volume is particularly informative as the editors situate work and family issues within a larger theoretical and societal context. I particularly found helpful their juxtaposition of the post-second wave context, intensive mothering, and ideal worker norms:

Contemporary women's status as post-second wave beneficiaries, the intensive and unbounded career-path and ideal worker norms of academia that center on achieving tenure and promotion, and the demanding and also unbounded requirements of the contemporary ideology of "good mothering," intensive mothering. Indeed, we argue that, when

8. Bassett, ed., *Parenting and Professing* and Evans and Grant, eds., *Mama Ph.D.*

the three factors converge – when post-second wave beneficiaries *are both* mothers and professors – a distinct-to-academia "perfect storm" of difficult and almost-impossible-to-meet challenges for academic mothers emerges where they try to have and manage "it all," which also makes academics a more challenging profession for women who are or want to become mothers. (3)

It is the perfect storm to which Hallstein and O'Reilly refer that makes issues associated with the advancement and equity of academic women so complex and stubborn to address. The challenges women face at work are compounded by limitations at home. Gender stereotypes in home and work spheres stymie the progress of women as professors.

Societal Norms

Although ideal worker and intensive mothering norms are not new concepts, Hallstein and O'Reilly's descriptions of how these concepts intersect within a post second-wave context in today's academic workplace (something they refer to as post second-wave split subjectivity) make perfect sense and provide a strong foundation to look at issues associated with work and family for faculty. The volume is well-integrated and theoretically rich across chapters. Often edited volumes, especially one of this length and complexity, can be disjointed, but this reads extremely well as an integrated whole. Mothering and academic careers cut across multiple life stories and perspectives and the book is broad and comprehensive in its inclusion of multiple perspectives. The volume gets inside the stories and the perceived choices people make with regard to working full time or part time, or in alternative careers or on tenure tracks. Numerous options and issues exist related to academic work and motherhood including variable personal experiences in addition to research perspectives, methodological approaches, and theoretical orientations. The authors' contributions are a rich combination of personal narrative, rigorous research methodologies, policy conversations, calls for change, and theoretical perspectives.

The strength of both books is their comprehensiveness in terms of data, theory, and research. A shortcoming of both is a similar challenge that exists in other works related to work and family – the need for more focus on intersectionality between and among women of different backgrounds (race, class, sexual orientation) within the academic context and also greater acknowledgement of the academic profession as one, generally, of privilege. There also needs to be great consideration of gender roles and how they manifest in same-sex couples. Joan Williams challenges discussions about work and family to be more inclusive with regard to class and race, to which I would add sexual orientation and gender.[9] While both books acknowledge careers beyond

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9. Joan Williams, *Reshaping the Work-Family Debate: Why Men and Class Matter* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

academic ones and realities beyond those of middle-class white women, they could be criticized for portraying privileged women complaining about luxury problems. I do not say this to sound harsh or to minimize realities that are extremely challenging; instead I offer it as a call for all work, family, and faculty researchers, including myself, to continue to strive for broader and more inclusive perspectives within research about academic careers as well as research that situates academic work within a larger context of work and careers. To be sure, there are challenges in the academic workplace that are real, valid, daunting, and sometimes horrific, but academic jobs can also be very rewarding and privileged spaces. Research projects need to recognize a myriad of perspectives.

The books are complementary in that Baker's work contextualizes the academic career and Hallstein and O'Reilly offer nuances specific to work and family. The persistence of the gender gap can be attributed, at least in part, to work and family concerns and to motherhood penalties academic women face as they navigate the academic career. Traditional socialization models dictate prescribed career progressions that include academic training, advanced graduate preparation and, depending on the field, postdoctoral training. Once in the academic profession, the traditional trajectory includes a tenure-track position that moves into associate and full professorships. While many start out planning such a trajectory, life happens. International fellowship opportunities arise that take people in a different direction, people get sick, budgets get cut, parents die, unexpected job opportunities arise, partners leave, lab equipment goes down, people get grants, and babies are born. Personal life happens. Academic life happens.

Professional, organizational, and personal circumstances can interrupt and change career trajectories for both men and women. Yet, there is a tendency to focus on personal challenges, including those involving work and family, as issues that affect women and their careers more so than men. To be sure, circumstances surrounding childbirth, breastfeeding, and parenting impact women differently than they do men; however, both men and women are typically part of family formation and development. Work and family discourses related to the academic gender gap need to broaden to include men and women. As long as work and family conversations are largely focused on women, by women, and for women, we will keep having the same conversations. As Kerri Kearney, a contributor to the Hallstein and O'Reilly volume, states, "the game pieces change, but the rules of the game live on." (89) For real and lasting change to occur, discourses about work and family in research, policy, and practice need to shift to include critical conversations about the labour of men and women at home and at work.

