

DUELING CLOCKS: MOTHERS ON THE PATH TO TENURE

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Abstract:

The research study that is the basis of this paper looks at the experience of academic women as they attempt to combine the demanding roles of motherhood and tenured careers in academic institutions. Through in-depth interviews with five academic mothers, participants identified supports and barriers that they experienced, and discussed the structures that they felt would be most helpful to academic mothers. Framed by a critical, feminist theoretical perspective and informed by the researcher's experience as a woman in a doctoral program, the aim of this research study is to promote equity and systemic supports for academic parents in general, and particularly for women who choose to embark on academic careers while raising the next generation in this global society.

Résumé

La recherche sur laquelle ce papier est basé examine les expériences des femmes dans le monde universitaire (mères universitaires) qui essaient de combiner les rôles exigeants incombant à une mère de famille et celui d'une carrière titulaire dans des institutions universitaires. À travers des entrevues de profondeur avec cinq mères universitaires, les participantes ont identifié les supports et barrières qu'ils ont vécus ainsi que les structures qu'ils pensent seraient le plus utiles pour des mères universitaires. Encadrée par une perspective théorique féministe et informée par les expériences vécues par la chercheuse, comme femme dans un programme doctorale, l'objectif de cette étude de recherche est de promouvoir l'équité, en plus des supports systémiques, pour des parents universitaires en générale et particulièrement pour des femmes qui choisissent de s'embarquer dans des carrières universitaires, tout en élevant la prochaine génération dans cette société globale.

Introduction

Women's participation in academe has increased visibly over the past few decades. A higher percentage of women learners in universities and colleges is not, however, reflected

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by an equal increase in women faculty, particularly in high-ranking positions. This trend is documented consistently throughout higher education and lifelong learning research (Laster, 2010; Stalker & Prentice, 1998), with recent research highlighting barriers facing women attempting to balance child care with the work of tenure-track academic positions. Demanding publication schedules, ambiguous tenure policies, a lack of professional and personal support, and time constraints on child-bearing (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004) are commonly cited barriers.

This paper is based on research that explores the experiences of women who are mothers of young children and hold academic positions. While gender is at the forefront of this analysis, the notions of universality and diversity add further complication to the feminist issue of role balancing (David, 2011; Wilkinson, 2009). Women are a diverse group in terms of class, race, sexuality, culture, ability, and socioeconomic status, so while they are distinct in ways from men, women are diverse in gender construction and experience (Acker, 1997). Some women experience marginalization on multiple levels, and while this is beyond the scope of this study, diversity is discussed further in the paper in terms of research participants. Challenging the patriarchal traditions in academic settings from a feminist perspective requires consideration of other forms of marginalization: race, ethnicity, religion, class, and ability.

The purpose of this research is to discuss supports and barriers identified by women academics who are mothers to young children; their experiences in terms of balancing the role of mother with academic; and supports that they feel would help mothers working in academe. The data was obtained from a qualitative, critical feminist research study set in eastern Canada. There is an international body of literature regarding women balancing child care and academic employment, particularly in the United States and Europe (Acker & Armenti, 2004; Cooke, 2004; Perna, 2005), as the pressures of neo-liberalism in academe emphasize competition and personal accountability in the workplace. This research brings an eastern Canadian perspective to the existing literature.

The academic tenure system reflects a typically male life trajectory in which one does not often have significant caring responsibilities. “Academic careers have traditionally been conceptualized as pipelines, through which young scholars move seamlessly from graduate school to tenure-track positions. This model often fails to capture the experiences of female PhD recipients, who become tenure-track assistant professors at lower rates than do their male counterparts” (Wolfinger, Mason, & Goulden, 2009, p. 1591). A student who moves through his or her degrees with minimal interruption (another patriarchal expectation) is likely to complete a PhD in his or her thirties. Therefore, women who want to have children may be doing so as students with minimal funding, or as junior academics with little to no job security. Those who decide to put their career on hold for family may be allowing their PhDs to grow stale—deeming them undesirable for employment.

