

Childfree in the Academy: Class and Motherhood in the Professoriate

by Lynn Arner

Abstract: Employing a survey of English faculty across Canada and data from Statistics Canada, the first one-third of this article examines the intersection of gender and parental educational level in relation to faculty members' likelihood of having children. Although among the men reproduction was not associated with parental educational level, women whose parents possessed graduate degrees were more likely to have children than women with lower parental educational levels. The bulk of the article discusses some of the implications of these disparities. Not all women struggle equally to balance academic careers with childrearing: class privilege can compensate for some gendered disadvantages. Given their increased chances of being childfree, given their gender, and given their class backgrounds, women faculty with lower parental educational levels can end up with heavier workloads than their colleagues. With the government and universities alike failing to provide adequate childcare, university administrators routinely shift the responsibility for accommodating parents' schedules onto childfree women and LGBTQ+ faculty. Because (heterosexual) men typically spend more of their work time than their women colleagues on research, because of gendered assumptions about service and about the pastoral care of students, and because of the time constraints of faculty mothers, a disproportionate amount of service and care work is performed by childfree women and their LGBTQ+ colleagues, hindering their ability to publish.

Keywords: academic labour; childless faculty; faculty who are first-generation university students; working-class faculty; gender discrimination in academe; classism in academe

Résumé : En s'appuyant sur un sondage mené auprès de professeur·e·s de littérature anglaise dans l'ensemble du Canada et de données de Statistique Canada, le premier tiers de cet article examine l'intersection du genre et du niveau de scolarité des parents en lien avec la probabilité que les membres du corps professoral aient des enfants. Bien que, chez les hommes, le fait d'avoir des enfants ne soit pas associé au niveau de scolarité des parents, les femmes dont les parents détenaient des diplômes d'études supérieures étaient plus susceptibles d'avoir des enfants que les femmes dont les parents avaient un niveau de scolarité inférieur. La majeure partie de l'article examine certaines des répercussions de ces disparités. Les femmes ne se heurtent pas toutes aux mêmes difficultés pour concilier une carrière universitaire et l'éducation des enfants : les privilèges liés à la classe sociale peuvent compenser certains désavantages liés au genre. Compte tenu de leur plus grande probabilité de ne pas avoir d'enfants, de leur genre et de leur milieu socioéconomique, les femmes membres du corps professoral dont les parents ont un niveau de scolarité inférieur peuvent se retrouver avec une charge de travail plus lourde que celle de leurs collègues. Alors que le gouvernement et les universités ne fournissent pas suffisamment de services de garde, les administrateur·trice·s universitaires transfèrent régulièrement la responsabilité de l'adaptation des horaires des parents aux femmes sans enfants et aux membres du corps professoral LGBTQ+. Comme les hommes (hétérosexuels) consacrent généralement plus de leur temps de travail à la recherche que leurs collègues féminines en raison de présomptions genrées du travail de service et de l'accompagnement des étudiant·e·s, ainsi que des contraintes de temps auxquelles font face les mères membres du corps professoral, une part disproportionnée de ce travail et de cet accompagnement est assumée par les femmes sans enfants et leurs collègues LGBTQ+, ce qui nuit à leur capacité de publier.

Mots clés : travail universitaire; membres du corps professoral sans enfants; membres du corps professoral qui sont les premiers de leur famille à fréquenter l'université; membres du corps professoral issus de la classe ouvrière; discrimination fondée sur le genre dans le milieu universitaire; discrimination fondée sur la classe sociale dans le milieu universitaire

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Introduction

Scholars have often observed that, among university professors, women are less likely than men to have children (e.g., Mason and Goulden 2004; Mason et al. 2013). Apart from considerations of marital status (e.g., Mason et al. 2013), researchers have paid little attention to which women in the tenure system tend to have children versus which women are more likely to remain childfree. In 2020, I conducted a nationwide survey of faculty in the discipline of English in Canada that sheds light on this issue. A key reason why this question has not been investigated is that the professoriate is generally seen as much more homogeneous than it actually is. While race in the profession has been an important area of inquiry (e.g., Henry et al. 2017; Gutiérrez y Muhs et al. 2012), class in the professoriate has not yet received much attention. This oversight is largely because, as Timothy Haney's (2016) survey of Canadian professors attests, most faculty view class in the professoriate as a non-issue. It is as if once working-class students earn degrees—and certainly once PhD recipients enter tenure-track positions—class differences among faculty vanish.

