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# Academic Fathers Pursuing Tenure: A Qualitative Study of Work-Family Conflict, Coping Strategies, and Departmental Culture

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Although past research has emphasized considerable strain and institutional biases for female academics balancing work and family, research on male academics with young children is limited. This qualitative study addressed this void by examining how junior male tenure-track faculty with children negotiated work and family responsibilities. Analysis of in-depth interviews ( $n = 12$ ) revealed three broad, nonoverlapping themes regarding men's negotiation of their various roles. These themes included (a) tenure and family balance/conflict; (b) coping responses; and (c) attitudes toward policy and work culture. Prototypical quotes are used as illustrations of subthemes found within each of the three general categories. Respondents negotiated their multiple responsibilities by using compartmentalization strategies, significant time management, communicating with spouses and peers at work, and overextending themselves in work and family responsibilities, though with little knowledge or utilization of university policies that could ease their considerable workload and conflicts. The results are discussed within the context of research on men's work and family lives as well as departmental culture and institutional policies.

*Keywords:* work-family balance and conflict, male faculty, tenure

Work-family conflict (WFC), defined as a stressor in which work responsibilities collide with family life duties (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Netemeyer, Boles, & McMurrin, 1996), is a frequently researched topic in vocational literature (Bellavia & Frone, 2005; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Studies consistently document the relationship between WFC and a range of physical, psychological, and familial outcomes (Bellavia & Frone, 2005; Grant-Vallone & Donaldson, 2001). Further, emerging literature suggests the negative impact of WFC on key organizational

outcomes (Kossek & Ozeki, 1999; Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005). WFC appears to be increasing, partly because of greater numbers of dual-career couples (Jacobs, 2003).

The WFC dialogue has been particularly active in higher education. The American Association of University Professors (2001) noted that the inability to limit work, tendencies to compare oneself to the "giants" in one's field, and high incidences of work overload make it difficult for academics to integrate work with private life. Within this discussion, gender disparities are commonly cited (Santos & Cabral-Cardoso, 2008); research documents higher levels of WFC among female academics (Finkel & Olswang, 1996; Varner, 2000; Williams, 2000). Other data show that women report overload and underappreciation at higher levels than men (Duxbury, Heslop, & Marshall, 1993).

In discussing these findings, experts point to a number of biases that impede women's progress (Armenti, 2004; Probert, 2005). This perspective is particularly salient for tenure-

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track<sup>1</sup> positions, where an overlap exists between the “make-or-break” period of tenure and women’s childbearing years (Moen & Sweet, 2004). Research supports these claims: Mason, Goulden, and Frasch (2009) found that women transitioned out of tenure-track positions primarily because of family formation. Further, Armenti (2004) suggested that the inability to balance academic and family responsibilities was a critical factor influencing women’s departure from academia.

While these challenges have been well documented, less is known about WFC and related considerations for male professors. The current study aimed to contribute to this literature by gaining an understanding of whether and how junior-ranked male professors at a research-intensive university would describe tensions between a tenure appointment and family demands. Additionally, we were interested in evaluating coping responses to such potential conflict(s) and how men described their complementary and/or conflicting roles as fathers and professors. Finally, we were interested in the extent to which men were familiar with and acted upon family-friendly policies for male professors. This included men’s descriptions of their departmental culture pertaining to discussions of work-family balance and demands.

Central tenets of role theory guided our work in this area. Most broadly, role theory explains WFC as a “form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect” (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, p. 77). This framework influenced our interview protocol in two ways. First, we asked questions about self-defined roles and responsibilities among male academics in different domains of their lives (e.g., work, parenting, and household duties). In discussing our assumptions before data collection, we believed the extent to which men described these roles as complementary or conflicting would be key considerations in their role satisfaction and approach toward tenure. Second, we were interested in how men described coping strategies, parenting styles, and work culture and their relation to WFC.

The topic of fathers in academe warrants a general overview of fathers at work. There are approximately 68 million fathers in America, a 4 million increase since 2008, with approxi-

mately 26 million having children under 18 (US Census Bureau, 2010). Concurrently, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2009) reported that men’s participation in the national labor force decreased from 88.5% in 2008 to 87.9% in 2009. As these changes in roles and responsibilities unfold, research notes that men are increasingly reporting WFC. The Families and Work Institute recently reported that 59% of fathers reported “work-life conflict” compared with 45% of women (Galinsky, Aumann, & Bond, 2008). Earlier work by Drago and Williams (2000) also support this point, with over 50% of men surveyed stating they would cut their salaries by one fourth if they could have more family or personal time. A 2010 Boston College study on fatherhood found that working fathers are reprioritizing family over work; consequently, men reported spending more time with their children at the expense of professional advancement (Harrington, Van Deusen, & Ladge, 2010). However, Van Deusen and colleagues (2008) found that though more parents of both sexes are working, few parents feel comfortable utilizing family-friendly policies designed to ease their workload.