Working women with young children often find child care issues to be of significant concern, no matter the occupation (Hartmann, 2004). An academic with a tenure-track position often has non-traditional work hours and demanding publication expectations. Once a tenure-track position is obtained, academics are expected to be highly productive during the first five to six years of their career to achieve tenure. Otherwise, they risk losing

their academic position, opportunities for job security, and possibilities for advancement. Thus, some women who pursue an academic career face the dueling tenure and biological clocks.

A review of relevant literature and academic policies regarding parental leave and tenure was the first step in this research study. Interviews with participants and analysis of the responses followed, all through a critical feminist theoretical framework. As part of this framework, it is important that I, as researcher, identify my place in the research. I write from the perspective of a white, middle-class, educated woman who plans to pursue an academic career. This research is relevant for me as I hope to have a family as well as a career in academe. Therefore, research that supports women and their challenges as working mothers has personal significance and interest. Creating space for discussion about issues of role balancing and support for working mothers is the first step in challenging systems of oppression.

Literature Review

Much of the role-balancing literature in adult education publications refers to “work–family” balance. While this certainly applies to one’s children, elder care has become a popular topic over the past 10 to 20 years (Doress-Worters, 1994; Misra, Lundquist, & Templar, 2012). This research study focused on the balance of academic positions and child-bearing/-rearing (or child care as it may be referred to throughout the paper). Focusing on elder care responsibilities for women is an important topic for future research.

In adult education research, several themes emerged from publications regarding academic mothers: the gendered division of child care and housework, the unequal treatment of women in academe, sources of support for women, the influence of neo-liberalism in academic institutions, and tenure and family-friendly policies (Aycan & Eskin, 2005; Home, 1998; Tripp, 2002). Following is a brief look at this literature.

Gendered Division of Housework and Child Care

Recent research on women’s learning trajectories shows that while women continue to increase their presence in the labour force, they often maintain traditional caring roles as well (Correll, Benard, & Paik, 2007; Jacobs & Winslow, 2004). According to Correll et al. (2007), the notion of being a “good mother” conflicts with employment productivity, whereas men often benefit from combining family life with a professional career: “Since the ‘good father’ and ‘ideal worker’ are not perceived to be in tension, being a parent is not predicted to lead to lower workplace evaluations for fathers” (p. 1307). For men, families often represent stability; for women, families may represent a lack of productivity and time conflicts. These gender ideologies are common discussion points in feminist research and play a major role in the division of household labour (Arrighi & Maume, 2000; Loscocco, 1997; Nordenmark & Nyman, 2003; Stalker, 2001; van Emmerik, 2002).

In educational and sociological literature, both the home life and academe are considered to be “greedy institutions”—a term first coined by Rose and Lewis Coser (1974)—creating challenges for women who decide to raise children while pursuing a

career outside the home (Franzway, 2000; Rasmussen, 2004). Academe has been deemed a “greedy institution” because it demands a high level of time and commitment. The system itself is gendered and does not account for individual situations. Comer and Stites-Doe (2006) found that many working mother participants viewed motherhood as a major barrier to the progression of their careers. This struggle for balance is experienced by many academics (Stalker & Prentice, 1998), and some feel it begins when women are still students (Sloane-Seale, 2011). To ensure that women have the ability to engage in lifelong learning and pursue careers in academe, it is important that they themselves identify the barriers working against them and that we as an equitable society work to make supportive changes.

Unequal Treatment of Women in Academe

Elements of academic careers can both encourage and inhibit mothers from obtaining a tenured position (Gouthro, 2002; Sutor, Mecom, & Feld, 2001; van Anders, 2004). While flexibility and autonomy are seen as benefits, with flexibility comes a sense of obligation to work long hours during evenings and/or weekends: “There are always articles to read, papers to grade, syllabi to update, and proposals to write. Work never ends in terms of quantity” (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004, p. 245). Young and Wright (2001) identified timing as a pervasive theme for women struggling to balance work and child-bearing/-rearing roles. According to Armenti (2004), academic women are “hiding maternal desires in order to meet unwritten professional standards geared toward the male life course” (p. 223).