Although employed in a middle-class occupation, not all university professors are middle class. In Canada, large portions of faculty derive from working-class backgrounds. According to Statistics Canada, one-half of all PhD recipients in 2005 were first-generation university students (Desjardins 2012). Similarly, as explained in my previous work (Arner 2021), according to Statistics Canada's *Survey of Earned Doctorates (SED)*, the parents of 38.8% of English doctoral recipients in Canada from 2003–2008 held no university degrees. While first-generation university students and working-class students are not interchangeable groups, there is a very large overlap, and parental educational level is conventionally considered a key indicator of socioeconomic status (Oldfield and Conant 2001; Carnevale and Rose 2004). Socioeconomic disparities among faculty—rooted in their familial backgrounds—have *profound* effects on academic careers. In the US, these effects are as monumental as where scholars earn their degrees and where they are hired (Grimes and Morris 1997; Lipset and Ladd 1979; Roscigno et al. 2023). The same is true in Canada (Arner 2021, 2024). Despite the profound effects of socioeconomic background on academic careers, the relation between socioeconomic roots and reproduction among faculty has been almost entirely ignored.¹

Based on my survey of English faculty across Canada, the first one-third of this article examines the parental educational level of women faculty in relation to their likelihood of being mothers. The study then discusses some key conditions that enable women scholars from higher socioeconomic backgrounds to become mothers but that make it difficult for women scholars from lower socioeconomic backgrounds to have children. (It is important not to assume, however, that childfree women necessarily want children.) Although the Canadian federal government has instituted a generous parental leave policy nationwide, because of the unfulfilled promise by the Canadian government (excluding the province of Quebec) to provide universal childcare and because of the simultaneous dearth of on-campus childcare available to faculty, not only are the Canadian government and universities failing faculty mothers, but, as this article explains, these institutions are also failing childfree women faculty and their LGBTQ+ colleagues (groups that obviously overlap to some degree). Part of this failure involves senior university administrators routinely displacing their responsibility for accommodating parents onto childfree women and LGBTQ+ faculty and thereby creating unnecessary conflict among different groups of faculty.

Methods²

From January 28 through May 28, 2020, I conducted a survey that invited the participation of all faculty (excluding graduate students) listed on the websites of English departments at every university in Canada. I selected English because it has been the largest discipline in the Humanities, in both Canada and the US, with the greatest volume of students and the biggest faculty labour pool for decades. Survey invitations were emailed to 1,913 faculty, and the survey garnered a response rate of 32.51% ($N = 622$).³ Four screening questions asked participants to affirm that they were (a) housed in an English department/program, (b) not students, and (c) not primarily administrators outside an English department/program and that they were (d) either teaching or on sabbatical during that academic year.⁴ 556 participants remained in the survey. The overall survey explored a few key ways in which careers might differ for English faculty according to their gender and parental educational level. This article concentrates on one section of the survey, specifically the section on reproduction.

Respondents were asked to indicate their gender and parental educational levels. For gender, respondents could identify as men, as women, or as non-binary. Seven participants skipped this question, and six selected non-binary, too small a group for analysis. The survey did not inquire about sexuality because, if participants were out in the profession, there was a risk of revealing the individual identities of individuals of those who indicated that they were LGBTQ+. For parental educational level, participants could choose from the following categories for each parent/guardian: (a) no baccalaureate; (b) a baccalaureate as the highest degree; or (c) an advanced degree. Six participants skipped this question.

This article also employs publicly unavailable Statistics Canada data on English PhD recipients. Li Wang, Kristopher Brazil, and I processed data from the *SED* from 2003–2008, the only years in which the *SED* was conducted in Canada. Kristopher and I processed data from the *National Graduate Survey (NGS)* for university students who completed degrees in 2000, 2005, 2010, and 2015 (Statistics Canada 2002, 2007a, 2013, 2018).⁵

My survey could not inquire about participants' race because of the limited number of BIPOC scholars (Black, Indigenous, and people of colour) who had graduated with English PhDs in Canada. In the *SED* (Statistics Canada 2005, 2007b, 2008a, 2008b, 2009), 88% of English PhD recipients identified as White, and an additional number did not answer questions about their race or ethnicity, meaning that the real percentage of White English PhD recipients may have been higher. Hence, in my survey, the variable of race would have generated cell counts too diminutive to analyze and, due to other variables, could have revealed some participants' individual identities.