This trend persists among men in academia: there is evidence that work culture and policies might not align with men’s interest in achieving work-family balance. A study by Perna (2001) demonstrated that institutions had policies for maternity leave, but less than half had policies in place for job assistance, flexible scheduling, and/or paternal leave. Furthermore, for those with policies in place, such policies were rarely enacted. This finding is surprising, given that the National Center for Educational Statistics (2009) reports that men are the majority of full-time faculty at 4-year universities.

Given the paucity of research on male faculty negotiating work-family balance, we felt a qualitative investigation would appropriately explore challenges confronting this population, fo-

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<sup>1</sup> The following comes from the rules and regulations of a public institution of higher education: Tenure denotes a status of continuing appointment as a member of the faculty at an institution of higher education. Tenure typically is withheld pending satisfactory completion of a probationary period of faculty service, usually seven years. Tenure-track faculty are those hired at the assistant or associate level, and are expected to meet the requirements as designated by the institution’s Provost office for earning tenure within a designated period after their initial hiring.

cusing on tenure-track assistant professors at a public university. Work-family balance issues are at the forefront at this institution, evidenced by the establishment and subsequent reports of a gender equity task force. This investigation promises to elucidate predominant issues for men working to balance fatherhood, relationships, and careers.

## Method

### Site

Data for this study were collected from October 2009 to April 2010 at a large public university in the southwestern U.S. The Carnegie Foundation classifies the institution as a “Doctoral/Research University–Extensive” (McCormick & Zhao, 2005). Additionally, the institution is categorized “Research University/Very High Activity” (RU/VH), the highest categorization among doctoral-granting institutions (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, n.d.). Thus, we can surmise that tenure-track faculty at the institution have significant requisite research responsibilities to earn promotion.

The institution has several policies designed to assist faculty in negotiating work-family balance. There is a Modified Instructional Duties Policy, which allows a reduction in teaching, service, and/or research responsibilities, as well as an extension of the probationary period for tenure-track faculty (“stopping the clock”). These policies parallel those of many other large public research institutions (UIC Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, 2008; University of Kentucky College of Arts & Sciences, 2010; University of Pennsylvania Standing Faculty of Arts & Sciences, 2010).

### Research Team

As Patton (1990) notes, in qualitative research, the researchers are the instrument. Toward that end, we include a description of the team responsible for formulating the research project, creating the interview protocol, performing interviews, conducting the analyses, and completing the final write up. The team comprised five members: two male professors who served as primary investigators and lead authors of the study (one Black assistant pro-

fessor and one White associate professor, both with two children apiece), and three doctoral students (one Black male with two children, one White female, and one Hispanic male).

### Sampling

We sought to understand the phenomenon of junior male tenure-track faculty negotiating their roles as fathers and academics; thus, we found a phenomenological approach (Seidman, 1998) most apt for this purpose. Phenomenological qualitative research has been used on a range of topics, including perceptions of faculty and enterprise managers in cooperative education in South Africa (Groenewald, 2004), the meaning of going to college for Mexican American students (Attinasi, 1991), and the academic and personality characteristics of gifted children with cerebral palsy (Willard-Holt, 1998). In this study, we purposefully sought respondents who met the following criteria: tenure-track assistant professor, with at least one child aged 0–5. To recruit respondents, the primary investigators wrote to department chairs summarizing the project and requesting help identifying prospective respondents. Twenty department heads responded, with some forwarding the request directly to eligible members of their faculty and others recommending that the researchers contact eligible members in their department. The researchers then contacted eligible faculty via e-mail, explaining the study and requesting their participation. Utilizing a purposive sampling technique (Patton, 1990) to capture a diverse population of male faculty, the investigators then invited faculty to participate in the project.

### Respondents and Procedure

Twelve professors were selected to participate in the study, consisting of an electronic survey, an in-depth interview, and a follow-up interview. Descriptive information about the professors can be found in Table 1. The survey consisted of 17 questions capturing demographic data (number of children, marital/partner status, years in their field, etc.) as well as two Likert-style questions regarding their concern over promotion and tenure, and their estimated contributions to household responsibilities.

Table 1  
*Profile of Study Respondents (N = 12)*

| Name                | Field            | Ethnicity/race     | Age | Marital status       | Number of children |
|---------------------|------------------|--------------------|-----|----------------------|--------------------|
| Juan                | Education        | Hispanic           | 38  | Married              | 1                  |
| Neil                | Natural Sciences | Asian American     | 42  | Married              | 2                  |
| Mattias             | Engineering      | White <sup>a</sup> | 46  | Married              | 1                  |
| Ian                 | Liberal Arts     | White              | 33  | Divorced             | 2                  |
| Rob                 | Professional     | White              | 41  | Married              | 2                  |
| Steve               | Liberal Arts     | White              | 38  | Married              | 1                  |
| Tom                 | Professional     | White              | 31  | Married              | 1                  |
| Lionel              | Liberal Arts     | White              | 35  | Married              | 2 <sup>b</sup>     |
| Darren <sup>c</sup> | Liberal Arts     | White              | 37  | Married <sup>d</sup> | 2                  |
| Enrique             | Professional     | White <sup>e</sup> | 34  | Married              | 1                  |
| Ryan                | Liberal Arts     | White              | 30  | Married              | 1                  |
| Alvin               | Education        | African American   | 39  | Married <sup>f</sup> | 1                  |

*Note.* <sup>a</sup>Internationally born. <sup>b</sup> Had two children, but only one lived with him. <sup>c</sup> Earned tenure during the study. <sup>d</sup> Spouse is also a tenure-track professor at the university. <sup>e</sup> Internationally born. <sup>f</sup> Spouse is also a tenure-track professor at the university.

