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The Faculty

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<http://chronicle.com/weekly/v49/i40/40a01001.htm>**Family Time****Why some women quit their coveted tenure-track jobs**

By PIPER FOGG

Conway, Ark.

After Karen Gaul returned from maternity leave, she set up a playpen in the office next to hers at Hendrix College. Students baby-sat while the assistant professor of anthropology taught classes and did her research. She learned to work quickly and efficiently between changing diapers and breast-feeding. She even brought her daughter, Kameko, to faculty meetings.

But after two years of struggling to combine single motherhood with an intense academic workload, including serving on multiple committees, teaching three courses a semester, and advising 15 undergraduates, Ms. Gaul decided to leave academe, even though her provost assured her she would receive tenure this year.

Although everyone at Hendrix welcomed Kameko, now age 2, and the family-friendly environment at the small liberal-arts college here allowed Ms. Gaul to spend a lot of time with her daughter, she says she "got to the point where I sat back and said, 'Is this all there is?'"

So she sold her car, packed up her house, and moved across the country to Alaska, where she'll start a part-time job with the National Park Service later this summer. The new job will allow her more time with her daughter. And she can leave behind a life that had become increasingly overwhelming.

In giving up the security of tenure because of family concerns, Ms. Gaul is not alone. Bonnie K. MacKellar left a tenured position in computer science at Western Connecticut State University for the better hours and better pay offered by industry. Only after leaving academe did she consider having two children. Heidi R. Tilghman left a tenured post in Germanics at Knox College to move to a city with a better job for her husband and more cultural opportunities for her children.

60-Hour Weeks

Despite the widespread notion that academe is one of the most family-friendly environments, anecdotal evidence suggests that many female scholars are not finding the time and flexibility they would like for other priorities. Those include raising children, caring for sick and aging parents, and accommodating a spouse's job. And while Ms. Gaul -- who wanted to spend most of her time with her child -- represents one extreme, other women are finding that the 60-hour week often required of successful academics leaves little left over for a satisfying family life. As a result, they are leaving tenured or tenure-track jobs, many after devoting grueling

years to reach the most-coveted goal of their careers.

Experts on work-family conflicts say that if institutions are committed to a diverse work force, they need to do more to accommodate families, such as extending the tenure clock and reducing the teaching load for new parents. They suggest that more colleges create centers for work and family life, which exist now at about 160 institutions. And, they say, colleges must work to remove the stigma of taking advantage of family-friendly policies -- the feeling that women who do so are less committed to their careers.

After all, research standards and the number of publications needed to move up the professorial ladder are at or above levels that were set when the profession was dominated by men who had stay-at-home wives and could afford to spend every waking moment at work.

That many women bail out of tenure-track jobs to raise a family is "not too surprising if you read the statistics on how many hours it takes to get tenure," says Joan C. Williams, a professor of law at American University and director of its Program on Gender, Work & Family. Indeed, she says that many women who get their Ph.D.'s never pursue a tenure-track job because they anticipate it will be incompatible with raising a family. "So long as full time is wild amounts of overtime, you're going to have fewer women no matter what else you do."

As a graduate student in theology at Harvard Divinity School and later in anthropology at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, Ms. Gaul never envisioned having a child. "How can you think about anything but school when you're on that path?" she asked at her kitchen table in Conway one day last month, as she took a break from packing for Alaska. Kameko was in her lap, molding Play-Doh into colorful geometric shapes.

Ms. Gaul came from a family where getting an education meant finishing high school. She took immediately to the intellectual world, but balancing graduate studies with her love of hiking, art, and the outdoors was a struggle. "Academics drives your lifestyle," she says. "It's really hard to find breaks from that."

Ideally, Ms. Gaul would have found a faculty job in Montana, her home state. But choosing where to work is a luxury few anthropologists have. The position at Hendrix seemed attractive enough: The faculty of 70 was small but collegial, and because the college had no anthropology department, Ms. Gaul would create an entire program herself while operating out of the sociology department.

