Sleepless in academia

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The conditions under which women academics work provide the impetus for this article. Current trends in feminist and other writing are moving us away from dwelling on the disadvantages women experience in the academy. Yet the findings from the two Canadian studies reported here suggest that issues around children and career, anxieties about evaluation, and fatigue and stress shape the daily lives of women academics. The women do find ways and means of coping and resisting, sometimes collectively, although one of the major responses—working harder and sleeping less—might be considered somewhat short of empowering. We also look at what the prospects are for changes in university policies and practices.

Introduction

> I mean, if I didn't have to sleep it would be fine. (Audrey)

> Well, I write … at ten at night till three in the morning. (Moira)

> There's a big portion of our work that we can do between two and three in the morning if we want to and if we can force ourselves to stay awake. (Natalie)

What has happened to concern about the plight of women academics? It is our impression that in Britain and Canada, at least, critical feminist attention has largely shifted elsewhere. Although a number of important monographs and edited books wholly or partly on women academics appeared in these two countries in the 1990s (e.g., Bannerji *et al.*, 1991; Davies *et al.*, 1994; Chilly Collective, 1995; Morley & Walsh, 1995; Stalker & Prentice, 1998; Morley, 1999) the pace of publication appears to have slowed in the new century.[1] A path-breaking recent British edited collection on gender and education (Francis & Skelton, 2001) contains no chapter on women academics. An informal look at the 2001 and 2002 issues of some key journals on gender and education, sociology of education, and higher education in the two countries suggests that only about one article per year per journal is devoted to this topic.[2] In this article we argue that times have not changed so much that we should abandon the effort to expose deleterious working conditions for women academics. In fact, the situation is quite the opposite: underlying structures and ideologies that

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work to the disadvantage of women in academe continue to exert a strong, if increasingly unheralded, impact.

Once we have set the stage by discussing the contemporary intellectual approaches to the study of women academics, we illustrate our claims by drawing on two qualitative research projects on Canadian women academics that we conducted in the mid-1990s. We contend that the concerns that surfaced in these interviews suggest that optimism about changing times needs to be muted. The women focus on obstacles that might have been thought to be settled matters by now, including home/work conflicts, anxiety about being evaluated, fatigue and stress. Why, in these changing times and after thirty or more years of feminist writing and resistance, do these problems appear to persist? We also examine the coping strategies the women use and question what more the university could do in policy terms to address the situation.

Our preferred perspective draws from the critical feminist policy rubric used by Bensimon and Marshall (1997). This stance puts a concept of the social construction of gender at the heart of the work, critiques conventional theories that fail to undertake a gender analysis, and infuses both the theoretical and methodological approach with a commitment to making women's experiences more fulfilling and productive. As a form of critical analysis, our approach attempts not to take for granted conventional university practices, thus (in a paraphrase and reversal of John F. Kennedy's famous dictum) asking not what women can do to themselves to fit into the academy but what the academy can do for women. Moreover, while recognizing that we will not be able to designate one story that is 'women's', we assume that (various) women in the academy are positioned in ways that reflect the impact of history and what Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) call the 'old norms', the traditional gendered expectations and understandings that linger even as new goals and beliefs arise. Aisenberg and Harrington use as an example of an 'old norm' the 'marriage plot' (in literature and life), by which they mean the idea that women's proper sphere is the private or domestic one with a major role of providing support for a significant male (pp. 6–7). Women have internalized this particular story, even as they also participate in the 'quest plot', the search for accomplishment and achievement in the public world.

The 'old norms' cannot wholly determine women's behaviour (for one thing, we would not then call them 'old'), as there are always sources of resistance and wellsprings of change. We also need to question how the 'norms' find expression in the everyday lives of women academics. A possible connection, we suggest, can be found in the concept of regulation. Barbara Grant (1997), taking a Foucauldian approach, describes the 'discipline' required of 'good' undergraduate students in the university. The 'student body' is shaped and regulated by an array of policies and practices such as examinations, timetables, rules and requirements. Through technologies of the self, the good student exercises control over herself/himself in tandem with the institutional regulation. This 'subject is constituted within multiple socially-produced and changing discourses, each of which produces a range of subject positions' (p. 103). Dominant among academic discourses are those that feature competition, individual achievement, striving for continuous improvement and placing of responsibility for success in one's own hands (Acker & Feuerverger, 1996; Davies, 2003). These Darwinian discourses may have their seeds in undergraduate education (Erwin &

Maurutto, 1998), but they grow in graduate school (Acker, 2001) and flower among academics. Both institutional and self-regulation operate to make the norms for women academics at once old and new. We intend to place some of the concerns expressed by the women we interviewed within this framework. We begin, however, by considering contemporary approaches to the study of women academics. There are three reasons why we might expect to find a diminished focus on women academics in the critical feminist literature. First, conditions have improved. Second, ideological and theoretical trends have altered the way we think and write about the topic. Third, other issues are taking centre stage.

The study of women academics

Change for women academics

Policy reform stimulated by societal change has improved life for women faculty members. They now rarely have to fight against nepotism rules that screen them out of jobs when their partners are in the same institution; they have maternity leaves and sometimes, in North America, the option of slowing the tenure clock.[3] Their representation in the university has risen. In Canada, the number of full-time faculty posts held by women has increased by 2000 since 1992, while those held by men have decreased by 5000 (Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 2002b, p. 25), although the decrease is due to male retirements rather than disproportionate female hiring. Women account for slightly over one third of new appointments, consistent with their representation among doctoral recipients in the past decade (AUCC, 2002, p. 26), and they are about 30% of all full-time academics. In Britain, figures from the Equal Opportunities Commission (2001) indicate that women were 32% of full-time and 47% of part-time academic staff in higher education institutions in 1998–1999. While in both countries, men still dominate higher ranks and managerial positions, women's representation at that level is also gradually increasing (Wyn *et al.*, 2000).[4] These changes make it more difficult to argue that women are a minority group within academe, subject to exceptional deprivations and degradations. Yet, as we shall see, certain disadvantages persist.