Perna (2005) looked at differences between family structure and career promotions for male and female academics, and found that women academics had significantly lower marriage rates than their male colleagues. A tenured academic career requires years of work and publications. This may be problematic when combined with the other “greedy institution,” family life, which typically demands more of women than men (Stalker & Prentice, 1998). Feminist literature suggests that women academics are increasingly expected to work within a patriarchal, hierarchal system that values productivity and careers without interruption (Acker & Armenti, 2004; Cotterill & Letherby, 2005). However, it is not only gender that impacts women and their experiences in the workplace, but multiple intersecting factors such as gender, class, race, culture, and ability (Briscoe, 2009; Guo, 2010; Skelton, 2005).

Sources of Support

The current neo-liberal influence of individual choice and responsibility for one’s actions (pervasive in Western culture) means that women may stay silent about their role-balancing struggles as opposed to collectively challenging society’s oppressive structures, particularly when job security is tenuous. In academe, until one achieves tenure, full-time positions are rare and part-time positions have little job security from year to year (Perrons, 2003). Institutional supports for academic women will benefit not only them, but the institution as a whole because the faculty feel valued and secure.

Modifying maternity policies in universities is important, but not enough. Maternity leave policies often do not assist women later in their careers: “While maternity and infant

care leaves provide some flexibility around the time of childbirth, these policies do not help with the management of the day-to-day needs of and responsibilities for children over time” (Young & Wright, 2001, p. 567). On-site daycare is one type of support that could assist faculty members with young children. When these types of institutional supports are unavailable for women, they turn to other sources of child care, such as extended family (Young & Wright, 2001), domestic workers (Luxton, Rosenberg, & Arat-Koc, 1998), and community daycare programs (Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006). The issue around power and employing domestic workers is a complex theme that deserves a research study unto itself; however, it is briefly discussed later in this paper. Sources of support and open dialogue regarding the challenges of balancing work and child care are critical to the success of women in academe.

Neo-liberalism in Academe

Neo-liberal ideals remove the distance between the market and the state in today’s society and impart economic rationality on the social sphere. Within a neo-liberal context, greater emphasis is placed on individual responsibility for making “wise choices” and the ability to compete effectively (Saunders, 2010). The influence of neo-liberalism can be seen throughout universities in the competition for grants and promotions, the focus on productivity and output, and the perception of students as knowledge consumers and faculty as overworked producers. Critical and feminist theorists draw attention to the dangers of neo-liberalism in education, arguing that the focus should return to emancipatory learning and social justice (Gouthro, 2009; Plumb, Leverman, & McGray, 2007).

To contribute to society’s rapid growth and efficiency, universities tend to focus on programs that have a higher market value, such as business and information technology. Unfortunately, women faculty are often disproportionately represented in the departments that are considered to have lower market value. In 2006, women represented 49.9%, 42.0%, and 41.3% of all education, fine arts, and humanities faculty, respectively, whereas the numbers for engineering and applied science, and mathematics and physical sciences were 12.0% and 15.2% women faculty, respectively (Canadian Association of University Teachers, 2010).

Universities attempting to save money hire part-time and contract faculty members, increasing the pressure on women already struggling with multiple commitments to work harder for tenure-track positions (Mason & Goulden, 2002). Part-time and contract positions lack job security, are poorly paid in comparison with tenured positions, have little support for research (Waltman, Bergom, Hollenshead, Miller, & August, 2012), and at times even lack access to office space and basic resources such as computers and telephones (Lacy & Sheehan, 1997). So what seems to be a viable option for working mothers in academe (part-time employment) may actually be a case of working many hours with little benefit or support.

Discourse in feminist theory highlights the damage done to women’s careers and experiences under such narrow, oppressive systems (Feigenbaum, 2007; Skelton, 2005). Women in academe are confronted with patriarchal ideals and values throughout their careers, a value system that is further enforced in a neo-liberal context (Gouthro, 2005).

With emphasis on commercial and industrial economies, the knowledge and contributions of women (particularly working-class and minority women) are heavily disadvantaged (Jackson, 2003), and the learning that takes place in the home is undervalued or disregarded.

