

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION AND EMPLOYED MOTHERS

Anne-Marie Ambert

Dans le processus de création et de mise en action de programmes d'action positive pour femmes, les responsabilités ménagères des mères qui travaillent doivent être considérées. La bureaucratie universitaire persiste à imposer aux membres féminins du corps enseignant, un double fardeau. Les critères employés pour déterminer les promotions et les augmentations de mérite – l'érudition, l'enseignement et les services – doivent être modifiés pour permettre de surmonter cette inégalité. Anne-Marie Ambert propose qu'élever des enfants soit inclu dans la catégorie des services, comme service à la communauté.

Affirmative Action may mean very little if we do not offer an occupational structure that does not conflict with the home responsibilities of employed mothers. Indeed, all studies done in eastern and western industrialized nations (whether Russia or Canada) show that married women with children do most of the housework and nearly all of the child-care, even when they are also employed outside the house. Thus, employed women carry two loads: women university professors are not exempted from this rule.

In the case of women professors who have young children – as well as men faculty who have sole custody of young children – this structural situation has led to another fundamental inequity: such persons cannot be expected to excel in all three dimensions of the reward system generally utilized for promotion and merit pay – scholarship, teaching, and services (generally committee work). These women are especially penalized in the area of services because most committee work takes place after 3 p.m. – at a time when mothers have to pick up children from school, drive them to lessons, and

later on give them supper. Even if committee work takes place during the day, it takes time and these mothers have less of this precious commodity than childless persons.

Since it might be too difficult to restructure the work schedule of an entire university, I suggest that women faculty who have young children (and sole custody fathers) be exempted from the services category during deliberations for promotion and merit pay. Women who raise children are already serving the community; they are raising the next generation of tax payers and are re-producing the labour force. We simply cannot continue to exact a double duty from our women faculty members. Neither can we throw the easy accusation that faculty women "can't have their cake and eat it too." Raising children and giving them the devotion they deserve while teaching and being productive on the scholarly front is not exactly a "piece of cake!"

Universities are at the forefront of knowledge-creation and dissemination. In this role, it is incumbent upon them to set the example by not forcing such women to carry a double load – which the men, in any case, do not do. Why the double standard? I urge university women to get organized and put pressure on their individual chairs, deans, union executives, and presidents to recognize and remedy this inequity. I furthermore urge tenured faculty women with young children to refuse to provide information on their "services" when merit pay discussions take place. Raising children is a service to the community for which women ought to be compensated.

P.S.: When I was contacted by phone to write this statement, I was whipping up a meringue pie and was concerned over a child doing hand-stands in the staircase. I wrote this

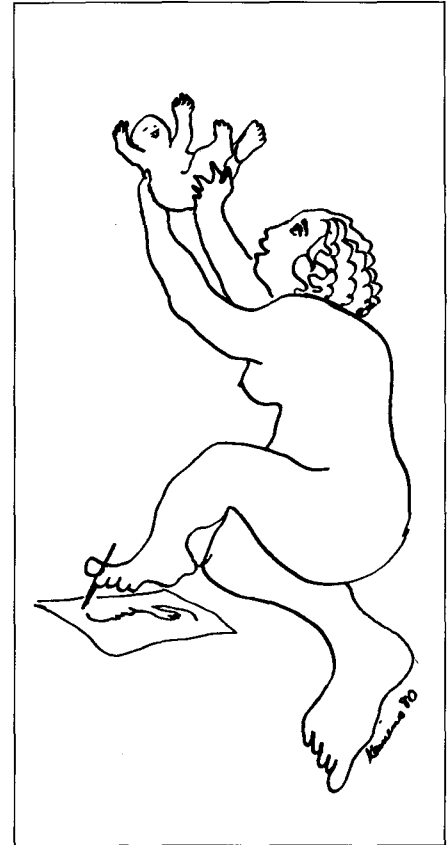


Illustration by Jean Kamins

statement after learning that I had had another paper accepted by a refereed journal, after teaching two classes, picking up the children at school, and doing a laundry. While polishing the final draft, I took note of the following interruptions: I had to unzip a small dress, help with two homeworks, give a hug, admire a drawing, and fix up a toy.

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