Trends in research

Research on women academics, especially in the United States, has frequently taken what might be termed a sex differences approach, whereby differentials between women and men in salary, publishing productivity, promotion chances and other characteristics and outcomes are documented, usually with large samples, and analysed (for examples, see Cole & Zuckerman, 1987; Sonnert & Holton, 1995. A recent Canadian instance is Nakhaie, 2002). While this body of research has the limitations of a largely liberal feminist approach of often focusing on the fate of individuals rather than the nature of structures, its strength is that it has enabled policy-makers and feminists to substantiate claims of discriminatory and unjust practices in higher education. The accumulation of multiple findings of disadvantages for women

support a less-individualized concept of a 'chilly climate' (Sandler, 1993; Wylie, 1995) for women in academe.

Other, mostly qualitative, approaches develop organizational concepts such as micropolitics or workplace culture (e.g., Acker, 1999b; Fogelberg *et al.*, 1999; Morley, 1999), or concentrate on narratives, wherein stories of being female in academe—with varying amounts of contextualization—are told by individual women (see Bannerji *et al.*, 1991; Davies *et al.*, 1994; Heward, 1994; David & Woodward, 1998; Kolodny, 1998; Stalker & Prentice, 1998; Christian-Smith & Kellor, 1999) or stitched together into a collective story (Acker & Feuerverger, 1996). Some analyses focus on the interpenetration of gender and other social divisions such as race or ethnicity (James & Farmer, 1993; Medina & Luna, 2000), generation (Looser & Kaplan, 1997), or sexual orientation (Bensimon, 1997). There is also a genre of advice to women embarking on academic careers which builds on research findings and suggests that academe is a difficult place in which to survive without support (Caplan, 1993; Toth, 1997; Collins *et al.*, 1998).

In light of the improved circumstances noted above, and given what is a voluminous literature over at least three decades, it may be thought that these lines of research on women academics have run their course: what more could be said? Are those who still insist on exploring the consequences for women of subordinate status in academe simply attached to victim status and chronic complaining (Acker & Feuerverger, 1996)? Luke (1999) posits that younger women, in particular, are more attracted to positive and affirming theorizations of gender than to 'the same old tired narratives of oppression, marginalization, and disempowered women favoured by older academic feminists' (p. 9). As if exemplifying Luke's point, Mavin and Bryans (2002) quote two women in the academic support group described in their article as not wanting to 'whinge' (p. 243) or be in a 'whingeing feminist group' (p. 241). The authors themselves created the group to go beyond identifying inequalities and to 'move on' (p. 236). And at the same time as we may be experiencing a downturn in sympathy for academic women's discontents, feminist research and theory has taken a distinctly different direction, influenced by post-structuralism and postmodernism. Locating the sources of women's oppression in structures of capitalism or patriarchy—as was popular in earlier decades—is now seen as capitulating to a false hope that a master narrative can be found (and thus corrected), while the coherence of the group, 'women', has been severely questioned, given the great range of ages, classes, races, religions, and other statuses found among any particular group of 'women' (see Dillabough, 2001; Paechter, 2001). Instead we are encouraged to ask what subject positions are available for women (in higher education, as elsewhere) and how discourses such as those about masculinity and femininity are organizing our thinking. The subject is seen as in flux and any coherent and generalizable experiences of 'women' in academe are too elusive to be captured and categorized.

A few recent works apply this perspective to women academics (Looser & Kaplan, 1997; Raddon, 2002; Ropers-Huilman, 2003). The postmodern turn has opened up an exciting new range of questions and exposed some assumptions that are now hard to defend, such as the sisterhood of women. It has drawn attention to the contradictory discourses that we are subject to and creators of: thus it no longer seems

quite so strange that academic women are doing better in the statistics yet still often miserable. Yet at the same time, the dominance of these theoretical approaches makes it more difficult for us to figure out how to examine the experiences of 'women', even when it appears that traditional gender expectations (the 'old norms') still organize institutional practices and 'women', when interviewed, protest about many of the same disadvantages found in much older studies.

Trends in university life

Thus far we have reviewed two possible explanations for diminishing interest in women academics: better conditions and theoretical trends that move away from conventional approaches to the topic. A third possibility is that other issues have captured the attention of scholars of post-secondary education. Certainly the higher education sector is experiencing rapid social change. Universities and colleges no longer enjoy sufficient financial patronage from the state to operate in the manner to which they were accustomed. Moreover the compression of time and space that constitutes globalization dictates that universities are competing in a world market for students and funding. They are now frequently seen as 'enterprises' to be managed by business principles rather than collegiality (Marginson & Considine, 2000), with students as 'consumers' and academics as workers subject to labour processes like increased accountability and work intensification. A feature of the global university is public demonstration of accomplishments (Blackmore & Sachs, 2000). In some jurisdictions—notably the UK and Australia—pressures to publish have been heightened by formal exercises that reward or punish universities and departments on the strength of research productivity. In North America, much of the scrutiny is individualized, as academics move through a career structure with elaborate points of assessment of their teaching, research, and to a lesser extent service.

There is now a substantial literature on the intersection of globalization and university work (see Scott, 1998; Marginson, 2000; Marginson & Considine, 2000). With notable exceptions (including Currie & Newson, 1998; Blackmore & Sachs, 2000; Brooks & Mackinnon, 2001; Luke, 2001; Currie *et al.*, 2002) the issue has been largely de-gendered. Either the threats to academics are seen to be related to global trends that are thought to transcend social divisions such as gender and race, or the writing takes place outside of the circles of feminist work that have hitherto produced accounts of women's experiences in academe.

In the next sections of this article, we review some illustrative findings from two recent Canadian studies conducted by the authors. What we get are results that appear in some regards to be throwbacks to the bad old days. We then return to some of the questions raised in our introduction, in an effort to determine whether academic women have come a long way—or not.

The studies

Two projects are reported here, both qualitative in approach. 'Making a difference' (MAD) was a funded project for which Sandra Acker was Principal Investigator.