Like the dirty dishes in her sink, her load at Hendrix began to pile up soon after arriving six years ago as an assistant professor. She was asked to serve on numerous committees, including one in charge of a major curriculum overhaul. "Students would come to me for everything," she says. "I had to be really multipurpose."

The year she decided to have a child Ms. Gaul had already submitted a grant proposal to work on a project for the National Park Service about women in Missouri's Ozark Mountains. She got the grant, but she went ahead with her plan to become a single mother. She plowed through her work during her pregnancy, driving three or four days a week to Missouri for her project. She finally returned home to Montana in the early summer of 2001 to give birth.

"It was hard coming back" to Hendrix, she says. She had to start spending \$500 a month on child care, including 20 hours of day care a week as her daughter became old enough. Leaving her baby with other people was gut-wrenching. "I just had all these fears. I kept thinking about what could go wrong with her."

Eventually, though, the struggle became too difficult. On top of caring for Kameko, Ms. Gaul faced constant paper-grading, advising, teaching, and then trying to write.

So she applied for a job she saw advertised for an ethnography program with the National Park Service, in Alaska. She accepted the position just as she was about to be awarded tenure. Ms. Gaul is excited about the cultural and educational opportunities in Anchorage for Kameko, to whom she has already taught some words in Spanish and Hindi. "Over all, I think it will be a better lifestyle for Kameko and me."

Ms. Gaul's story hits home for many career-minded women on the faculty who want a family. One assistant professor, who asked not to be identified, had been told that her tenure in the English department of her university would be assured when she returned from a year's leave at a large, prestigious research university. She had won teaching awards, published, and ran the women's studies program at her university.

While on leave she got married and pregnant with a baby due in September. She requested a second year for maternity leave from her university, which negotiates leaves on an individual basis. She says the administration gave her a choice: return to teach in January after one semester of leave or resign. Her husband was not going to relocate, and "I did not want to move across the country in the middle of the winter with a three-month-old baby and no husband or family," she says. So she resigned.

When she left, she says, older female professors in women's studies thought less of her, saying things like, "I've fought on the front lines so you wouldn't have to do this. You're screwing your career over."

Now, the former professor lives in the Bay Area with her husband and teaches a writing course for mothers, many of them former professionals, who can bring their children to class. "I love it because it integrates my life with my daughter and my intellectual life."

She still has some regrets about leaving academe and is considering going back. Ideally, she would wait until her daughter is older. "But I'm scared if I wait ... it will be that much harder to get back in," she says.

Ms. MacKellar, who was an associate professor of computer science at Western Connecticut State, didn't think it was possible to have children while in academe. In computer science, she says, "the pace of change means you're constantly preparing. To keep up, you need to maintain a research career at some level, even if you're at a teaching school, or you could consult in industry."

She was commuting to Massachusetts on the weekends because her husband was teaching at the College of the Holy Cross, in Worcester. In 1997, her spouse left academe for a software company.

After watching him make the transition from academe to industry, she decided to follow suit. "He was working saner hours and making more money. It was kind of a no-brainer," she says. "His stress level went down, and he was really enjoying what he was doing."

Since leaving academe to become a software engineer at Mobius Management Company, she has had two children, now 1 and 3 years old, and both she and her husband moved into the same house. She works 8:15 a.m. to 5:15 p.m. while her kids are at day care. She has more time to spend with her family, including training for half-marathons with her husband.

Splitting the Difference

Some professors find that, while the tenure track is not for them, they can still find a manageable job in a university setting. Heidi Tilghman gave up her tenured position to switch to the administrative side of academe, where there is less pressure to publish.

Ms. Tilghman's husband, an urban planner, left his job at a small consulting firm in Seattle to move to

Galesburg, Ill., where Ms. Tilghman got her first academic job, at Knox College. After 12 years of building her career, earning tenure, and having two children, Ms. Tilghman decided to quit in 2001, when the Seattle consulting firm offered to rehire her husband.