Results

Table 1 records the number of respondents in my survey, divided according to (binary) gender and parental educational level.

Table 1: *Gender and parental educational level of faculty*

	Men	Women	Total
Parents with no university degrees	91 (16.79%)	124 (22.88%)	215 (39.67%)
Parents with baccalaureates only	41 (7.56%)	75 (13.84%)	116 (21.40%)
Parents with advanced degrees	88 (16.24%)	123 (22.69%)	211 (38.93%)
Total	220 (40.59%)	322 (59.41%)	542 (100%)

Notes. N in the tables vary because a few participants intermittently skipped some questions. Due to rounding, totals in the tables may not equal 100%.

Table 2 outlines the number of men and women in each parental educational level who answered “yes” to the question “Do you have children?” Although my survey found a gendered disparity in the proportion of men (65.8%) and women (60.2%) who were parents, this gap was not statistically significant, $\chi^2(1, N = 540) = 1.69, p = .194$.

Table 2: *Gender and parental educational level of faculty with children*

	Men	Women	Total
Parents with no university degrees	59 (64.8%)	68 (54.8%)	127 (59.1%)
Parents with baccalaureates only	25 (61%)	39 (52.7%)	64 (55.7%)
Parents with advanced degrees	60 (69%)	86 (69.9%)	146 (69.5%)
Total	144 (65.8%)	193 (60.1%)	337 (62.4%)

Note. $N = 540$.

There was an association between parental educational level and having children. As Table 3 demonstrates, faculty whose parents possessed advanced degrees had an increased likelihood of having children compared to faculty whose parents did not possess advanced degrees, $\chi^2(2, N = 548) = 8.31, p = .016$.

Table 3: *Parental educational level and number of faculty with children*

	No degrees	Baccalaureates	Advanced degrees	Total
Count	129a	64a	149b	342
Expected Count	136.1	72.4	133.6	342
% Responding “Yes” within “Do you have children?”	23.5%	11.7%	27.2%	62.4%
% Within parental educational level	59.2%	55.2%	69.6%	62.4%
Standardized Residual	-.6	-1.0	1.3	

Notes. $N = 548$. “A” indicates a subset of parental educational levels whose column proportions do not differ significantly from each other at the .05 level.

Regarding where the disparities among the groups lie, there were no significant differences among the three groups of men in the likelihood of having children, $\chi^2(2, N = 219) = 8.31, p = .654$. As Table 4 demonstrates, the disparity lay specifically among the women: women who were first-generation university students or whose parents held only baccalaureates were significantly less likely to have children than women whose parents possessed advanced degrees, $\chi^2(2, N = 321) = 8.07, p = .018$.

Table 4: Parental educational level and number of women without children

	No degrees	Baccalaureates	Advanced degrees	Total
Count	56a	35a	37b	128
Expected Count	49.4	29.5	49	128
% Responding “No” within parental educational level	45.2%	47.3%	30.1%	39.9%
% Within “Do you have children?”	43.8%	27.3%	28.9%	100%
Standardized Residual	.9	1	-1.7	

Notes. $N = 321$. “A” denotes a subset of parental educational levels whose column proportions do not differ significantly from each other at the .05 level.

Table 5 records the average number of children across the entire faculty pool, including parents and nonparents alike.

Table 5: Average number of children among all faculty, according to parental educational level and gender

	M	N	SD
Women whose parents have no degrees	.94	124	1.01
Women whose parents have baccalaureates only	.95	74	1.01
Women whose parents have advanced degrees	1.28	123	1.02
Men whose parents have no degrees	1.35	91	1.14
Men whose parents have baccalaureates only	1.20	41	1.15
Men whose parents have advanced degrees	1.36	86	1.08
Total	1.18	539	1.07

Faculty parents averaged 1.89 children ($SD = 0.7$). Among the six groups divided by gender and by parental educational level, post-hoc analysis revealed that the only significant gender difference lay among faculty who were first-generation university students: fathers who were first-generation university students ($M = 2.08$, $SD = .68$) had a significantly greater likelihood of having more children than mothers who were first-generation university students ($M = 1.72$, $SD = .71$) ($MD = .364$, $SE [.122]$, $p = .037$, 95% CI [.01, .72]).