Interviews were conducted with women and men in the four professional fields of education, social work, pharmacy and dentistry. Our interest in this article is confined to the women academics in faculties of education. Carmen Armenti's 'Women academics blending private and public lives' was doctoral dissertation research conducted across a number of subject fields but within a single university.

In the MAD study, forty-three women in faculties of education, located in five universities in four of Canada's ten provinces, were interviewed. Questions were asked about a range of experiences concerned with career, departmental culture, and academic work generally. Nineteen women were interviewed for 'Women academics', which covered some of the same ground but had a sharper focus on questions of balancing family and career.

In the MAD project, once a set of universities had been identified that gave diverse regional representation and included both major research-oriented universities and those expected to be more oriented towards teaching, lists of academics in faculties of education were derived from public sources. We worked with a largely purposive method of selecting participants (Mason, 2002, p. 138), whereby provisional quotas are set for 'types' of people to be included in the study based on the research question animating the study. Selection is often done in the field and can be modified as the study proceeds. In each faculty in the study, we wrote to all or nearly all of the women full professors (there were usually relatively few), later working our way 'down' through associate and assistant professors. If the faculty of education was large with a number of constituent departments, we selected individuals from a range of areas to secure broad representation. Persons who expressed an interest in being inter-viewed, either by contacting us after receiving an initial letter or responding to a follow-up telephone call, became participants. Interviews took place in intensive visits to the particular universities over a week or two.

In the case of 'Women academics', a list of names was retrieved from the university directory and the women were asked via electronic mail to volunteer to participate. The criteria for selection were that the women be in the ranks of assistant, associate and full professor within a range of departments including those from arts, social sciences, sciences and professional school faculties. A total of eight assistant, seven associate, and four full professors participated in the study.

All participants received and signed consent letters that spelled out procedures for safeguarding anonymity. Because of ethical concerns, we have chosen not to include much demographic detail in our discussion here or give tables with participant char-acteristics. The Canadian academic community is relatively small and women a minority within it. Too much detail could compromise anonymity (and in the case of Armenti's work, possibly lead to identification of the university). For the same reason, where relevant, minority group membership of some participants is only stated in vague terms. Where pertinent, we mention the rank of the women or their family role. In other words, we aimed to report information relevant to our arguments while protecting the participants.

In both studies, interviews were in depth and semi-structured, allowing respon-dents to include their own interests within the general topic area, and lasted from 60 to 90 minutes. This approach means that topics covered varied slightly from

interview to interview. We did not ask direct questions about 'sleeplessness', but found that many participants volunteered that information in the course of talking about other issues. Generally, the academics were keenly interested in the study and talked freely and sometimes emotionally about their working lives and personal circumstances. Interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. Using procedures common in interpretive analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Mason, 2002), transcripts were read and tentative codes developed. As themes were identified, based on a mixture of our reading of the literature, questions in the interviews, and emergent concepts (Tesch, 1990), transcripts were re-coded to high-light them and identify any sub-categories. The parallels in the two studies lead us to claim greater generality for our results than might occur with one study alone.

Certain limitations of the data need to be acknowledged. We did not speak with women on limited-term contracts; they may have a different view of the academy from their position of lesser security. Most of the participants in both studies were married or in a stable relationship and had children. Armenti's letter of invitation to participate specified the purpose of examining the interrelationship between career and family life, thus probably increasing the chances that respondents would be in such positions. Acker's study of women in faculties of education also probably over-represented women with children (compared to the situation in the university at large), as many participants had been school teachers before entering university life and had their children at that time. Nevertheless, there were younger faculty in that study with children born recently and also women with same-sex partners or who were single without children.

Endemic concerns

Home and work

In an excellent review of mostly American literature on the work-family interface for women faculty, Wolf-Wendel & Ward (2003) distinguish two types of studies: 'outcomes research', which is typically quantitative and relates family status to publication rates and other measures of academic success, and a more holistic approach that looks at how motherhood affects the woman and her faculty career as a whole. With its focus on experience and narratives, our study clearly falls into the second camp. Wolf-Wendel & Ward summarize the findings of studies in this group with some understatement: 'significant tension exists for women who combine work and family' (p. 121).

The 'significant tension' was strongly apparent in our interviews. Here we have an example of how 'women' are both alike and different. Only a few had traditional marriages where they did the lion's share of the housework or childcare, yet most of the women had some concerns related to having or caring for children and these needed to be understood within university structures that institutionalized career paths that did not take much account of family dilemmas. At the same time, the women in our studies were variously positioned with regard to the issue, depending on their own age, whether they had a partner and/or children, and the age of their

children. Age represented a major divide here, as in other aspects of our study (see also Carpenter, 1996; Looser & Kaplan, 1997). The 'older' women in our research (those between their late forties and early sixties) did not have major current concerns around balancing home, children, and work. In the past, though, these women suffered from little attention to their needs. They had struggled to get the universities to introduce maternity leave policies and day care facilities, or managed without.

Women of this generation tried to plan the timing of their childbirth so as not to interfere with the academic calendar year. Natalie[5] explained 'for the women my age almost all the babies were born in May and June because that seemed like the only safe time to have a child', while Paula notes 'I stabilized my career before I had children. And that was pretty deliberate. I didn't want to have the concurrent stress of trying to stabilize my career and having children'. Others reported being discouraged from having children at all:

> [A senior woman] gave me the best advice she knew how to give at the time, which was try to be more charming at parties to win their hearts and don't have a child … She just knew them well enough to know … if I walked around pregnant that would be my doom, and I'm sure, at that point, she was right. (Megan)

By the time of the interview, these women had resolved their domestic dilemmas. In contrast, younger women were either childless or were wrestling with the conundrum of having children and getting through tenure (see next section). Balancing the demands of children and career posed daily dilemmas for the women in our studies, as it did for women studied by other researchers (Leonard & Malina, 1994; Raddon, 2002; Wajcman & Martin, 2002). Wendy gave a vivid description of the combined pleasure and problem young children represent:

> One [child] has just turned six and one is going to be four. So, you know, it's getting better, but their demands are different … you know they want to tell you everything that happened during the day. And they still cling onto your legs or whatever other body parts, you know, you can't even sit down. And they want you to read to them. They want you to listen, like really listen … the little one, especially. She'll take my face in her hands and make me look into her eyes, you know. And so it's hard. And weekends, forget it.

