

WOMEN IN ACADEMIA: THE IMPLICATIONS OF CULTURE AND INSTITUTIONAL AND GOVERNMENTAL POLICIES FOR WORK/LIFE BALANCE

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INTRODUCTION

- Women half the workforce
- Traditional division of labour persists
- Academic women struggle for work/life balance
- Impact on ability to perform in classroom
- Challenges affect every aspect of teaching process
 - Vary with childcare responsibilities and phase of career
- Institutional and governmental policies



CURRENT RESEARCH

- Challenges for desirable work/life balance
- Impact of cultural norms and institutional and governmental policies on balance
- Available policies and prevailing social and cultural norms:
 - Shape individual perspectives on and expectations of desirable work/life balance
 - Limit individual's ability to achieve desirable balance



METHODS

- Participants:
 - 60 academic women, 20 each in the US, UK, and Australia
 - With and without primary care responsibilities
 - US—16/20 (80%) with children
 - UK—8/20 (40%) with children
 - Australia—10/20 (50%) with children
 - Permanent contract positions
 - Aged 31 to 71, all points in career
- Procedure: In-depth, in-person interviews
 - 12 open-ended questions
 - Follow-up survey



RESULTS

- US Academics
 - Career very important to personal identity
 - Greatest job satisfaction; least likely to leave academia
- Australian Academics
 - Most satisfied with ability to balance work and life
 - Zero participants equated work with life
- UK Academics
 - Responses fell between extremes of US and Australia



GUILT: TO FEEL OR NOT TO FEEL

- Participants describing feelings of guilt:
 - US—10 (50%); 6 with children
 - UK—7 (35%); 4 with children
 - Australia—6 (30%); 5 with children
- Formal institutional policies vs. implicit expectations
- Cultural attitudes toward working women
 - Reflected in formal policies
- Implications for teaching quality
 - Productivity
 - Occupational health—stress, illness
 - Job satisfaction and commitment to organization
 - Overall life satisfaction



DISCUSSION

- Cross-cultural comparison
 - US academics experience most difficulty achieving balance
 - UK academics somewhat better off, but still feel conflict with cultural attitudes toward work
 - Australians are most satisfied—culture and formal policies are mutually supportive
- Governmental and institutional policies
 - Crucial role in work/life balance
 - Can only go so far: society and culture must allow for implementation of policies



RECENT ADDITION

- Data collection completed in Stockholm, Sweden
- Most progressive policies in the world
 - 480 days of paid parental leave
 - 2 months of “Daddy Days”
 - High-quality childcare widely accessible
- Preliminary Observations
 - Even more satisfied than Australian academic women
 - Considerably more equal division of domestic labor between men and women
 - Children not seen as impediment to woman’s career



BIG PICTURE

- Importance of work/life balance
 - Job and overall life satisfaction
 - Effective teachers, advisors, mentors
- Cultural attitudes and available policies
- Institutions and governments have responsibility to support work/life balance
- Cross-cultural comparison provides potential solutions to shared social problem



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