The authors of the books use different approaches to frame and discuss the academic context. To enhance understanding of the current academic environment, Baker provides details about the "socioeconomic and political context of university workplaces and recent restructuring." (46) She effectively

links the gendered consequences of university restructuring and the ways in which the rise in managerialism and corporatization perpetuate the gender gap, drawing connections between economic pressures, academic contexts, and the academic gender gap. Academic reward structures tend to advantage those faculty members who "devote long hours to the profession, to publish widely, and to remain fully employed throughout their careers." (66) Hallstein and O'Reilly talk about academic work within an ideal worker framework as put forward by Arlie Hochschild and Joan Williams.[10] Academic workplace and ideal worker norms dictate much of how people approach work and family. The ideal worker is one who is focused on work responsibilities without outside distractions, including family concerns. Although this image is neither realistic nor even ideal, the legacy of the concept permeates many contemporary academic workplaces and is often used as a way to position and think about work and family research. Hallstein and O'Reilly use the concept of "unboundedness" (21) to describe academic culture. Academic work is unbounded in multiple ways – it is unending, it can be done anywhere and anytime, and it is not clearly defined in terms of achievement which leads to ambiguity for faculty. The unboundedness of academic work, Hallstein and O'Reilly argue, makes it "particularly incompatible with motherhood because the lack of clear boundaries between work and family makes it difficult for academic mothers to manage 'it all.'" (21) Most mothers would add that motherhood itself can also have unbounded demands.

Post-Second Wave Contexts

Both books do a laudable job of situating women and work in larger contexts. Baker does so by providing background information relative to sociodemographic and policy contexts. As editors, Hallstein and O'Reilly excellently situate the topic of academic motherhood through their own contributions and those of the other authors. Through their exploration of second wave and contemporary feminism, the editors effectively address the importance of why it is timely to address and talk about topics related to academic motherhood. By using the term "post-second wave" the editors do not mean to suggest that feminism is over or that feminism is the cause of contemporary issues related to women and work; instead, they use the term to convey that the "contemporary context is one that is simultaneously split between new-found gains for women – especially for middle-class women with class, race, and sexuality privileges – and old family-life gender patterns and assumptions that discipline both men and women." (4)

Baker in *Academic Careers and the Gender Gap* and Hallstein and O'Reilly in *Academic Motherhood in a Post-Second Wave Context* offer critical and

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10. Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Time Bind: When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1997); Williams, *Reshaping the Work-Family Debate.*

feminist perspectives to examine the problems, opportunities, challenges, and possibilities related to being a female academic. Baker does so by using theoretical frameworks grounded in feminist political economy theories, social capital theory, and interpretive frameworks. Her work uses these frames to situate the work of colleges and universities within economic and political contexts shaped by globalization and privatization that are forcing changes in workplace structures.

Closing the academic gender gap and more readily addressing work and family issues calls for researchers, policy makers, administrators, and faculty members to fully explore and understand societal, academic workplace, and family norms. Hallstein and O'Reilly use post-second wave perspectives to explain the current societal context for women academics. First and second wave feminism have impacted college and universities (as well as other workplaces) to be more open and progressive when it comes to women in the workplace. While discrimination still exists on college campuses, it is no longer at levels that preclude women from entering the workplace or that exclude women once they have children. Legally workplaces have progressed to be more inclusive of women. The authors of both books point out how societal contexts have changed to be more gender neutral and inclusive of women (existing challenges not withstanding). I recommend the introductory chapters of both books for how they frame the larger social and societal context and how it impacts academic workplace conversations. Norms and structures in colleges and universities as well as academic work are shaped by larger societal forces.

Overall, female faculty are roughly equitably represented in junior faculty ranks, with considerable variability across disciplines, but the number of women declines at each step along the academic progress ladder. In what is often referred to as a 'pipeline' argument, the fewer women at any particular experience or leadership level, the fewer women are likely to be present at the next level above. Glass ceilings, disproportionate involvement in service, teaching, and advising, and the overrepresentation of women in part time and contingent faculty positions all come to mind as impediments to equity for women. Another reason that women do not persist into leadership positions or into the higher academic ranks is the perceived incompatibility between traditional workplace structures and motherhood. The challenge is between carving out a lifestyle where a woman performs her academic work in addition to a "second shift" at home, or modifying her professional career and aspirations by opting to work part time or not at all outside the home.

Ideal Worker Norms and Ideal Mother Norms

Baker takes into account some very important considerations about the academic marketplace overall, which is one of the forces Hallstein and O'Reilly address in relation to traditional academic norms. These are typically

associated with the ideal worker norms put forth initially by Hochschild and later used in my own work, as well as by many other researchers looking at work and family issues.[11] The premise of the ideal worker norm is that to be the ultimate worker, one is married to the job. Both men and women can be ideal workers and ideal workers are not limited to the academic workplace. In the academic context, ideal worker norms align with tenure-track expectations that also prompt ideal worker mentality, dedicated solely to academic pursuits while on the tenure-track. Baker's work situates the ideal worker in the larger academic context. Her chapters entitled "University Restructuring and Global Markets" and "Social Capital and Gendered Responses to University Practices," put ideal worker norms and traditional academic expectations in a context, helping to explain why simply adding policies or updating practices are not enough to create lasting and gendered change in colleges and universities.