Accessing day care was problematic for women faculty in the Armenti study (see also Hornesty, 1998), although rarely mentioned in the Acker research. It may well be that the situation was particularly difficult in the university studied by Armenti, suggesting again that the particular institutional context is important in shaping the possibilities for academic careers. In both studies, childcare was of particular concern for single parents. These quotations from two assistant professors who are single parents illustrate the dilemmas related to inflexible teaching timetables and babysitters:

> And I said to her [a senior colleague], I am breastfeeding my baby. And I said I would like it very much if you could do one thing for me. I don't care what time I teach, as long as it's not eight-thirty in the morning, so I can still do the morning feeding. Any other time: ten, one, night-time, whatever. I can get someone else to help me, or he'll be in day care. So when I get my schedule, everything's eight-thirty. (Grace)

> When I have to teach in the evenings, I just have to do it. The stresses come from that too, because sometimes the babysitter that I've lined up for the kids is not available or has got sick, and then I'll at the very last minute run around making arrangements for the kids. But that's what I'm saying—if I have to teach, well, I have to teach. But then, when

they are in bed at night, then I sit down and do my work for about two or three hours at night. (Kaila)

Commonly emphasized by the women in our studies were the high levels of stress, exhaustion, and sleeplessness associated with combining the building of an academic career with bringing up young children. For instance, Natalie said:

> When the children were little, it was very hard for me, because he [spouse] would be gone for three or four days in the middle of the week, and so in terms of getting the kids to day care, covering when they were sick, everything, you know, it was mine to do … I could only get about 5 hours of sleep [each night]. At the same time [as] you're trying to get tenure, at the same time [as] you're trying to get yourself established…you have small children at home … And that was quite difficult when they were young and when I didn't have much job security and was exhausted all the time.

Similar stories can be found in the (relatively sparse) literature presenting personal accounts of balancing academic work with parenthood (see Leonard & Malina, 1994; Coiner & George, 1998; Hornosty, 1998; Palmer, 1998).

Some of the young, childless women participants were contemplating starting a family. They tended to worry about how they could possibly manage children and career.

> If I have kids in the next year, how would I ever write that grant? I mean, there is a reality … [in terms of] the number of hours you have to put in, because I'm writing three grants, trying to get my papers out, trying to keep the lab going, doing my teaching, doing the service, you know, there's no way I could have kids in the next year. (Cynthia)

In their study of managers, Wajman and Martin (2002) report very similar statements from young childless women. For the academics in our research, a particular source of anxiety was the conjunction of the 'tenure clock' and the 'biological clock':

> Tenure. Tenure, tenure first. I think, like ultimately it's very difficult to do it [have a baby] unless you know you are well established and when you're trying to establish yourself and establish family at the same time, I'm not convinced it's something I could have done. (Rachel)

Several American studies (Finkel & Olswang, 1996; Williams, 2000) highlight the problem of the clashing clocks. Wolf-Wendel & Ward (2003) point out that this situation is a relatively new one for universities to come to terms with, given how few women with young children held tenure-track positions in the past. A related issue is an apparent tendency of women who are parents to keep quiet about it and even not to take up some of the policy reforms offered such as maternity leaves, for fear of harming their careers (Finkel *et al.*, 1994; Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2003). In Britain, Leonard and Malina (1994) comment that 'being a mother in academic life is a predominantly silent experience' (p. 30). Both the joys and problems of motherhood are suppressed (p. 31). Many of the chapters in Coiner and George's (1998) *The family track* indicate the same thing. The fear seems to be that colleagues will learn that the parent is not coping, and not coping is equivalent to not being an acceptable academic. Consequently, significant aspects of women's personal lives such as childbearing and childrearing are tabooed subjects in academia (Armenti, 2000).

As we have hinted already, there is an oddly old-fashioned sound to these expressed concerns about family and work. Women are no longer expected to interrupt their

careers and stay at home when children are young, nor do they confront the problems described by the older participants of no maternity leave or May babies (for more detail on the May baby phenomenon see Armenti, 2004). Yet they seem unsettled and exhausted, trying to keep up high academic standards and care for children. We suspect that one reason for the difficulty is the intensification and rising expectations that make up an academic career, especially in a research-oriented university, today (Gore, 1999; Blackmore & Sachs, 2000; Davis, 2003). Rising pressures can be discerned in the women's talk about evaluative processes—'tenure first'—and their impact on their sense of well-being.

Evaluation

As noted earlier, academics in the contemporary North American university face the constant scrutiny of their performance through mechanisms of tenure, promotion, and merit reviews (Morley & Walsh, 1995), which place great pressures on *individuals* to 'perform'. The new recruit to university faculty life in North America typically is assessed after a probationary period of three years or so, then if successful, allowed two to four more years before a full tenure review is held. The specifics vary across universities and departments,[6] as do the probabilities of success (generally high in Canada), but the outcome is highly consequential: the academic either has a job ('for life'—though there are circumstances under which it could be truncated) or must leave the institution a year later. Normally a promotion from assistant to associate professor occurs at or about the same time as gaining tenure. Other points of scrutiny also exist. Later in a career, a faculty member might be reviewed for promotion to the higher rank of full professor. In many institutions, annual 'merit' reviews also take place, sometimes with implications for salary increases. Nevertheless, the 'up or out' nature of the tenure review makes it a particularly important watershed for North American academics.