Regarding when in their career trajectories faculty reproduce, in the *NGS*, 42.3% of survey participants already had children when they completed their English PhDs: 53.3% of the men were parents but only 37.7% of the women. Among the women, the *NGS* suggests that the motherhood gap between women whose parents held advanced degrees and women whose parents had lower educational levels was already underway early in their careers: nearly one-half (47.7%) of the women whose parents held advanced degrees were mothers at PhD graduation versus only one-third (33.3%) of the other women (Statistics Canada 2002, 2007a, 2013, 2018).

Age is clearly an important factor regarding when in an academic career a woman might reproduce. Employing data from the *SED*, my previous work (Arner 2024) demonstrated that, at the conferral of the PhD in English, there was a significant difference between the age of first-generation university students and the age of those whose parents possessed advanced degrees: from 2003–2008, women whose parents possessed advanced degrees graduated on average at age 33.3; women whose parents possessed only baccalaureates graduated on average at age 37; and women who were first-generation university students graduated on average at age 39.4. Not surprisingly, women who were first-generation university students formed the largest proportion of PhD recipients who graduated at forty or older (Arner 2024). Similarly, according to the *SED*, the older English PhD recipients were significantly less likely to have parents with university degrees (Arner 2024). These age disparities were attributable primarily to differences in age upon entry into doctoral programs, since the length of time to PhD completion was comparable across gender and parental educational levels (Arner 2024).

Among my survey participants, women faculty inside the tenure system were no more likely to be mothers than women outside the tenure system: 61.9% of women in the tenure system and 56.9% of women outside the tenure system were mothers, $\chi^2(1, N = 320) = .744, p = .39$. Likewise, women who taught part-time were no more likely to be mothers than women who taught full-time, $\chi^2(1, N = 322) = .423, p = .52$: among the women, 56.9% of part-time and 61.2% of full-time faculty were mothers. The absence of significant disparities between mothers outside versus inside the tenure system and mothers who worked full-time versus part-time persisted across the different age groups (under 35, 35–39, 40–49, 50–59, 60–65, 66 and over) and hence is not explainable by age.

My survey did not investigate the likelihood of LGBTQ+ faculty having children. However, the 2021 Statistics Canada (2022) census sheds light on this issue in Canada as a whole. According to the census data, in 2021 slightly over one-half of the heterosexual couples in Canada had children living with them, but less than one-quarter of lesbian couples, roughly 6% of gay men couples, and just under one-third of transgender or non-binary couples had children in the home.

Discussion

Not all groups of women are equally able to balance careers with childrearing

Among the groups of women divided by parental educational level, disparities in the likelihood of having children seem to indicate that the oft-cited problem of balancing careers with childrearing (e.g., Connelly and Ghodee 2011; Bracken et al. 2006) does not affect all three groups of women equally. Since my survey suggests that mothers whose parents hold advanced degrees are the most likely group of women to have children, it appears that class privilege can compensate for many gendered disadvantages. One key component of class privilege for women whose parents hold advanced degrees is the average age at which they complete their PhDs, well within childbearing years, enabling a large number of women faculty from this group to have children, if they choose, often within the security of a tenure-track, and sometimes tenured, line.

Another key component of the class privilege enjoyed by women whose parents possess advanced degrees are the material conditions in which a disproportionate number of these women work. Primarily because of strong faculty unions, Canadian universities overall have experienced much less casualization of academic labour than their US counterparts, although the tenure system in Canada is increasingly under threat. Irrespective of the disparity between the

US and Canada regarding the proportion of faculty who work inside the tenure system, in both countries not only are women scholars with higher parental educational levels more likely than women scholars with lower parental educational levels to hold tenure-track positions, but they are more likely to hold such positions at prestigious universities (Grimes and Morris 1997; Lipset and Ladd 1979; Roscigno et al. 2023; Arner 2021, 2024). As Matt Brim (2020) explains, faculty members' abilities to produce scholarship are tied to the material conditions of their academic workplace, and stark contrasts exist between elite, well-resourced research universities (with their greater availability of sabbaticals and funding for research and conference travel, at least for faculty in the tenure system) and under-resourced universities.