Policy

In a study involving self-employed women, Loscocco (1997) found that it is not necessarily having multiple roles that contributes to work–family stress, but the notion that work and family roles do not easily fit together, combined with a lack of policies designed to support employed parents. In an academic context, existing policies should be revisited to ensure that the needs of faculty (both men and women) are equally addressed. Policies regarding parental leave, flexible schedules, and child care are critical, as are tenure policies, which have often been labelled confusing and unclear (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004). A clearly articulated and flexible tenure process would help to even the academic playing field and challenge the stranglehold of neo-liberalism. Support for academic mothers (and fathers) is part of fostering a happy, healthy, motivated workforce.

In an attempt to secure a coveted tenured appointment, academics may feel pressured to sacrifice other parts of their lives, at least temporarily. Academic mothers find themselves working not only a “second shift” of housework and child care, but also a “third shift” of scholarship after the children are put to bed at night (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004). Feelings of stress, exhaustion, and hopelessness are reported by many academic mothers in various global contexts (Gouthro, 2004). Part-time options with adequate supports, tenure-track extensions, and tenure-clock-stop opportunities would help ensure that women can fill multiple roles more successfully.

Methodology

This research study was designed and conducted through a critical feminist theoretical framework in which oppressive systems are identified and challenged for their inequitable treatment of women, and in which alternative practices are suggested for a democratic society. An essential element of feminist methodology is the use of voice—privileging those (women and other marginalized groups) who are often silenced (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Kirby & McKenna, 1989; Smith, 2006). Some feminist research studies, including this one, employ narrative inquiry as a methodology that challenges power issues (Kim, 2008). Participants are viewed as subjects telling a story rather than as objects being observed (Savin-Baden & van Niekerk, 2007), and stories are a way for individuals to make sense of their experiences within a socio-cultural context.

This research was also informed by Smith’s (2006) institutional ethnography as a way of starting research from within the lived body and experience and looking outward to the systems that influence daily behaviour and actions. Beginning an analysis with the individual challenges the more traditional patriarchal theoretical perspectives with which one begins with a general theory and applies that to the individual (Smith, 2006). Participant voices and stories were the starting point of this qualitative analysis.

This methodology, informed by critical feminist perspectives and institutional ethnography, helped to address the following research questions: How do women academics incorporate child care into their demanding climb up the tenure-track ladder? What supports are available for women combining child care with their academic career? What supports should be put in place to help women combine work and child care roles? For a sample of women academics in eastern Canada, what has been their experience of role-balancing academe and children?

Following a literature review and analysis of academic tenure and child care policies, I conducted semi-structured interviews with five academic women from Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia. Putting out a call for participation resulted in a purposive sample of women at various stages of their careers from differing disciplines: the arts, sciences, and humanities. Their shared characteristic was that they all had at least one child under the age of 10. All participants self-identified as white and heterosexual; the sample was quite homogeneous. While this may speak to a lack of diversity in academe, I feel it may also show a reluctance to share their experiences, particularly when they may feel further marginalized by other factors (gender, culture, religion, ability, etc.). Due to the significant concern of participants being identified, detailed descriptions of the women are not provided and care has been taken to remove any identifying factors.

Feminist researchers note the importance of representing the lived experiences of women and diverse voices, and developing change-oriented research (Nielsen Glenn, 1998; Smith, 2006; Taber, 2005). Supporting working mothers involves challenging power structures and systems that continue to hold women at a disadvantage in the workplace. To identify where change is needed, power imbalances first must be identified, preferably by those involved in the research.

Findings

Transcripts of the interviews were reviewed extensively through qualitative analysis to identify pervasive themes in the responses. The literature review themes introduced earlier in this paper were evidenced in participant responses, and there were a few emergent ideas. While there are similarities among the women's stories, feminist theorists (Mojab, 2005; Ng, 1993) remind us that we cannot group all "women" together under one umbrella of experience.