Her job at Knox had become increasingly unmanageable. She felt she served on countless committees and task forces and performed numerous duties beyond teaching and supervising theses.

Because Knox is a small college that emphasizes student-faculty contact, she felt her door had to be open all the time. Because she is relatively young, she says, students gravitated to her for advice. "I was an amateur counselor. ... I think there's a perception that women are more approachable. I was a very sympathetic ear."

"It was extremely difficult to negotiate a balance between work and family," says Ms. Tilghman. "As my daughters got older and their need for emotional support increased -- and as Knox College began to teeter financially and we were all asked to do yet more for the community -- I simply could not successfully negotiate that balance any longer."

Seattle would give them more opportunities for their two daughters, who were 6 and 10. "So many things were difficult to reach from Galesburg," like theaters and museums, and mountains for hiking.

In Seattle, she became an assistant to the associate dean for academic programs at the University of Washington Graduate School, where she sets up reviews of departmental programs. She also teaches a Germanics course at the university, without pay, every semester.

"I go home and leave my work at work," says Ms. Tilghman. "That's been very good for me, wonderful for my husband, wonderful for my marriage and for my kids."

There are certainly many women who thrive in academe and have balanced, healthy family relationships, says Kristie A. Boering, a professor of earth and planetary science and chemistry at the University of California at Berkeley. "There's this mythical idea that you can't do it, you shouldn't even try," she says.

Still, Ms. Boering, who is married and has a 2-year-old, benefits from Berkeley's progressive policies. She took a reduced course load for one semester, and is currently off the tenure track for a year.

She is also willing to give up some time with her child. Ms. Boering was lucky enough to get her son into one of only six infant-care slots available to the entire faculty. She has a baby-sitter and a part-time nanny. Her husband, an associate professor of chemistry, "did everything but breast-feed."

Her advice to women considering having a family while being a full-time professor is to figure out what their expectations are. She gave up a clean house, dinner parties every week, and spending each and every day with her son, but that's a choice she's comfortable with. "It can be really frustrating to stay home with a toddler all day," she says. As a working mother, "when I'm with him, I forget about work. We smell flowers and look for bugs. I don't feel I have to do that all the time."

Other women, who have left the academic rat race, say they wouldn't go back. Ms. Tilghman, who gave up her tenured job at Knox to be an administrator at Washington, confirmed that she made the right choice when she returned to Knox recently for a visit. "I came back going, 'phew!' and feeling so badly for my friends," she says. "They're still doing everything I was doing and it's very difficult to sustain, so they're at the breaking point. ... I'm relieved not to be there. I'm relieved to be happy."

HELP ON THE FAMILY FRONT

Organizations that deal with work-and-family issues are urging colleges to be more mindful of such concerns. Here is how some institutions are responding:

- The Alfred P. Sloan Foundation gave \$420,000 in March to the University of California at Berkeley to develop a family-friendly package of policies for tenured faculty members. The plan comprises more family-leave time; more child-care opportunities; temporary modified duties after childbirth or adoption, such as fewer teaching hours; a centralized fund to pay people on leave; extended tenure; and a permanent part-time track, both pre- and post-tenure. Berkeley will publicize the arrangements on an interactive Web site designed to help remove the stigma that women who take advantage of such policies are less serious about their scholarly work.
- The Massachusetts Institute of Technology added policies in 2001 that created a part-time tenure track, an extended tenure clock, and a reduced teaching load for one semester at full pay for new parents. The university is also undergoing a major assessment on the work-life front, which includes forming a committee to follow up on a quality-of-life survey of the faculty conducted in 2001.
- Ohio State University has created the Women's Place, an organization through which women can find information and support. It is conducting a study of recently hired female professors to find out why more women than men leave the faculty before their fourth year. The group meets twice a month to answer questions like, How welcoming was the university in your first year?
- At the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, professors can take two years off the tenure track. The university plans to start offering creative services to parents, like a concierge service, where for \$20 an hour professors can hire someone to pick up a child from day care or take a car to the shop at the last minute.

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