Brim's observation applies not only to scholars' material conditions at work but can also apply to scholars' material conditions at home. Women scholars from economically privileged families are not usually laden with so much childcare and housework that their research suffers greatly. To use the logic of Pierre Bourdieu (2011), most women faculty whose parents hold advanced degrees have sufficient access to capital to purchase the time of poorer women to perform domestic and childcare labour, allowing the more socioeconomically privileged women to free their time for nondomestic pursuits, in this case research. In *The PhD Parenthood Trap: Caught Between Work and Family in Academia*, Kerry F. Crawford and Leah C. Windsor (2021) discuss their survey of faculty parents who work in a variety of post-secondary colleges and universities (mostly in the US). Emphasizing a respondent's comment "Pay for your time back" (197), Crawford and Windsor explain that many of their respondents recommended hiring others to clean the house, to deliver groceries, and to prepare food.

By contrast, the decreased likelihood of faculty women from less socioeconomically privileged backgrounds of becoming mothers seems to suggest that less privileged women have a reduced ability to combine an academic career with children. A key factor is the average ages at which the two groups of women with lower parental educational levels complete English PhDs. Thirty-seven and especially thirty-nine respectively do not leave much time on the biological clock for securing a tenure-track job, earning tenure, and producing a baby. Freezing embryos and in vitro fertilization can be expensive and unreliable. Women with limited financial resources who dare to have children (biological clock permitting) can have their research time devoured by childcare and domestic work and thereby jeopardize their career. Presumably at least a few women academicians with lower parental educational levels avoid having children because of the risk of severely damaging—or forfeiting—their careers as scholars.

Although they do not necessarily possess a lot of disposable income, heterosexual men faculty do not typically face the same pressure to choose between careers and children, not only because of greater latitude age-wise for paternity but also because their partners usually bear heavier domestic and childcare responsibilities. A 2022 survey by the Pew Research Center (Fry et al. 2023) in the US found that in heterosexual marriages when wives either were the primary earners or had earnings comparable to their husbands, husbands spent more time on work and leisure, while wives devoted more time to caregiving and housework. Only when wives were the sole breadwinners, a mere 6% of heterosexual marriages, did husbands spend more time than their wives on caregiving—but not on housework. Regarding English faculty specifically, the Modern Language Association's report from Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession (2009) found that women faculty in English and in Modern Languages and Literatures at US universities and colleges devoted significantly more time to childcare than their men counterparts, averaging 31.6 versus 14.2 hours a week respectively. Given the gendered distribution of domestic labour and childcare, most fathers' research time would not be devoured to the same extent as that of mothers who cannot afford many domestic and childcare services.

Lest one object that, irrespective of parental educational level, mothers in the tenure system in the strongly unionized Canadian university system earn comparable salaries and hence are equally equipped to pay for childcare and domestic services, it is important to remember familial money. The intergenerational transfer of wealth is a key source of financial support for privileged families. Scholars whose parents possess advanced degrees typically have access to greater familial funds because their families are usually wealthier. Scholars whose parents possess lower levels of parental education, especially scholars who are first-generation university students, often have little more than their paycheques upon which to rely. Regarding spousal support, a longitudinal study of Canadian tax files indicates that heterosexual

women tend to partner with a spouse whose income level is relatively similar to that of their parents, especially towards the top of the income distribution (Yang et al. 2022). Consequently, the spouses of women who are first-generation university students would typically earn less than the spouses of women whose parents hold advanced degrees. Regarding lesbian couples, another longitudinal study of Canadian tax records reveals that women who live as part of a lesbian couple (specifically, women who have never lived in heterosexual marriages or common-law unions) earn on average 25% less when living in a common-law relationship and 31% less when married than heterosexual married men earn on average, although this investigation was unable to consider class differences (Yang et al. 2025). Women faculty who are first-generation university students can have many financial impediments to motherhood, such as sizeable student loan debt, no parental assistance with home purchases, and lower lifetime earnings because of the average age at which they complete their PhDs. Moreover, as Vincent J. Roscigno et al. (2023) learned, it is not uncommon for scholars who are first-generation university students to financially assist their parents and other relatives.