Gendered Division of Housework and Child Care

All participants in this study drew satisfaction from their careers and did not regret their decision to combine work with raising children, although some mentioned that they would have enjoyed spending more time at home during their child's first few years: "I envy people in countries, like Norway and France, where there is much more support from the government in terms of having job security and more financial support if you decide to take more than one year of [maternity] leave. I don't feel that any of that is built into academia in any way." Participants returned to work early due to work and financial requirements: "I had to. Maternity leave was short and I couldn't afford to take leave without pay." Despite often taking only a short time off, participants continued to be responsible for most of the

housework and child care: “The house is one hundred percent my responsibility and work ... I’m not getting anything done because I’m teaching and running the household and trying to find snippets of time for work.”

One participant’s husband took over most of the household tasks while her focus became their child. This was not explicitly discussed, but rather “happened naturally that way.” She believed the assumption that the woman would be the primary caregiver to be quite typical: “I think most of the time the woman does 80 to 90 percent of the child care ... because it’s always been me, then I still do it. It’s not on their brain ... but it’s on yours.” Although there are different reasons among the participants—more flexible schedules, natural division of domestic work, breast-feeding babies, traditional gender roles—all women found themselves in the position of primary caregiver for their children.

Some participants were very aware of an imbalance in terms of the division of housework and child care, despite having conversations about equity: “I said to him, ‘you have to help; you have to do half.’ He said he would, but I knew he was lying at the time, not because he wanted to lie but because he can’t; because of his job.” Single mothers working in academe feel the strain of being sole provider and carer for their families: “A lot of my fellow colleagues work around 90 hours per week; I can’t do that. I do work a lot of hours, but a lot of my hours are spent with my kid as well. There is some anxiety for me around that.”

Unequal Treatment of Women in Academe

One participant who had children as a post-doctoral fellow found herself at a financial disadvantage as she “was on fellowship money; soft money,” and there were no maternity leave guidelines built into her position. Another woman who started her family early in her career talked about the fear of losing her part-time position: “I couldn’t let go of a course because I wasn’t guaranteed that I’d have it again. They would hire somebody else ... so I really had to do it.” Women are often expected to return early to work and demonstrate a high level of productivity, regardless of life circumstances. This trajectory may be possible for some colleagues, but not as likely for an individual who is the primary caretaker of children.

Participants who were tenured before having children felt less stress in the workplace: “My career is so stable now that it allows me freedoms that I didn’t have [before].” Increased job security is certainly a benefit to obtaining tenure first, but this can raise concerns about age and fertility: “We didn’t have an idea of time around my career. My child was born when I was [in my late thirties], so the biological clock was ticking. I wanted children and there wasn’t a lot of time.” Despite the years of study and dedication required for a career in academe, life choices and personal situations do not appear to factor in to professional policies.

The flexibility that often comes along with an academic career can work both for and against women with children. As one participant stated: “I do think that a career as an academic gives you that flexibility.... I think we all work at home; we’re working all the time.” However, this flexibility can also signify an expectation to work irregular hours. One woman talked about weekend meetings: “It just doesn’t even get discussed. If there’s

advising on a Saturday then you should be there just like everyone else.” A single mother discussed working at home after her child was in bed: “Bedtime is at eight o’clock.... On average throughout the year I work from eight to ten or ten-thirty on four or five nights a week.” Working late into the night was a common trend among the interview participants, albeit one that cannot be sustained: “I can’t do anything between ten o’clock at night and two in the morning anymore; I’m exhausted.” Instead of forcing employees to meet the requirements of a capitalist workplace environment of productivity, the policies and politics of a professional workplace should support the lives and needs of its members.

Sources of Support

Women in this study described varying levels of support from their partners or ex-partners (all male), ranging from complete responsibility for all child care and housework, to having a more equal distribution. However, despite discussions about the division of work, all participants claimed they were primarily responsible for child care: “I am responsible for all of [the child care]. I just met a woman at a conference who said, ‘It’s not at all like we thought, is it?’ I meet women all the time like that. We have this idealized view of motherhood ... it just doesn’t happen.” The degree of support from partners is in part dependent on their work demands: “He does his best to leave work, but the truth is that he simply can’t sometimes; he may be on call in which case I have to be there.”

