

# **The Family Life of Academics: Gendered Priorities and Institutional Constraints**

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# Outline of Talk

- Background
- Methodology behind paper
- Family Demography of Academics
- Balancing Work and Family
- Context: Academic Priorities & Practices
- Conclusions

# Background

- High levels of education & job commitment generate dissimilar patterns of family formation by gender
- Educated men: high marriage & fertility rates
- Educated women: low marriage & fertility rates
- Regardless of education, women make more work-related concessions for family reasons

# Academics and Gender Gap

- Full-time academics: good example of high education and job commitment
- Profession becoming more gender balanced but:
  - Women have higher attrition rates in doctorate & junior positions
  - Fewer have doctorates and tenure-stream jobs
  - Lower rank and salaries than men
  - Lower publication rates (especially peer reviewed)
  - Women report less career satisfaction (advancement possibilities)
- Main question: How does gender gap relate to family circumstances?

# Methodology Behind Presentation

- Survey of international literature on academia, gender gap, mentoring, work-life balance
- Qualitative taped & transcribed interviews with 30 academic men and women in New Zealand (not completed yet)
  - Academics work in 2 universities ('research' university & 'teaching' university) in social sciences and humanities
  - All academic ranks of full-time teaching/research staff

# Family Demography of Academics

- More academic men married with children (than academic women & other male professionals) – still marry down in age & qualifications
- More academic women single, childless, divorced, single parents
- When partnered, more academic women in dual-career marriages
- Women's partners more often other academics who work longer hours & make more money
- Women with tenure-stream positions have lowest fertility rates (part-time women moderate rates, doctorates outside labour force highest fertility rates)

# Balancing Work and Family

- Academics gain 'social capital' from educated spouses but marriage asset for men's promotions but women's 1<sup>st</sup> job
- Pregnancy & infant care interferes with job searches, tenure, publishing, international conferences, subsequent promotions for women more than men
- Young mothers more often teach part-time (but cannot always move into full-time positions when they want)
- Married/partnered women take more responsibility for childcare & domestic work than academic men do

## Balancing Work and Family (cont'd)

- U of California study (Mason et al 2006): women faculty aged 30-50 worked 100 hrs/wk compared to 85 by men (academic work & childcare/domestic work)
- Hours did not converge until age 60
- Family stress leads to work stress (elevated in pre-tenure yrs)
- No gender differences in partner support for career but women report less partner support for parenting & domestic work
- Many women lack knowledge of university policies on work-life balance or are afraid to use them
- Instead, academic women delay or forgo childbirth, work part-time, divorce, gripe among themselves, or leave academia

# Context: Institutional Priorities & Practices

- Publishing most important for promotion but gender differences in PhD & publications (quantity, peer-reviewed & perceived importance)
- Also important for promotion:
- Geographic mobility (job searches & better job offers) but women more often 'trailing spouse'
- Favourable mentoring experiences
  - Male doctoral students report that PhD supervisor was supportive & published with them but more women report lack of supervisor interest in topic, discrimination & harassment
- Working in 'research' university & dept with research culture
- Specialising in particular area of research (enhances publishing)
- Career longevity (women enter late, leave early)

# Audit Culture, Neo-liberalism & Managerialism in Universities

- Corporatizing universities: a benefit or new obstacle for women?
- More 'objective' promotion criteria and new mentoring programmes but:
  - Downsizing (women's studies, education, languages)
  - Dual labour market (research only vs. pt-timers)
  - Greater priority to research outputs and peer esteem
  - International focus in research & conferences
  - Backlash against affirmative action?

# Conclusion

- Academic gender gap reflects combination of related family circumstances & institutional practices
- For promotion: full-time career, peer-reviewed publications & career longevity
- Gender gap diminishing but continues to reflect the typical domestic division of labour and gendered academic priorities