As with family concerns, age differences were evident in responses to questions about assessment of performance, especially around the extent to which tenure, in particular, was viewed as troublesome. This division is likely to be related to the increasing institutionalization of tenure procedures over the years. For example, at the University of Toronto, tenure reviews were systematized in the early 1970s, and faculty who had been hired earlier often got tenure 'by default' rather than going through a prescribed procedure (Acker *et al.*, 2002). It also appears that standards have been gradually rising. The consequence was reports of extreme distress by those who had passed through tenure reviews, for example Nicole's comment: 'I had such anxiety about tenure, I was so afraid. It was a visceral, palpable fear inside me'. The women assistant professors were obsessed with the tenure process, which shadows their lives in the early years of a career: 'The worry about tenure, it never goes away. I mean sometimes it gets pushed to the back of your mind, and the answer to that is to do it and get it, and then I think it will be less stressful' (Vanessa).

A few of the older women who had got tenure more or less automatically neverthe-less ran into roadblocks in being promoted to full professor later on. Iris, for example, described how during her career the 'rules got changed'. The criteria shifted from

working with students to getting grants and publishing: 'So I basically had to start from scratch and be qualified for that promotion again'. When asked what one needs to do for full professorship, she replied:

> [Y]ou're supposed to have, you know, a huge stack of articles in all the prestigious journals, first author of course on all of them. You're supposed to have x number of grants and graduate students and have this international reputation and be able to choose the people for referees that are going to give you good comments back.

Iris referred to the cost of being a mother, in commenting that it was difficult for her in the years that her children were young to do the international travelling and networking that eventually proved necessary for this promotion.

Apparent in the women's comments were concerns about self-esteem and self-presentation. Madeleine's anxiety was related to 'the fact that you have to keep justifying your existence, to outside agencies, even to your Dean'. Coiner's (1998) discussion allows us to make a connection with the family issues discussed in the previous section, as she describes 'coping well' to be one of the 'unspoken requirements for tenure'. However hassled, junior academics should 'look relaxed and on top of things rather than frenzied, fatigued, malcontent. We have to prove that we're ''one of them'' … Most of the untenured faculty I know believe that they would jeopardize tenure by making demands or simply by admitting the truth about the quality of their lives' (p. 240).

Obtaining tenure did not necessarily bring relief. Terri, for example, said that 'I still work about 78 hours a week which is crazy … I mean I'm in my mid-forties, I've got tenure'. [Interviewer: 'Do you have any leisure activities?'] 'No, in fact I used to do horseback riding and photography and I've just basically given them both up. I still do gardening … and my kids and that's basically it'. Terri could be considered to be 'self-driven', so much so that external regulation is no longer necessary. Apropos of this point, Leverenz (1998, p. 272) relates an anecdote about two colleagues of his making identical Freudian slips in referring to Foucault's important book, *Discipline and punish*, as *Discipline and **publish***. Both internal and external controls were operating in the institutions we studied. Merit award procedures, which existed in many universities, were a case in point. Money made available for rewarding 'merit' depended on an annual review and was often a set amount per department to be differentially shared out among members of that department. Typically, the monetary rewards were very small, but the process kept these academics feeling that they were under continuous review. The high level of scrutiny, combined with suspicions of invalidity, were disliked by our participants even as they tried to conform: 'We have to fill out this lengthy form, detailing everything we do. It's the most horrendous evaluation scheme probably in Canada. Then, the department head, without reading any of your stuff, or attending any of your classes, will give you a grade' (Alicia).

Heath and stress

Coping with the dilemmas described above exacts a toll on these women. Despite the fact that academic women are undoubtedly privileged in the larger scheme of things, something about their conditions of work is producing a high level of stress and

illness. Coiner (1998, p. 244) makes a relevant distinction between 'discontented women' and 'the nature of modern professionalism'. In other words, the complaints of academic women should not be ignored because other women are in worse shape: that these privileged women are beset by stress and illness may be telling us something important about the nature of (professional) work for women and the lack of fit still encountered even by the most fortunate of women workers. Nevertheless, there are very few studies that actually describe health conditions of women academics. Some of Currie *et al.*'s (2000) respondents reported 'health' as one area of sacrifice they were making for their work as academic or general staff. In a personal account, Gore (1999) writes: 'My life, like that of many colleagues, feels taut, almost to breaking point' (p. 17). Kolodny (1998) tells the story of her own battle with rheumatoid arthritis while a university dean of arts.

When asked what kind of health they enjoy, a minority of the women educators in the MAD project simply said that their health was good: 'My health is fine' (Mary); 'My health is very good' (Norene). At the other extreme were quite a few women who launched into detailed stories about illnesses. Rose described her arthritis, back trouble, and sinus problems. Georgina talked about allergies, joint problems, and difficulties related to menopause. Some participants had experienced serious illnesses or breakdowns: 'I developed … some kind of chronic, neurological problem, because I was extremely tired and having a lot of weird sensory balance problems' (Lucille).

A common theme in many of the responses is fatigue and burnout, sometimes related to high workload but often also connected to particular experiences or career stages that seemed to serve as a trigger. For example, Tamara stated: 'I have thyroid problems … [after a stressful experience in the university] it was at that point very severe; they told me I was lucky I didn't have congestive heart failure from it'. Women who were members of a minority group felt they faced additional pressures related to what Tierney and Bensimon (1996) call 'cultural taxation', the extra work that is expected of these academics in trying to mentor and support minority students and themselves serves as a symbol of achievement. In Alicia's case, these expectations were added to a harassment situation: 'Because of his harassment I actually burnt out and had to take medical leave … The burnout was diagnosed as chronic fatigue syndrome … you know, I've been carrying an overload in many ways [being a minority] … [I am better now but] I have to be really careful not to fatigue myself. I've always had difficulties with allergies … it became very severe … I was so sick'.

Health issues could readily be related to the family/work and evaluation issues discussed earlier. Olivette, a senior professor, comments about the impact on younger women of dealing with family and work in a context of rising expectations:

> I feel [the pressure] on a personal level, but I can see for young professors who have young families, young children, they are completely overwhelmed by the effort they have to make. They do it, they do it very well, except that they suffer from stress, from exhaustion which is really dangerous in my opinion to keep up for many years … The women in the departments do not seem to be in good health as a general rule. I look around me and I find that worrisome to see the fragility of health that comes with this type of double role, especially with young ones.