Questions for the interview were derived from group discussions and relevant literature on work-family balance and family leave policies. After developing the interview protocol, each research team member twice piloted the instrument with a male professor and received feedback on the content, pacing, and order of the questions before arranging the interviews with the final pool of respondents. The respondents from the pilot interviews were not recruited for the study, and no data from these interviews were used in our analysis. The three graduate-level members of the research team then conducted the interviews. The interview stage consisted of one face-to-face, in-depth semistructured phenomenological interview lasting 60–90 minutes (Seidman, 1998).

Following the interview, the primary investigators performed an audit of the transcribed interview, noting emergent themes and areas of ambiguity. The researchers then conducted the second interview utilizing this feedback. The final interview protocol (available upon request from the first author) was organized in sections with relevant questions pertaining to family roles and responsibilities, tenure process considerations, work/family balance and identity, familiarity with family-friendly policies, and departmental culture.

## Analysis

Two research team members coded each interview, using a systemic process for under-

standing the data and cross-case comparison of the data (Maxwell, 1996). The researchers utilized an etic<sup>2</sup> coding procedure, integrating themes identified from the research literature on work-family balance and junior faculty pursuing tenure. With the list of etic codes, the researchers approached the data and integrated emic codes, revising the code list. Researchers met to discuss themes, as well as both unique and shared concepts across the narratives, composing analytic memos to capture immediate impressions from reading the narratives. Throughout data analysis, the researchers wrote and shared memos as a recursive tool to clarify thoughts, themes, and approaches to organize the voluminous data. Through this process, the researchers identified 13 major code categories from the data, all linked to the research questions. The researchers then created matrices from the data, identifying patterns and points of comparison, particularly identifying key excerpts from narratives that might serve as representative perspectives for the emic themes. Finally, the researchers discussed excerpts from the data that best expressed the ethos of the themes.

The research team utilized a variety of verification strategies *during* the research process along the axes of (a) methodological coherence; (b) sampling sufficiency; (c) data collection and analysis; (d) theoretical thinking; and (e) theo-

<sup>2</sup> Themes that are derived from theory, in contrast to *emic* (themes derived from the data).

retical development, as postulated by Morse and colleagues (2002). This approach ensured both reliability and validity of the data collected, which we integrated into the research design (Creswell, 1997; Kvale, 1989).

Methodological coherence was achieved by using a semistructured, phenomenological research design for interviews that matched the research questions regarding how respondents made meaning of the roles of father and professor. We achieved sample sufficiency by seeking out respondents until we reached saturation, which ensures comprehension and completeness of the data. As the project unfolded, the members of the research team concurrently engaged in both data collection and analysis; hence, we were in constant dialogue regarding what was known and what we desired to know. During collection and analysis, emergent ideas were confirmed and reconfirmed with new data; thus, our theorizing moved forward deliberately, grounded in the words of the respondents. Last, we engaged in theoretical development, moving beyond current conceptualizations of WFC; our novel theoretical contributions, such as the significance of peers navigating work-family balance, are found in the discussion of this article.

We further assured trustworthiness through the direct use of transcribed statements and the use of multiple coders to discern statements' meaning (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). To ensure privacy and confidentiality, the research team assigned pseudonyms to the respondents in the study and identified them by their broad disciplinary field. We additionally disguised potentially identifying information (names of colleagues, etc.) to ensure confidentiality.

## Results

### Tenure and Family Balance/Conflict

As respondents discussed their multiple responsibilities as professors and fathers, a number of significant themes and subthemes emerged, presented in the following section with representative quotations from the study respondents.

#### Conflict and Strain

The overwhelming majority of respondents discussed pervasive conflict and strain. Five

subthemes emerged: (a) conflict and strain are inherently part of the tenure process; (b) the tenure process places strain on relationships; (c) having a family strains work-family balance; (d) attempts to balance the tenure process and family can strain one's health; and (e) the tenure process factors in deciding on whether or not to have children.

Three respondents talked about the general stress associated with the tenure process. Neil<sup>3</sup> discussed how significant accomplishments were somewhat diminished because of the pressure to produce. He noted, "It's like, 'Okay, I just published another paper, got a big grant!' and you're happy. It's an accomplishment, but then at the end, someone tells you, or in your mind, it's just one more checkmark for tenure."

Similarly, Lionel stated that there was always more work to be done: the job "never says you've done enough." Mattias further emphasized this concern:

The workday never finishes. I do a lot of work at home in the evening. Computers have made things much more complicated. . . not only do you have to be reading and trying to get writing done, but there is a constant stream of e-mails that you need to deal with.