Understanding work and family requires not only examining workplace norms that govern what it means to be a "good" academic, but also to neo-traditional family values (as put forth by Hallstein and O'Reilly) that dictate what it means to be a "good" mother. Colleges and universities can change and academic workplaces can be updated, but as long as women feel held to exacting standards and particular ways to be mothers that demand total dedication to the family, women who work, in any profession, will feel they do not measure up as either parents or workers. Neo-traditional family configurations place

the primary responsibility of household labor and caregiving on [women] even as they maintain their full-time employment within academia. In new and complex ways, then, while contemporary women's lives have been freed from a *domestic destiny* as mothers, academic women's lives have not been freed from *domestic responsibility* in their homes. Equally important, neo-traditional families are the new norm for many academic women, and this 'new' norm also creates complexity and tension for academic women, because it demands that women simultaneously meet the intensive demands of the new momism while also meeting the intensive and exacting norms and expectations of academia. (9)

Unbounded work and family spheres call for total dedication leaving women challenged to meet the unending demands of academic work and the greedy demands of intensive mothering. These realities operate within the post-second wave context and situate women between the promise for equity and acceptance in the workplace and the gendered realities of society and higher education institutions.

The timing of academic, as well as legal and medical, careers often leads to lifestyle challenges for women who hope also to pursue motherhood. An academic position requires considerable educational preparation – an undergraduate degree, significant graduate training, sometimes post-doctoral preparation – meaning that by the time a person is ready to assume a faculty

11. See my recent book with Lisa Wolf-Wendel, *Academic Motherhood: How Faculty Manage Work and Family* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012).

position and start up a tenure clock (typically around age 35), biological clocks have also started to tick loudly. Obviously, not all academics choose to have children or wait for a faculty placement to have children, but those who do wait to start a family until they have an established academic job may find that their tenure track position coincides with the prime remaining years for having children.

Lean In?

ANOTHER REASON THAT WOMEN are not as well represented at higher academic and administrative ranks may be that they self-select to remove themselves from positions and situations that would allow them to progress in the academic ranks, because they are concerned about a perceived incompatibility of academic careers and family lives. This is one aspect of the argument made by Facebook chief operating officer Sheryl Sandberg in her book *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*.[12] Sandberg points out that many women "sit back" from professional opportunities because they are concerned about how they might negotiate the challenges posed by those opportunities at some future time when they might want to start families. She encourages women to "lean in" to opportunity and to trust that they will be able to navigate the career machinations necessary when or if they choose to start a family. The advancement and accommodation for women in faculty ranks is difficult enough for women who "lean in" and pursue every opening and opportunity. If women choose to opt out of possibilities because of some potential future conflict, they compound the existing structural challenges they face and institutions suffer because they are not able to recruit and retain women. While some argue with Sandberg's point for her focus on women instead of the organizations where they work, the progress of women in the academic context will take a combination of structural change as well as individual women opting in to navigate in and through the academic system. The "perfect storm" that Hallstein and O'Reilly refer to as the comingling of variables (societal context, mothering norms, and ideal worker norms) that create barriers to gender equity are the same variables that need to be addressed to remedy the problem.

For women to truly progress in the academic ranks requires some fundamental rethinking about gender and work that privilege men as workers, and also about traditional family values that privilege women as caretakers. To create such a fundamental change calls for foundational shifts in what women do and to what men do both at work and at home. At the core, current challenges related to work and family are really about maintaining structures that privilege men at work and that situate women best at home. For years the system has worked and has benefited men both at home (because with

12. Sheryl Sandberg, *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013).

women as primary caregivers men remain free to pursue their careers as ideal workers) and at work (for the same reasons). In this calculus women are at home and men are at work – part of basic patriarchal structures that provide a foundation for societal norms and workplace structures that reinforce traditional gender norms at home and work. Even in same-sex couples it is likely that one partner will assume more mothering roles and those roles, regardless of who assumes them, are likely to be discounted given how they are perceived as incompatible with ideal worker norms. Broad based perspectives about work and family mean looking critically and in different ways about home-based work associated with parenting and ideal worker norms associated with academic work.

Many colleges and universities are grappling with how best to remedy gender gaps and how to help faculty integrate work and family. The findings and discussion in these two books provide a great foundation to facilitate conversations about next steps that consider individual, institutional, and societal perspectives about problems associated with gender inequity in the faculty ranks and how to best respond. Researchers, policy makers, and faculty themselves need to be constantly diligent about maintaining feminist perspectives that call for fundamental change in families and traditional gender roles as a way to create the change at home so that workplace structures can change as well.

The work of Baker in *Academic Careers and the Gender Gap* and of the various authors in *Academic Motherhood in a Post-Second Wave Context* provides the foundation for conversations that can prompt new kinds of thinking about work, family, and academic careers. For women and men to "have it all" as parents and professors calls for rethinking what it means to have it all and also what it means to be a good professor and a good parent. Reading these books in tandem can help readers understand, and hopefully bridge, societal contexts as well as the structural challenges at work as well as the structural challenges at home.