As we note elsewhere in this article, younger women with children themselves spoke of stress and strain (and sleeplessness) from their dual roles. Susan, an assistant professor with several children, specifically identified her job as a source of declining health:

> I came in as a very healthy, energetic person [six years ago]. When I was carrying the bulk of the program … I was starting to get very tired. I was exhausted, mentally, and my blood pressure was just sky high. I nearly keeled over in class one time. So I had to go on pills … and I've had really bad heart palpitations … [then two years later] I got my blood pressure under control and then my arthritis started so I couldn't exercise anymore.

Lack of sleep played a role: 'Well, sometimes I don't get to bed till three and then I get up at seven if I have an eight-thirty class. There's no other way I can do [the job] [describes her administrative responsibilities]'. Like Alicia, Susan was a woman with a minority heritage and her administrative position working with minority students meant 'I'm here [in the office] all the time. I gave up taking lunch hours long time ago, many years ago'.

For women juggling the pre-tenure years of an academic career and young children, fatigue was a major problem: 'They're what I call the brain dead years because people would tell me all the things that happened and I would say it did? I just don't remember much about that time … I was tired all the time' (Vivian). Associate professors with young children also experience exhaustion. Janice explains that the reason her young daughter wants to be a housewife is 'because I'm always so busy and I'm always so tired'.

Even younger women without families spoke of the incessant pressure. Helen commented: 'I think current, untenured academic life is quite stressful and draining and demanding, and that it fills all of your waking hours'. Bella's response shows the impact of self-regulation: 'There's guilt when you don't work on a Saturday. I would find myself in my office for 12 hours during the regular school year and so what happened was that I was too tired to go to the gym'. Similarly, Cynthia notes: 'Right now I'm hitting a heavy stressful time, I'm just working all the time'.

Two of the women experienced serious mental health issues connected with tenure reviews:

> It's incredibly undermining and incredibly destructive what they did … I tried to survive and basically went completely off my tree after about three months. I had a complete nervous breakdown. (Lisa)

> By the end of it all [appeal of tenure review] I had quite a full case of clinical depression … over a year's time I slowly but surely had been transformed from a very positive individual to a very negative individual … Most of it was lack of appetite, difficulty sleeping, nausea and vomiting when I came to work. I was always fine at home in the morning. And it was not until I actually got in the building that it would strike me. (Brigid)

Most of the participants found it difficult to separate 'illness' from 'stress' in their answers and almost all agreed that academic life was, or could be, very stressful. Barbara, who said she was 'healthy as a horse, colossally healthy', still went on at length about the stresses of academic life: 'I think it is bad because you never feel good enough … Am I good enough? I'm not good enough, constantly, not good enough. I constantly feel not good enough'. In describing her career Vivian claims that 'it

haunts you, it consumes you … with research being the primary focus of a lot of what goes on here there's always sort of a threat to your self-esteem that somehow you are just not quite smart enough'. Some of the women tried to analyse what it was about academic life that caused the difficulties. Like Barbara, Beth invoked the internalized feelings of never doing enough providing the motivation to excel. Beth believed that academic life 'just selects a certain type of personality. If you're gonna succeed in academe, you're very self-driven, and you're never doing a good enough job'. Other answers implicated the reward system, the diversity of responsibilities, and the lack of boundaries.

Ruth's answer was particularly interesting as she made a distinction between current and past circumstances, pointing to the intensification of contemporary workloads as well as the rise in accountability mechanisms:

> I got to a point where I was exhausted, there was nothing left in the reservoir. I looked around and I thought where is my personal life? … I think [the university has] been a very unhealthy place in the last years. Being asked to do more and more, being criticized increasingly, being told we don't trust you in a number of ways … Policies essentially say we don't trust you, you're not trustworthy, therefore this policy must keep you in line … I'm convinced that our merit system is kept in place because it permits the control to be held by the deans and the heads.

Writers on the subject of women and higher education often try to describe what it is about the environment that creates these tensions for *women* academics. Raddon (2002, p. 387) comments that 'women academics with children are both positioned and positioning within complex and contradictory discourses', notably the discourses of the 'successful academic' and the 'good mother'. Currie *et al.* (2000) describe a 'peak masculinist discourse (one that operates from the top of the organization) … to normalize high workloads and a prime commitment to the institution' (p. 289). Similarly, Wolf-Wendel & Ward (2003) write that 'the professorate [sic] presumes a singularity of purpose' (p. 113). They also tackle the question of why university practices might be more problematic for women than men, returning to the greater impact on women of 'the simple logistics of age, the biological clock, the tenure clock, the physical demands of pregnancy and childbirth, the gendered expectations of family obligations' (p. 113).

Whatever the pervasiveness and perversity of the demands for total work commitment, the women in our studies needed to develop ways to work within the system. In the next section, we look at some of the strategies they described.

Coping strategies

How do the women faculty respond to the difficulties in their lives? In Bagilhole's (1994) study of women academics in Britain, three strategies were identified: working harder, identifying with male rather than female professionals, and collective action. Our women, like Bagilhole's participants, relied mostly on the first of these strategies. In fact, the primary approach which all of the women appear to use is to work harder and longer—well into the wee hours of the night. The references to getting up early and going to bed late evident in the quotations below were replicated in many of the other interviews:

[How do you manage?] Well I write … at ten at night till three in the morning. Last night I came back at eight and worked till midnight. Sometimes I have breakfast meetings with students at eight in the morning. I don't have another life; my life when I get home is my children. (Moira)

[How do you manage to balance home and work?] Well that's why I stay up till three in the morning. 'Cause I have to wait till the kids are in bed before I do my admin stuff. I'm the only driver in the family … I have to do the running around, pay bills, and get groceries. Sometimes you can see me at A&P if it's open till midnight getting groceries … Saturday morning I'm up seven doing the laundry. (Susan)

Many of the women with young children describe leisure time as time spent playing with their children. Those with partners negotiate a division of labour. Carol, for example, said '[My husband] takes care of [my daughter] half time and she's in day care or preschool half the time', while Iris, whose husband is now retired, commented 'I've found that has helped enormously because he is an excellent house-husband, shall we say, and he cooks and he basically does most of the household things now, and my children are all gone now as well'.