Six respondents spoke about the strain that the tenure-track and raising children places on relationships. Ian and Steve discussed how navigating their professional roles and maintaining communication with their spouses tended to be all-consuming. Steve shared this perspective, saying: "It took a toll on my marriage. My wife was really upset with how little time I had for us. She would say, 'I don't want to live like this.'"

Rob, Mattias, and Ryan shared that time constraints were aspects of their faculty jobs: the fathers often rushed home for dinner to help put their children to bed. Three respondents noted conference travel placed a further strain on relationships. Mattias further shared how his wife "hated" his choice of career: "She thinks it is an exclusive job and excludes a serious commitment to a family." He further noted that in her view, the job "takes a lot of time" and does not provide adequate compensation to hire house-keeping help.

<sup>3</sup> Pseudonym (as are all names of respondents in the manuscript).

In addition to challenges in balancing familial relationships, respondents discussed how the pressure to be productive at work impacted family obligations. Rob, Lionel, Darren, Steve, and Ryan discussed a drop in productivity after starting families. Before children, Rob stated he was able to devote “around 12 hours” to his work; now he can only work for “six to eight hours,” resulting in a decline in his scholarly output. Many of the respondents’ concerns were encapsulated in Darren’s comment about the impact of having children on his career:

I think [an] obvious way in which it may have hindered my career is I’ve just, frankly, spent *less* time working at my career. I just haven’t had that luxury to spend all of my time, all of my waking hours working on exciting, interesting projects.

Juan concurred, noting he “has erred on the side of spending more time being a father than doing [his] job.” Ryan agreed, quipping, “The joys of parenthood will suck the work away from you.”

Further, balancing competing demands and responsibilities placed considerable strain on respondents’ health. Four men explicitly discussed this challenge during their interviews. Steve, for instance, discussed long days that led to his decision to spend some nights at his office. He described this arrangement:

Yeah, it’s a cot that I got when my second child was born, and for a while I used it *every single day*. [I] mean, I was missing meetings with my graduate students ‘cause I had to sleep, ‘cause I had to get work done. And there just wasn’t enough time to sleep.

Alvin also discussed the impact that these work-family stressors placed on his health. He noted, “[Y]ou gain weight and tend to get lost in yourself.” He observed a beneficial aspect, however, commenting that his situation allowed him to be more productive in terms of generating publications: “It’s like you just get sucked in and you’re gone . . . and the more productive you are, you really get into it . . . you get lost in yourself.” Neil felt that the nature of the professoriate meant that he struggled leaving work behind and spending quality time with his family.

I have lots of things in my mind. It’s hard to clear your mind about the things you have to do at work. So you may be physically with your family, but mentally, you’re thinking about your responsibilities at work. I think that’s the toughest part.

## Comparison to Female Academics

While the study focused on men’s experiences, respondents unanimously shared a notion that faculty mothers are at a greater disadvantage. Women are still perceived as the primary caregiver and respondents largely focused on the biological aspects that keep women at home: recovery from childbirth and breastfeeding. Darren represented the views of many with his comment, “It is *easier* on the man when you have children . . . there’s just some aspects of raising a child, like breastfeeding, I can’t really do that.” As the respondents noted, these realities potentially predisposed women to a truncated career trajectory. Darren further explained: “I think it’s probably part of the reason why our department, and probably many other departments, were dominated by males . . . the system is not terribly friendly to women.”

## Bias Against Active Fathering

Respondents observed that in academia, men were generally seen as subordinate to women as parents. Thus, fathers choosing an active parenting role perceived that their orientation was at odds with expectations in academe. Alvin summarized this perspective held by a plurality of respondents:

I believe in academia, [fathers] aren’t expected to do *anything*. So if a woman in academia has a child, she has to take leave and disability and there’s expectations . . . I think fathers are just kind of extraneous to the process—just outliers.

Along with other respondents, Alvin felt that because of the physiological demands on a woman’s body during and after pregnancy, men were not seen as equally deserving or in need of special accommodations in adjusting to fatherhood.

Such perceptions led respondents to self-regulate their own concerns about familial responsibilities. As Mattias stated, “I think that there’s not much sympathy for educated, upper-class men saying that they’re getting the short end of the stick in terms of family issues.” Though respondents described family-friendly policies as potentially alleviating some short-term difficulties, the required balance between work and home life appears inequitable between men and women. Neil concluded, “Just seeing

what my wife does and all of the responsibilities she picks up, I couldn't imagine going through that and being tenure-track."

One respondent, Alvin, shared his thoughts about cultural expectations on fatherhood, suggesting that fathering may look quite different based on one's racial/ethnic identity: "I think there's even a greater responsibility because of the way the societal discourse is laid out for Black men, so there's pressure for Black men to be good fathers and still produce." He further discussed the marginalization of men who struggle to negotiate their responsibilities: "The father gets left out of this in some ways. We're kind of struggling psychologically with this role of being a father and at the same time doing this work."

