Faculty Members With Young Children Need More Flexible Schedules

By Jennifer Freyd

ON MONDAY, my colleague looks guilty and embarrassed as she sneaks out of a faculty meeting at 5:10—a meeting that ends, after a crucial vote has been taken, at 5:45. On Tuesday, she attends the first 40 minutes of a colloquium that begins at 4:30. On Wednesday evening, she misses a research seminar altogether. On Thursday, she sits through the first half of a university committee meeting. By Friday, it seems almost normal when she cannot attend the department party from 5:00 to 7:00.

I recognize the anxiety my colleague experienced on Monday—she had only 20 minutes to get her young daughter from the child-care center before its 5:30 closing. I recognize her embarrassment—she senses the effect her departure has on her reputation. I understand her frustration at not being able to stay long enough at the meetings to participate fully, giving up position and influence in faculty governance. And I recognize her deep feelings of loss on Tuesday and Wednesday—when she was deprived of the stimulation and excitement of participating in the intellectual exchange at the colloquium and seminar.

Although late-afternoon and evening events are fine for most professors I know, they are just awful for most mothers and many fathers of young children. Child-care centers typically end their day at 5:30, with stiff fines or charges for late pick-ups.

More important, children usually are hungry, tired, and keyed up in the late afternoon, and their needs are not easily met by anyone but their parents. And

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tween parental responsibilities and meeting times as matters to be resolved by majority preference misses the crucial role that the conflict plays in discouraging working parents, especially mothers, from practicing their professions. I have seen some of my most talented colleagues abandon their careers when confronted with the conflicts imposed by trying to be both a good parent and a good professional. As Arlie Hochschild states in her book *The*

society through work. Rather, both desires are fundamental aspects of our humanity. They may compete for our time (especially in our current society), but the need to love and the need to work should never be considered to be in competition for our passions.

WHEN I WAS PREGNANT with my first child, I was told by a colleague: "You have just made the worst career decision of your

The influx of women into the work force offers a crucial resource to academe, which otherwise may face a shortage of Ph.D.'s in the next decade. But the extent to which their potential contribution can be realized depends heavily on societal support.

So far, our society has made a legal commitment to equal opportunity in the work place. What we need to do next is simple. We must allow for a humane integration of work and family responsibilities by providing maternity and paternity leaves for new parents and by insuring that high-quality and affordable child care is available.

WE ALSO must overcome the current expectation that academics must demonstrate their dedication by putting in a "macho workweek." Most academics, including those with young children, have a lifelong passion for their work. Faculty members and administrators are as likely to think creatively while taking a shower or nursing a baby as they are while sitting in an office or laboratory. We need to evaluate our colleagues' contributions, not the number of hours spent on campus. We also need to expand the time frame in which we judge our colleagues. It is surely a mistake to assume that parents of small children have the same amount of time available to work as they will have during the other periods of their careers.

Equally important is the need to schedule the work day so as to minimize, rather than maximize, conflict between home and work. We need to increase our sensitivity to scheduling

evenings are essential periods for family time for working parents and their children.

In recent years I have attempted to change the time of regularly scheduled meetings so that I could be both a responsible parent and a responsible faculty member. But I have had more success in bringing about parental-leave and child-care policies than in changing the times of meetings and colloquia.

"We have always done it this way, and it never was a problem in the past" is the typical first response of the person in charge. When I press ("Could we meet at noon instead?"), the next response is likely to be, "The majority prefer the currently scheduled time." If I keep urging I am told, "You can juggle your schedule—other parents manage it."

All of those statements are undoubtedly true, but are they the best basis to use for deciding this issue? The "we've always done it this way" response, especially the part about its never having been a problem in the past, is a good indicator of the traditional privileges most faculty members have enjoyed. Late-afternoon and evening professional activities posed no conflicts, because there was a wife at home managing the household, cooking dinner, and caring for the children. Any ill effect the tradition may have on individual faculty members now is presumably considered to be a benign accident of a world changing faster than tradition.

The second response—"the majority prefer the currently scheduled time"—is less benign. Treating conflicts between family and work as a matter of individual choice ignores the fact that the choices are made in a context of institutional constraints. Arlie Hochschild, in her book *The Second Shift:* "The career system inhibits women, not so much by malevolent disobedience to good rules as by making up rules to suit the male half of the population in the first place. . . . [Women] find that their late twenties and mid-thirties, the prime childbearing years, are also a peak period of career demands. Seeing that the game is devised for family-free people, some women lose heart."

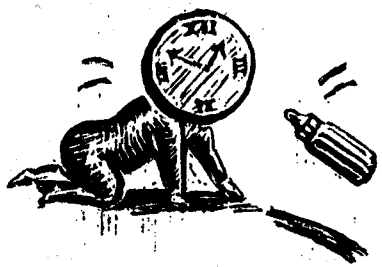
If working parents and women lose status in the work force or drop out altogether because of structural conflicts such as late meeting times, how will they ever increase their numbers to the point where they can change the rules by a democratic vote?

Saying that a working parent need only "juggle" his or her schedule and that "others manage it" conveys a strong message. It implies that parental responsibilities are comparable to activities that are inherently flexible, less important than work, or even dispensable—an athletic hobby, say, or a trip to Bermuda. It also implies that if the faculty member only had his or her priorities straight (like the "others" who manage to juggle their schedules), parental responsibilities would not get in the way of professional commitments. Both implications reflect pervasive and destructive values about children's needs, parents' roles, and what it means to be committed to work.

Where did we ever get the idea that dedication to family is indicative of a lack of commitment to work? For most of us, the desire to rear children is not felt *instead of* a desire to contribute to life by getting pregnant before getting tenure." I've noticed, in contrast, that male colleagues contemplating raising a family are typically encouraged to do so.

Yet there is a sad logic to the advice so often given to women: Avoid having children until your career goals are largely met. Compared with their husbands, employed women are likely to have significantly more responsibility at home—a national situation well-documented by sociologists. This leaves most fathers much freer than mothers to compete in a working world that rewards commitment to career over family and then measures that commitment in terms of time.

For the few men I know who more fully share domestic responsibilities with their wives, the conflict between employment and family tends to be severe. Their professional commitment, like those of working mothers, is doubted. These fathers may be under more acute strain than even working mothers, because at least mothers' contributions to their families are acknowledged (although undervalued) by society. The greatest tragedy here is that children pay much of the price of our society's insistence on pitting commitment to work against family responsibilities, no matter how family responsibilities are divided between the mother and the father.



To reduce the conflict between work and family, universities must recognize that faculty members have legitimate responsibilities as parents and must be willing to accommodate those responsibilities. Faculty members with young children have special constraints and need to respond flexibly. For example, mothers of infants may need to leave the campus frequently during the day to nurse their babies; teaching and committee meeting times should be adjusted to make this possible. Fortunately, academic jobs typically afford more scheduling flexibility than do many others.

We can, at the least, schedule meetings, colloquia, and seminars when there is a good chance that parents can attend. For instance, in many cases simply scheduling a regular afternoon meeting at 3:15 or 3:30 instead of 4:00 or 4:30 would allow parents to participate. In other cases, moving afternoon or evening meetings to the noon hour would increase parents' ability to participate.

Such changes would be inexpensive to implement; administrators just need to take the initiative. If we are committed to equal opportunity for women in the work force, we will make those changes. If we are "pro-family," we will make those changes very soon. If we are concerned about our greatest resource, our children, we will make those changes immediately.

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