As noted earlier, some contemporary writers stress the importance of identifying sources of agency and empowerment as well as (or instead of) sources of oppression. Raddon (2002) believes that it is not only conflicted subjectivities that come from the competing discourses in academic life but also some empowerment, as women academics with children do manage their daily lives and create spaces for accomplishment, although she too notes that what they do is not usually politically driven. We found some evidence of resistance and collective measures. There was a tradition of quiet sharing whereby women gave career advice to other women. Irene noted, 'I'll say to them, 'Well, you're coming up for P and T [promotion and tenure] and if you want me to take a look at your CV and make some suggestions about it, I'd be happy to do that'. Solange said, 'As a woman there's this feeling of responsibility for the ones coming up in the ranks. It's not enough to do the research and publications and teaching and committees, we have to look after the new ones who may lack self-confidence'. Similarly, Nicole explained that moral support from female colleagues made 'all the difference' for her and she tries to continue the tradition: 'I feel it's a debt that I want to pay … It's a question of constructing an identity for women in academe'.

In addition to these instances of one-to-one mentoring, some women found groups of colleagues or networks that gave them support. In one university, the female faculty established a women's caucus, a women's studies program, and a research centre. The same women endeavoured to expand the maternity leave plan and to reduce the teaching and committee workloads for junior women faculty.

In another university, Kay described how women academics banded together through a faculty union committee: 'At the first meeting we identified women who were coming up for tenure and [contract] renewal. And we organized a workshop for them to get their materials together. So we're trying to get structures in place, so we're all working towards mentoring each other'. The group also devised a strategy for getting women on some important university committees: 'We decided as a group that we wanted women on those committees. So we asked particular women to let

their names stand, and then we tried to do block voting. And we got four women on one and three on the other'.

While it is important to identify these pockets of resistance, it is also important to note that not all universities displayed such collective action. Perhaps it requires academics with a feminist commitment and a lot of stamina to spearhead such initiatives, and perhaps the nature of the institution plays a role. Needless to say, it is difficult to undertake such initiatives on top of sleepless nights.

Conclusion

We began this paper with a plea that the concerns of academic women not be allowed to fall through the cracks, even in the face of improved conditions, impatience with complaining, and changing interests and theoretical frameworks of researchers. We believe that postmodern warnings about essentializing women are broadly compatible with the generational differences and family-role differences that we highlight—i.e., not all women are the same; yet the similarities are also substantial. We readily admit that academic women are not the wretched of the earth; in contrast, they are in extremely privileged positions. Yet if these women experience their lives as threaded with misery, what hope is there for other women who have not had their advantages? And why is it that academe still seems unable to adjust to its two-gendered population?

The results of our two studies have been combined here to highlight the particular lines of discontent that stand out. The 'old' norms that associate women with family and childcare are still operating in a way that makes it difficult to be both a mother and a faculty member. This is not to say that we have not made enormous progress. Not long ago, it was barely possible to combine these two lifestyles. We seem to have arrived at a kind of turning point as women now make up around a third of academics and their numbers are climbing. Demography is on our side. As the older generation of academics—primarily made up of men—begins to retire in large numbers, women's proportional representation will continue to increase (Acker, 2003), bringing greater normative pressures to solve these problems. If the severe shortages of faculty that have been predicted over the next few decades (AUCC, 2002) do occur, there will also be a greater onus on universities to find creative ways of recruiting and retaining new populations. If there are larger numbers of younger women (especially those who have been brought up to believe they are entitled to succeed in all spheres), it follows that there will be more demand for maternity leave and family-friendly policies. The tendency of younger men to take a fuller part in family care than their fathers did should work in the same direction. Our guess is that it will be necessary to arrive at a point where these cases are frequent rather than occasional; if they are rare, then we have the phenomena described above of May babies, postponing family building until after tenure even at the risk of infertility, and not taking full advantage of progressive leave policies or talking about family-related conflicts for fear of not appearing 'good' enough to deserve tenure or other opportunities.

One change required will be a concentrated effort to examine systematically and take seriously university practices that contribute to a gender regime that has worked against the interests of many of its members, especially the women. This

conversion will not be easy, as deeply embedded in the idea of the university is a meritocratic discourse. Individuals are judged on performance, and differences in their capacity to perform are discounted. Typically, and ironically, a meritocratic discourse incorporates gender-blindness in the name of fairness. There would have to be a philosophical shift towards taking into account that not all academics are working from equivalent and neutral conditions. Given the difficulties affirmative action policies have encountered, we may not be able fully to accomplish such a shift in thinking. Moreover, to treat women as a homogeneous (and disadvantaged) group contradicts the postmodern understanding that individuals have multiple and shifting subjectivities and positionings. The editors of *The family track* admit that in contemporary times, wholesale reform is unlikely, yet 'we can implement those policies that cost little; we can work toward half- and quarter-measures; we can manoeuvre creatively within constraints; and we can raise consciousness about family-care issues' (George & Coiner, 1998, p. xxiv). Wolf-Wendel and Ward (2003) describe areas where policy reform has taken hold in some American universities. Changes include attention to course and meeting schedules, creative leave and tenure policies, commitment and training for department heads and senior administrators and better childcare. Many universities have not yet given sustained thought to prioritizing such policy changes. The university where Armenti did her research did not even have comprehensive childcare arrangements for faculty.