### **Gender Roles as a Factor in Work-Family Balance**

A number of respondents noted that even if they held progressive beliefs about the division of labor between mothers and fathers, adhering to traditional gender roles seemed to lessen strain on both work and family obligations. The analysis revealed that most men held progressive views on equal partnerships in parenting, espousing the idea that it was important for them to share work at home caring for their children. As Ian, who commutes between two states to care for his children during his divorce, declared, "I mean, as a father I feel very good, you know? In fact, I feel like, 'Wow . . . I'm doing a lot more than probably most dads do.'"

Although the philosophy of balanced workload appeals to these men, several representations of their parenting roles did not reflect their ideals. Most men shared that their spouses performed the majority of parenting responsibilities; only two men believed they were doing more than half of the parenting work. Most felt as Neil did when he stated, "[A]s my responsibilities picked up . . . [my wife] had to carry more and more of the weight."

Three explanations emerged in discussing the difference between men's espoused views and actual behaviors. First, some men revealed that they had previously incorporated duties that moved away from traditional roles but reverted back to them as work responsibilities increased. Second, some respondents reported that their wives wanted to stay home with the children (a

mutually agreed-upon decision). Third, some men perceived aspects of traditional fathering roles to be both normative and positive. One recurring example was the father as disciplinarian. For Steve, this role seemed natural, as "men tend to be a little more the disciplinarian . . . or at least that's the traditional role." Among participants, adhering to traditional fathering roles did not mean being distant to their kids. Rather, enacting these roles within a connected, loving context offered yet another chance to support the needs of the family unit.

Consequently, Ian and many others expressed rejection of traditional familial roles; in practice, however, these ideals were irreconcilable with the daily needs of child rearing and work. Some men expressed discomfort when more traditional roles became routine. As progressive men, some, like Rob, commented that with a wife at home, they had "weird feelings [that] we're kind of traditional in this way, like somehow 1960s." A balancing of responsibilities within an egalitarian family, though ideal, proved difficult in the face of such pressures, and although the alternative felt strange, it became common practice for these men.

### **Coping Strategies**

To deal with the tension of balancing work and family, respondents displayed a variety of coping strategies. Within the major topic of coping strategies, five themes emerged as coping methods: compartmentalization, communication with colleagues and time management, using the family unit as a buffer between the world of work, and finally, overcommitment.

### **Compartmentalization Strategies**

Men predominantly discussed coping with work and family demands through compartmentalization. Men seemed to divide responsibilities into defined categories by focusing on work at work and focusing on home when at home. This theme emerged in nine of the interviews. Additionally, these responses elicited a philosophy that the roles should remain distinct. Tom summarized this approach in his response: "There's work life, and then there's home life. [Those] are really two different things."

The respondents' predominant rationale for compartmentalization related to high demands

on their time as academics, the pressure to produce, and their responsibilities as fathers. Ian articulated this belief when he stated

[B]asically, the only way I've survived is by having a very clear sense of different roles and a clear sense of when I'm fulfilling those roles, because as soon as things start mixing in . . . I just get confused and overwhelmed, and it just feels like too much. If I'm thinking about doing something with the kids during the time that I'm supposed to be just relaxing and writing, then nothing's going to end up happening.

The interview data revealed that compartmentalization seemed to promote scholarly production and family quality time. In general, respondents viewed the home as a space for family where engaging in work is either unproductive, or negatively correlated with family development. Alvin referenced the futility of trying to combine work at home and childcare: "You're fooling yourself trying to send e-mails and do whatever . . . [the child] is not getting any attention, you're pulled in all these directions, and he could get hurt . . . You're not getting anything done."

Other respondents followed the strategy of separating work and family. Juan shared that weekends are for family, and weekdays are for work. Though he strove to keep work during the weekdays from taking over evenings, Juan admitted that it sometimes happened. However, the goal remained to keep the worlds as distinct as possible, as Ryan related:

When I'm [at work], I'm here, and I try to avoid all the other home-related things . . . I sort of block that out. While I'm here, I do only profession-related things . . . When I leave, I try not to do anything work related at home.

### **Communication With Colleagues: Support and Time Management**

Respondents stated the importance of communicating with others: some sought discussion with partners about their shared parenting issues; others looked for outside advice; and still others merely desired empathetic support. For fathers like Steve, this approach was helpful because it allowed them to meaningfully connect with others as they managed their roles—whether that person was a spouse, colleague, or friend. "There's several faculty members here who are willing to chat about a lot of things, both personal and professional . . . [A col-

league] wants to make sure we're comfortable as a family as well." Utilizing this method helped men to not only gain concrete help in balancing their roles, but to also benefit psychologically from the support garnered from these interactions.

Respondents also communicated their goal of balance through planning. Embedded within this technique was a desire to not overextend themselves and thus take on fewer projects. As Lionel indicated, a necessity within this method was to "have your time management skills on track . . . and know how to say no. The main thing is to learn how to say no." This generally involved learning to limit work projects to have a more balanced work and family life.