One participant and her husband employed a nanny to help with child care and light housework: “That worked out very well, but could only happen because we both had well-paying jobs. She was wonderful ... just a huge support. I started going back part-time and then full-time, so she would come in the morning and also clean up the house a bit. When I came home, some of the things that I needed to do were already done.” In this case, where time is scarce, financial stability can help ease feelings of stress. However, financial stability typically comes only with more senior positions. A single mother reported that while she could not rely on her ex-husband for frequent support, his occasional involvement gave her short periods of time to work: “When my ex takes the kids, I work that entire weekend. I see that as an opportunity to move ahead with my research.”

Several participants talked about the lack of role models (working mothers) in academe, which further perpetuated the silence around role-balancing stress: “Even now if we have a department meeting that runs late, I have to leave and pick up my [children], and I’m the only one saying that. With the other people in my department, if they have a small child the other parent doesn’t work. So I’m the one seen skipping out ... it’s awkward.” Having other mothers in an academic department does not automatically create camaraderie, however: “Some women are very much like ... ‘I have managed to balance these things, so I am better than you.’ You’re supposed to suck it up; there’s no empathy.” Tenuous policies and support from the institution create an “every-woman-for-herself” attitude; one that reflects neo-liberal, capitalist values of competition and individuality.

Neo-liberalism in Academe

A focus on competition and productivity reflects marketplace values whereby faculty are producers (of knowledge) and students are consumers (of knowledge). Said one

participant: “We’re letting a scientific business model run the world and that’s the problem. It’s completely inhumane and everything is reduced down to dollars, dollars, dollars.” Competition for research grants, pay raises, and time for research create an environment where everyone is held to the same requirements: “When you’re in that tenure-track rat race ... it’s all about time, and you have to produce.”

Neo-liberal philosophy infers that motherwork and the private sphere are invaluable and unproductive: “Just like the reproductive labour of women, the reproductive labour of the institution [creating the next generation of scholars] is not valued.” Research is more important than teaching; grant money more than student evaluations. One woman talked about the lack of value for child-rearing when sitting before a hiring committee: “There was some discussion around those few years when I was home with kids. There were questions around my CV and the gaps of productivity there.” If women are increasingly made to feel that their home life is unimportant—detrimental, even—there may be fewer and fewer women seeking academic appointments.

Policy

When participants discussed academic policies, they mentioned both tenure policies and maternity/child care policies. Daycare was a popular topic—one that was often critiqued: “Daycare should be subsidized and arranged much better in this province for everyone, but at the university level I think that that is something they could do.” Child care policies differ by country, and each Canadian province has guidelines for availability and subsidization of public child care. Each participant spoke of the need for child care services on campus, although only one was able to enroll her child due to their age requirements: “Here on campus they take them a little older; we couldn’t come here until [my child] was two.”

Perhaps more important than the existence of supportive policies is the clarity of those policies: “There is nothing in the collective agreement that says, ‘When you do this, time will stop. When you come back, the clock will start ticking again.’ There’s no set rules so that you can be assured there is a process in place and you will not be negatively impacted.” In Canada, some research grants have parental clauses, but university policies appear more inconsistent. Mothers are performing some of the most important work of all, and society as a whole benefits from the work of mothers who raise productive, conscientious citizens. We must challenge societal structures that keep the power in the hands of the dominant few and that keep women from recognizing their full potential as working mothers.

An analysis of policy documents from the national government, university collective agreements, and two granting organizations supplemented the interview findings. According to the federal government of Canada, many working women in Canada are eligible for a one-year maternity leave during which they receive a percentage of their average income. Those who receive funding through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada can interrupt their award for either an unpaid maternity leave or paid parental leave. The Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada gives researchers the option to apply for part-time grants to help balance family responsibilities. For post-doctoral fellows, “the agency will provide parental leave

supplements paid out of grants within six months following the child's birth or adoption to eligible students and postdoctoral fellows who are paid out of agency grants and who are primary caregivers for a child" (Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, n.d.). Having clear guidelines for students and professionals can reduce stress and uncertainty. In contrast, the two university collective agreements reviewed for this study had unclear and vague parental policies.