Practices that are not at first glance gender specific also need to be examined through the lens of gender analysis. Evaluation processes are prime candidates here. Even those writers who identify the North American tenure process as particularly pernicious usually stop before suggesting that it actually be abolished. Tenure has a strong symbolic function and is usually associated with academic freedom, essentially the right to have unfettered access to the world of ideas, even unpopular ones, without fear of dismissal (Acker *et al.*, 2002; Horn, 1999). Efforts to abolish tenure in the United States (in particular institutions or states) are mostly in the service of institutional flexibility and are usually met with significant opposition. Yet when combined with the global trends towards competition between universities, financial cutbacks, and increased scrutiny of performance, what has happened is that the process by which tenure is obtained has become a tormenting ritual that seems to have gone out of control. It is augmented by merit reviews and in some American institutions, post-tenure reviews as well. In current circumstances, we see people who have been achievers all their lives, who are already highly committed to excellence and productivity, risking their health and happiness to arrive at ever higher and ever more mystified performance standards. There is more than a little connection here with the surveillance that Foucault (1995, original 1975) describes as a key element in power networks (see also Davies, 2003). McLaren (2002) writes that although surveillance begins as an external practice, 'part of its effectiveness relies on its moving "inside" through the self-monitoring of the individual being watched' (p. 108). As such, it impacts on the body—in the case of our participants so much so that they adopt a process of going without sleep that in some cases ends in or accompanies health risks. Again, it may be that in a buyer's market as shortages bite, some of the 'disciplinary practices' will have to be reviewed. We hope a creative approach will be taken and that

universities will not see reform as tantamount to compromising excellence. The new rhetoric of the family-friendly university (Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2003) and the modest moves towards improving the quality of life or work-family balance apparent in some universities such as the University of Toronto in Canada are promising.

Also required is a more public acknowledgement of the counterproductive nature of pressures on academics that result in illness and stress. Illness among academics, women or men, barely reaches the research literature and is not high on university agendas. For the general public, scepticism is likely to be the response, given the image of academic life as a privileged space. Yet if our findings are a guide, there is a huge problem waiting in the wings. In the 'Making a difference' study, men were also interviewed and (despite the conventional association of men with shorter lives and heart attacks) they were much less likely to describe illnesses than the women were. We do not think that their jobs are tearing them apart in the same way that they are impacting on the women. There are many possibilities to explain gender differences here, some demographic: the men are more often older and more established in senior positions; while the women are more likely to be junior and more heavily subject to the rising standards of scrutiny in these 'new times' (Luke, 1999) in universities. 'Old norms' and new pressures add up to enormous difficulties balancing responsibilities for children and academic careers and these usually fall more heavily on women than men (although there were a few men in the MAD study who were caring for children and aware that they, too, were disadvantaged). We can expect eldercare issues to become more prevalent, as well, in the next few decades. Workload is an additional problem (Acker & Feuerverger, 1996). Women in the MAD study generally felt that they worked harder than the men, in part because women students expected them to serve as models and mentors. As women in the field of education at the time of the study were generally about one third of the faculty, but two thirds of the students, the stage was set for overload. Workload is thus another practice that appears gender neutral but which needs re-examining with the subtleties of gender in mind.

There may also be even deeper reasons why women academics are at risk. As relative newcomers, they are 'outsiders in the sacred grove' (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988) and subject both to a felt need to prove themselves up to the task and to the contradictory and conflicted expectations of colleagues and administrators. Because women so often have to prove themselves worthy, there is an argument that they have internalized a stronger need to follow the rules (even extending to the well-known careful penmanship among schoolgirls). The fatigue reported by our participants parallels closely that found in many studies of (mostly women) elementary school teachers (McPherson, 1972; Steedman, 1987; Nias, 1989; Acker, 1999b), where it appears that to be very tired is virtually a job requirement of a committed teacher. Similar experiences of women in different occupations can alert us to generalized gender expectations that may transcend individual workplaces and relate to gendered expectations in society at large (Acker, 1999a). Feminist theorists, some following Foucault, have described ways in which the female body is regulated by a myriad of daily influences, including the cosmetics, fashion and diet industries (McLaren, 2002). Discomfort in a new environment is added to general unease about how women should present and project themselves in any environment. Ironically, the

care of the body called for by many of the socially regulating consumer-oriented institutions directly contradicts the sleeplessness strategy described here, although there is a resemblance between starving oneself to be thin and going without sleep to produce a better curriculum vitae.

Finally, it is of key importance to break the silence. The women's movement has been doing exactly that for the past forty years and yet taboo topics still are evident. Going without sleep will not change things but talking about it might. Current feminist tendencies to want to move to victory rather than victim narratives may be misplaced so long as victory is a long way off.

Notes

1. Nevertheless, there are still recent publications on the topic coming out of other countries such as Australia and New Zealand (Brooks & Mackinnon, 2001; Luke, 2001) and the United States (Ropers-Huilman, 2003).
2. Journals examined included *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, *Gender and Education*, *Resources for Feminist Research*, *Studies in Higher Education* and *Women's Studies International Forum*.
3. See the later section on 'Evaluation'.
4. In 1999–2000, women comprised 12% of professors and 24% of senior lecturers and equivalent researchers in the UK (*Times Higher Education Supplement*, 2003); the closest equivalent in Canada would be full professors, of which women were 16% in 2001 (AUCC, 2002, p. 21). It is difficult to compare countries because of different definitions of rank and different conventions in collecting statistics. Even within a country, statistics from different sources are not always consistent.
5. We decided not to identify in the text which study each person participated in, as it would be tedious to have such repeated references. For those interested in sorting out which statements come from which project, here are the pseudonyms in the article grouped by project. *Making a difference*: Alicia, Bella, Beth, Georgina, Grace, Helen, Iris, Kaila, Kay, Lisa, Lucille, Mary, Moira, Nicole, Norene, Olivette, Rose, Ruth, Solange, Susan, Tamara, Terri, Wendy; *Women academics blending private and public lives*: Audrey, Brigid, Carol, Cynthia, Irene, Janice, Madeleine, Megan, Natalie, Paula, Rachel, Vanessa, Vivian.
6. Typically the candidate submits all published work, a cv, a narrative of accomplishments and a teaching dossier (a record of student course evaluations, course outlines, teaching philosophy, etc.) Appraisals by internal and external reviewers of the scholarship as well as letters from former students are sought. A tenure committee evaluates the evidence and makes a recommendation to higher levels of management.

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