### **Reliance on Family**

An additional strategy was to utilize one's family as a psychological "buffer," allowing respondents to gain perspective on work-related stress: as Ryan stated, "[Y]ou can't have it all. There are conflicting interests in your life." Consequently, he made family his priority. Other men cited the family as a physical buffer that allowed them to disconnect briefly from work stress by providing an opportunity to engage beyond their job. For Ryan, being home was relaxing in comparison to work: "I don't have a lot of stress when I'm home. I'm happy to say that I have a fairly happy home life, and it just doesn't weigh on me."

### **Overcommitment**

Men used the act of overcommitting to projects at work as a final coping method. As Matias stated, "[T]he only successful strategy—at least the only strategy I've been able to execute so far in terms of how to balance these things—is total personal neglect. No exercise, bad food, and no sleep." Alvin similarly stated that overcommitting was "the only way to juggle all those things." This strategy was described as an option when other efforts for balance failed.

### **Familiarity With Policies and Departmental Culture**

The majority of respondents were unfamiliar with family-friendly university policies such as

modified instructional leave or stopping the clock. Seven respondents were unaware of any family-friendly policies, while four respondents knew of only one. In general, men appeared apathetic or unmotivated to seek out information about such benefits.

Several men noted that they were aware of support for new fathers, but had deliberately chosen not to explore possibilities. Some, like Rob, felt that they did not need any time off because of the presence of a supportive spouse: "I don't know very many details, and it's probably a result of me having this support system, like my wife being home a lot." Enrique said he had heard about stopping the tenure clock but did not pursue this option, noting, "I don't spend a lot of effort gathering information I'm not going to incorporate in my decisions." Enrique was concerned that taking leave would hinder his career advancement, a concern shared by other respondents.

On the other hand, Steve was the only respondent who took advantage of a family-friendly policy. He credited an accommodating department that supported his decision to take modified instructional leave for his transition into fatherhood: "I have to say, they actually came through for me. They actually spent money in order to relieve me of my teaching load."

### Departmental Culture

Respondents described their comfort level with discussing the family and work life balance as a function of their department's culture. Satisfied men noted that their departments respected their multiple roles and welcomed discussions about family life. Enrique described this view, noting that his colleagues promoted "a very positive and healthy department . . . I think most people share strong family values in this department and view that as a big component of their lives."

Three respondents noted that work culture seemed to directly reflect the values of full professors and administrative leadership within their areas. The attitudes of decision-makers within their departments related to how comfortable these men felt discussing fatherhood and family-friendly policies. Ian commented, "There's definitely a consciousness here, and I'm sure that was coming from the chair, as he

was sending people my way who recently got tenure or went through the process and have kids." Meanwhile, Neil, who experienced a more negative work atmosphere, noted, "I'm comfortable bringing it up briefly, talking about the challenges with my fellow assistant professors who are in the same situation . . . but I wouldn't feel comfortable bringing it up to the full professors, or chair, or dean."

Departments with more young parents yielded more family-friendly attitudes at work. Lionel reported that there were "a lot of parents in this department. I think there's a general understanding of that." However, he also commented that differing attitudes reflected the age and professional status of the colleague: "Some of the older male faculty had more of a model where their wives took care of the kids, and they took their professor role." This dichotomy between older and younger faculty reappeared when discussing peers' attitudes about the respondents' decisions to have children. Mattias said, "The ideal system, or at least the system that a number of the older faculty in the department seemed to follow, is to go right to grad school really fast, either meeting a spouse or not, go get tenure somewhere, and *then* have kids."

Respondents described limited discussions of work-family balance at work. Men who did talk about family life in this context tended to discuss more about the day-to-day, rather than the combined pressures of tenure and fatherhood. They noted that having children neither relieved them of expectations or requirements dictated by their profession, nor would provide them any leniency in the tenure review process. Steve remarked, "I don't think I got cut any slack. I mean people aren't looking at my publication record and saying, 'Well, OK, but how many kids does he have?'" Others echoed this sentiment, including Juan who said, "There's no climate for changing your job description based on your family life," though he also recognized that accommodations for having children were not necessarily realistic. "To some extent, you kind of know what you're getting yourself into when you get into this business."

Some respondents shared more negative views regarding tenure. Mattias felt that his department's promotion process was an inequitable process that punished faculty with children:

If you aren't a monk who lives in a cell and studies and writes, even though the people involved in the job will say, "Oh, that's okay, we respect the balance between work and family..." from your department to the university itself, they will not behave that way.

In Mattias' view, the system was designed solely to reward productivity measured by publications, and time spent with family could be a hindrance to career advancement. Though most other men did not share this level of pessimism about being an academic father, they conceded that even if family life is valued within their work culture, productivity is what ultimately matters. Alvin concluded, "At the end of the day, what have you done? What have you produced? That's how people are, and I have no problem with that."

### Discussion

Data from our interviews of 12 male assistant professors point to a complex system of compromises, tradeoffs, and sacrifices used to balance work and family. In this discussion, we discuss the themes and subthemes that emerged from our analysis, placed within the context of related research and university-based family-friendly policies.