Discussion and Suggestions

Along with the five themes identified in the literature review and findings, a few additional ideas emerged from the participant interviews. Issues of power and privilege arise when discussion turns to the employment of domestic workers to assist in child care and housework. This trend can perpetuate a power imbalance among women and reinforce patriarchal standards in the workplace. While some women may feel that they are successfully balancing their multiple roles, they may be exploiting the work of another woman to do so. Some feminist researchers have shown this to be problematic, as caregivers (particularly from other countries) are often poorly paid (Gouthro, 2009) and may be leaving their own children behind in order to provide care for another family: "The survival of domestic service in Canada today is politically determined by the lack of adequate and good quality childcare services as well as the continuing availability, through immigration legislation and practices and discriminatory labour laws, of a cheap and vulnerable source of foreign domestic servants" (Luxton et al., 1990, p. 83). While not within the scope of this research study, these discussions are important and may be an avenue for future research.

Another theme emerging from participant responses is the notion of elder care (referred to briefly earlier in the paper). The "family" in work–family balance does not strictly refer to children, but can also reflect the so-called "sandwich generation" of adults who also care for elder relatives, or simply elder care alone. This adds another element of responsibility for adults (many women) who are already over-committed (Doress-Worters, 1994). The current academic structure of moving seamlessly from a full-time doctorate program to full-time tenure-track employment represents masculine socio-cultural ideals and disregards the varying life trajectories and caring responsibilities of men and women (Wolfinger et al., 2009). Part-time employment and assistance getting back into the academic system should be options for academics who want to continue on the tenure track, free from stigmatization.

As previously discussed, using feminist methodologies involves privileging the voices of women. In this study, it was the participants who identified what they felt to be the most important supports for academic mothers. Each woman believed that on-site, reliable, flexible daycare was an essential and practical way to alleviate stress associated with balancing work and children. As one woman pointed out, academic jobs often require relocation: "You rarely end up where you started. So many women end up with no family support." On-site care is, therefore, important and valuable. Participants felt that some university daycare centres provide spots for staff and students over faculty, which can be problematic: "They should favour faculty first because the faculty is the productive part of the university.... I should know that if I'm having a baby there's a spot for my child. That would be a huge, huge relief." With child care so hard to obtain and so costly in some

Canadian provinces, academic institutions have a responsibility to their faculty to provide these supports.

While child care is a support at the practical level, participants felt that deeper, systemic change must occur to shift the current thinking about what it means to be an “academic” and to truly support working mothers. The work and lifestyle choices that are currently rewarded in academe must be separated from the current capitalist model of production in society. As succinctly put by one participant: “The researchers are running the institutions because that’s where the money comes from ... We have to change the [academic] mindset. That’s the challenge and it’s going to take a lot of work. Change the meeting times which is doable and fast, but changing the mindset is going to take longer.”

Conclusion

The intent of critical feminist research is to raise awareness of power imbalances and to question and challenge how knowledge is created, as well as who creates it and for what purpose (Hatch, 2002). If work and lifestyle trajectories continue to be based on narrow neo-liberal ideals and the privileging of production over reproduction, lasting change is unlikely. How to shift away from the powerful influence of the neo-liberal era is an important question. Changing the structure of academe and how one ascends the ranks is key, as earlier identified in a participant quote. More diverse qualifications for tenure and a lesser focus on publications and research alone may help level the playing field. Creating space for these discussions is the first step to challenging the marketplace values that have become so pervasive in society.

The intent behind this research was to identify perceived supports and barriers (as identified by women themselves) to combining an academic career and raising children. There are limitations in terms of the number of women interviewed—five—and that the sample was purposive and homogeneous in terms of sexuality and race. The women were all educated and of a higher socio-economic status, but this was to be expected in research about academics. For future study, participation from a larger, more diverse sample would be essential. This may involve extending the research geographically. The women who kindly participated in this research created a rich, thick description of their lives as academics and mothers and clearly identified changes that would support academics (women and men) and parents (mothers and fathers). Feminism is not about duplicating male support structures for women; rather, it is about supporting women in ways they deem important.

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