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Gender, Work-Family Overload, and Stigmatization: Academia as a Revealing Organizational Case

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Work and family domains not only interact, but also vie for attention, impinging on each other in demands of time, energy, and loyalties. The conflict is bidirectional—work-to-family and family-to-work—and higher for women compared to men. Academia is a revealing, organizational case for the study of gender and work-family overload and conflict. Academic work entails high expectations and sets conditions for conflict (Fox et al., 2011). First, normative expectations are that the ‘ideal academic’ gives priority to work, has few outside interests, and pursues work single-mindedly. Second, the work role is highly salient to faculty members’ identity, and makes them responsive to the demands of their work. Third, organizational standards of evaluation and reward can heighten the striving for achievement. In academia, standards of evaluation are often both ‘absolute and subjective.’ This means that evaluative criteria can be vague, with clarity of evaluation tied to informal factors such as frequency of speaking with faculty (Fox, 2015). These conditions are not gender-neutral. Women report higher conflict between work and family. Further, factors predicting work-family conflict vary in interesting ways by gender in the effects of 1) marriage, 2) ages of children, and 3) senior compared to junior rank (Fox et al., 2011). Implications exist for interventions of childcare supports, by age of children; expectations that accelerate (rather than diminish) with higher rank; and tenure leave policies that operate differently in potential stigmatization and outcomes by gender.

References:

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- M. F. Fox, C. Fonseca, and J. Bao. “Work and Family Conflict in Academic Science: Patterns and Predictors Among Women and Men in Research Universities.” *Social Studies of Science* 41 (2011): 715-735.