#### Work-Family Balance and Conflict

While respondents described many benefits of academic life that promoted opportunities for active fathering and productive scholarship, themes of conflict and strain were common. First, many men described work-related stress, including anxiety inherent in the pursuit of tenure. Commonly emphasized stressors included publication and grant pressure, constant accessibility via e-mail, and the "never-ending" nature of the appointment. These stressors parallel those noted more broadly among academics navigating work and family responsibilities (Halpern, 2008). Second, a significant number of men discussed the impact of the strain of pursuing tenure on family relationships. Common challenges involved conflicting pulls on one's time (career vs. family), feeling rushed at home and work, and home responsibilities minimizing production at work.

These challenges were more pronounced for men desiring to be active fathers. Further, this same subset of respondents emphasized a lack

of opportunity to express their struggles balancing work and family roles with colleagues. These data seem to align with a recent study (Harrington et al., 2010) that describes men's struggles in being a "family focused" worker, emphasizing that the increasingly active roles men play at home may still be underappreciated in the workplace. The findings in this study support this research, though peers in similar situations mitigate the lack of a venue to discuss and share strategies in minimizing WFC.

Respondents expressed high role salience of their identities as fathers *and* academics. Men talked about the importance of earning tenure, while emphasizing their desires to be active and "present" fathers, particularly during their children's early years. Further, respondents described a number of key benefits associated with their roles and identities as fathers and academics. Several discussed positive, reciprocal relationships as they balanced work and home life. Some believed that the current stresses of pursuing tenure would eventually lead to familial benefits of job security and increased income. Many respondents cited how job flexibility allowed them to spend more time with their families.

Other respondents reported that having to balance work and family life made them more productive, as it both "raised the stakes" and gave motivation for efficiency and eliminating unproductive activities. This finding has been supported in literature describing fatherhood as an experience that can increase commitment to both one's job and financially providing for one's family (Knoester, Petts, & Eggebeen, 2007; Snarey, 1993). Further, in discussing roles and identities, discussions of gender role ideologies and the respondents' own experiences being fathered surfaced. The majority of men disclosed their preferences for parenting differently than their own fathers, who seemed to have a more "work comes first" mentality.

One of the most dominant themes emerging from our data pertained to women's experiences in academia. Respondents emphasized that WFC remained more significant for women. Many of the points iterated (e.g., sexism, timing of tenure, and perceptions of work not being a priority for women) are consistent with previous research findings (Crittenden, 2002; O'Laughlin & Bischoff, 2004; Wolfinger, Mason, & Goulden, 2008).

### **Coping Responses to WFC for Professors**

Men reported a range of strategies in attempting to balance work and family life. First, many noted the importance of open communication. This included frequent discussions with their partners about tenure, home responsibilities, and seeking advice from trusted friends and allies in their departments. Perhaps utilizing this method helped men to not only gain concrete help in balancing their roles, but to also benefit psychologically from the support garnered from these relationships, a finding supported by Holahan and Gilbert (1979) who suggest that spousal support is an important factor in relieving stress. Additionally, Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) further reinforce this idea by commenting on the importance of social support in reducing WFC.

As Marks (1977) suggests, WFC can result from overcommitting and an overemphasis of one role over another. Thus, the second coping strategy involved men setting limits upon their work responsibilities: narrowing their focus and limiting work, which can help moderate overcommitment to one's job (Coltrane, 1995; Duxbury & Higgins, 1994). The third strategy was using family responsibilities as a psychological "buffer," allowing the respondents to gain perspective on their work and the difficulties of the tenure process. Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2004) suggest that these two seemingly competing roles of worker and father actually complement each other by allowing the individual to take a break from one role when focusing on the other. In prioritizing their families, the respondents suggested that they were able to recognize what they most valued and allocate resources accordingly. This mindset also seemed to help during particularly stressful points of the tenure review process (e.g., annual evaluations, etc.).

Two coping strategies emphasized by our respondents could be considered less than optimal or unhealthy: overcommitting oneself to the detriment of physical and mental health, and compartmentalizing work and family responsibilities. The former finding confirms previous research associating WFC with poor health and alcohol abuse (Frone, 2003). The interviews suggest that respondents sacrifice leisure and physical well-being to devote more time to work and family, paralleling the literature on working women (Cole & Zuckerman, 1987;

Milkie & Peltola, 1999). Though respondents disdained this approach to work and family responsibilities, they described it as a common last resort when other attempts for balance had failed.

Next, respondents communicated a strong tendency to compartmentalize. Edwards and Rothbard (2000) term this "segmentation," an active strategy to keep family and work roles separate. Men described a greater ease in dealing with work and family demands when they were viewed separately: at work or at home, rarely on both. Respondents needed to dichotomize faculty and fathering responsibilities, and one noted that this approach to work-family balance is more common to men: a finding reinforced in the literature (Gerson, 1985; Thompson & Walker, 1989), while women are more likely to allow their roles as mothers and workers to intersect (Ropers-Huilman, 2000; Thompson & Walker, 1989; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004).

