

Do Babies Matter: Gender and Family in the Ivory Tower

Mary Ann Mason, Nicholas H. Wolfinger, and Marc Goulden
New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2013

REVIEWED BY KRISTIN MARSH

In *Do Babies Matter? Gender and Family in the Ivory Tower*, Mary Ann Mason, Nicholas Wolfinger, and Marc Goulden provide the most comprehensive evidence to date that both gender and family status do matter—a lot—for career prospects of aspiring academics in the U.S. Moreover, the relationship is reciprocal: career achievement, in turn, affects family formation for both women and men. The findings in this volume are the result of over ten years of research. The authors analyze available data from the Survey of Doctorate Recipients and survey over 8,000 tenure-track faculty in the University of California (UC) System. The result is conclusive evidence that academe is not structured to accommodate family, particularly for mothers.

Who is impacted most, and at what point in their career and life trajectories? The authors organize their study around various career stages: graduate school, getting a job, achieving tenure, and post-tenure years. Their overall findings are that family impacts career in various ways: new motherhood exacts a career penalty on women in their early careers, while fatherhood does not deleteriously affect men's careers. In comparison with all men and women without children, mothers are much less likely to land a tenure-track job to achieve tenure, and to be promoted to full professor. They are also more likely to find employment as contingent faculty or fall out of academe altogether. Regarding family formation, Mason, et al, establish empirically what is observable in many of our local workplaces: Women who achieve career success are less likely than men to marry and have children. While professional-aspiring women may prefer to opt against motherhood, the additional factor of a historically rigid career trajectory renders the choice moot for many. That is, even with the most strictly-adhered to time-line, a new hire will not likely earn tenure before the age of 35, and many find themselves 40 or older before their careers are secure enough to start a family. Our career and biological clocks are in direct conflict, to the extent that a successful career impacts family formation for women academics to a greater extent than for women lawyers or doctors.

Mason, et al, call on universities to accommodate an increasingly diverse graduate student and faculty body. Today's graduate students are just as likely to be women as men and are more likely to be in dual-earner families than in

the past; therefore, graduate students increasingly “desire flexibility and balance between their careers and their other goals” (8-9). Academe remains an institution with expectations for complete career commitment and marginalization of family needs. This affects women more than men, and women doctoral students know it. Women put off having children at higher rates than do men. And women in their study were much more likely than men to cite concerns about work-family balance and the incompatibility of career and parenthood. They fear that, as mothers, they would be seen as less committed academics. Graduate students report wanting women faculty mentors to role model “how to” effectively balance family and career. This is tricky: if women pay a career penalty for parenthood, they are unlikely to visibly perform their motherhood at work.

Beyond establishing these patterns in academe, the authors’ goal was to facilitate change. They worked with the UC system to implement more flexible career-trajectory policies. Mason, et al, dedicate their final chapter to over-viewing which policies are increasingly common and which are rarer but important for family-status equity, from paid maternity leave, health insurance, and “stop the clock” tenure policies, to part-time tenure-track appointments, emergency child care on campus, and childcare grants for conferences. Additionally, faculty should be aware of their options and feel supported in those options by departmental colleagues and administrators. Finally, the authors call for the accommodation of diverse pathways into, out of, and back into academe. As the authors state, “[t]rue parity could only be achieved when men and women realized the same professional **and** familial goals” (3).

The contributions of this small volume are seminal, as the authors pull together otherwise disparate pieces of a larger puzzle. Moreover, the authors differentiate effects of gender from those of motherhood. They neither find nor claim that gender discrimination no longer exists; but motherhood is the most salient factor in activating gendered career inequities. Readers of the *Journal of Motherhood Research* already know this (Volume 6.2, for example, is on motherhood in academe). What broader scholarly discourse has yet to fully accept, however, is that motherhood matters as a distinct category of analysis and identity, and as a key factor in understanding inequality at work.