### **Policy Familiarity and Work Culture**

The majority of respondents were unfamiliar with family-friendly policies. Respondents did not lament the lack of awareness of these policies, but rather admitted that they had not examined their options, or assumed that policies were targeted at women exclusively. The respondents neither offered insight on this issue, nor why they chose not to act upon them. However, one respondent attributed his decision to seek out modified instructional leave because of an accommodating department supportive of his transition into fatherhood. Indeed, employees in a work culture that is perceived to be family-friendly tend to more readily take advantage of work-sponsored, parental leave policies (Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999).

Respondents shared a range of responses about their respective departmental culture surrounding discussions of work-family balance. Half were satisfied with their work environment, feeling their departments respected their multiple roles and welcomed discussion about family. Others shared that male faculty rarely talked about responsibilities and attitudes toward fathering. Some respondents attributed these distinctions to the modeling of department leaders, as well as the age of most faculty. Concerning the former, one fourth of the re-

spondents communicated that the attitudes of departmental decision-makers related to how comfortable they felt discussing fatherhood and family-friendly policies at work—which parallels research about the importance of support from high-level administrators in alleviating WFC (Kossek & Lobel, 1996; Mitchell, 1997). Further, the data suggests that departments with more young parents yielded more family-friendly attitudes in the workplace.

The data suggest that discussions of work-family balance are infrequent. Men in departments that foster casual conversation of family topics tend to talk more about the day-to-day events in their children's lives rather than the combined pressures of tenure and fatherhood. It was clear the respondents recognized that parenthood would not earn them any leniency in the tenure process, as they acknowledged having children did not relieve them of any of the expectations or requirements dictated by their profession.

There are significant implications for policy and practice from this study. First, the lives of tenure-track academic fathers tend to be veiled, with other professors in similar situations privy to the balancing act used by the respondents, but few others. Departments should foster discussions regarding the importance of balance not only for academic fathers and mothers, but also all professors, as life balance affects productivity and health. Concerns about decreased productivity accompanying fatherhood may be unrealistic causes of anxiety for fathers: research suggests that utilizing family leave benefits can foster a better family life experience, boost morale, and enhance productivity (Huang, Hammer, Neal, & Perrin, 2004). Conversely, workplace inflexibility toward parents needing scheduling accommodations can lead to increased strain in both the home and on the job (Thiede & Ganster, 1995). "Graying" departments should be mindful of climate concerns for tenure-track academic fathers, who may encounter few, if any, colleagues in similar situations. This, of course, should not be taken to mean that tenure standards should be diminished—overwhelmingly, the respondents expressed that they were aware of the rigors of the pursuit of tenure in their profession—but resources and advice should be available when a junior professor joins the faculty or has a child.

Another concern is that the work of family-friendly policy advocates has not reached its full potential. This study indicates that informing faculty fathers of work modification, or stopping the tenure clock, is only a first step. There is a need to demonstrate that these policies are viewed neutrally and will not hurt junior professors at promotion and tenure. Faculty orientation sessions should feature discussions about family-friendly policies and highlight examples of how faculty have successfully used these policies to advance their work and family lives, as well as highlighting research about the benefits for fathers utilizing parental leave in parenting and work domains (Haas et al., 2002). These discussions pivot on faculty having positive experiences with family-friendly policies. Administrators must monitor how academic fathers investigate and use these policies and should have a willingness to reexamine or redress obstacles.

While these findings illuminate important issues concerning junior academic fathers and work-family balance, there are some limitations to the study: the purposive nature of the sampling and small scale prohibit us from generalizing these findings to junior academic fathers at this institution or indeed, universities writ large. Additionally, as respondents in the study volunteered to participate, it is likely that issues of work-family balance are salient in their lives. Future studies might consider random sampling techniques to obtain a broader spectrum of perspectives. Despite these limitations, an analysis of these professors' experiences contributes to the sparse body of literature examining how male academics balance fatherhood, family life, and professional responsibilities.

While the study is limited because of sample size, the racial and ethnic demographics of the respondents closely paralleled that of the institution, with Whites comprising the majority (75%) and men of color comprising less than 10% of the total, each. The institution's faculty is 80.4% White and faculty of color range from 9.2% (Asian) to 3.7% (Black). It is telling, however, that at least one respondent alluded to cultural factors affecting his identity. Future research should consider examining WFC among male faculty of color, and what influence, if any, cultural factors have on their behavior. While the sample features a diversity of disciplines, a disproportionate number of fac-

ulty were in liberal arts, while natural sciences and engineering had one respondent each. It is noteworthy, however, that the narratives from these respondents were similar to those from all professors in the sample. Given the differences in tenure expectations among the disciplines, specific studies by discipline will give greater insight into the issues confronting junior faculty fathers and WFC.

Other limitations suggest the need for further research. In particular, additional studies could benefit by considering larger samples at a diversity of institutions, varying in mission, size, governance, and location. Inclusion of partner perspectives, as well as those of administrative leaders, could further complete the picture regarding the relevant issues for junior faculty men balancing their careers and fatherhood.

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