The problem of childcare

The Canadian government has accomplished quite a bit for working mothers, but universal daycare has yet to be delivered, a failure that profoundly affects women scholars in Canada, whether or not they have children. The Canadian government has dealt reasonably well with the most common policy demand of parents who publish on motherhood in academe: substantial paid maternity leave (e.g., Connelly and Ghodsee 2011; Mason et al. 2013; Crawford and Windsor 2021). Under Canadian federal law, a mother is entitled to seventeen weeks of maternity leave, then thirty-five weeks of standard parental leave, followed by extended parental leave, to a maximum of seventy-eight weeks total when parental leave is not shared. Partners are also entitled to parental leave, with a cap of eighty-six weeks combined total when shared (Government of Canada 2023). In addition to stopping tenure clocks and, at many universities, continuing to accrue sabbatical credit, parents typically receive supplemental income from their universities to narrow the gap between their unemployment insurance income and their salaries. (It is important to note that faculty outside the tenure system do not receive equal parental support from their universities.)

The Canadian government and Canadian universities alike have been much less successful at addressing the second most common demand of parents who publish on motherhood in academe: quality on-campus childcare that is affordable and accessible (among others, Crawford and Windsor 2021; Connelly and Ghodsee 2011; Mason et al. 2013). Quebec is the only province that funds an affordable early learning and childcare system and has done so since 1997 (Fortin 2018). In 2024, the federal government reported that it had lowered the price of childcare in regulated childcare facilities by at least 50% in half the provinces/territories and to \$10 on average in the remaining provinces/territories (Government of Canada 2024). In 2022 and again in 2024, my research assistant Alia Wassan and I examined the childcare webpages for all Canadian universities (excluding Quebec) with English departments that granted baccalaureates. Most on-campus childcare facilities appeared to have lengthy waitlists and typically closed at 5:30 p.m. or 6:00 p.m. (Some closed earlier.) The majority did not accept children older than five, and most childcare centres prioritized the children of students over those of faculty.

By routinely offering parental accommodations but failing to provide sufficient childcare services, senior university administrators and university boards of trustees create conflict among different groups of women faculty, along with some of their LGBTQ+ colleagues. Faculty parents (especially mothers of underage children) can usually avoid teaching evening courses. At many universities, parents—irrespective whether they are in the tenure system—are eligible for teaching schedules that facilitate dropping off, or picking up, their children at school and taking their children to after-school extracurricular activities, such as sports practice. Such accommodations are provided through either formal institutional mechanisms or informal arrangements. The burden of accommodating parents typically falls on childfree women and on many of their LGBTQ+ colleagues. With the shortage of childcare on campus, these two groups are obvious candidates for teaching night courses. As many feminist scholars have argued, childfree women—both in academe and in the larger workforce—are expected to have greater work availability, to work longer and during undesirable hours, and to take additional assignments than co-workers with children (França 2022; Ramsay and Letherby 2006; Cummins 2005; Verniers 2020). Given that, according to my survey, at least in the discipline of English in Canada, women whose parents hold advanced degrees are more likely to have children than women whose

parents do not have advanced degrees, women from less privileged socioeconomic backgrounds, even in the tenure system, can teach a disproportionate number of 8:00 a.m. and evening classes to accommodate the schedules of their co-workers' children. Similarly, LGBTQ+ faculty almost certainly teach a disproportionate number of 8:00 a.m. and evening courses.

Teaching predominantly in the evening has many disadvantages. First, usually little or no infrastructural support is available, such as administrative assistance, computer help desks, and technical support in classrooms. Second, campus buildings and parking lots can be sparsely populated in the evenings and not overly safe, especially for women and LGBTQ+ folks. Third, night classes often contain different students, especially nonmajors, than during the day, meaning that faculty with night classes might not teach many majors in their own department. Fourth, a faculty member who teaches until 10:00 p.m. may need to either remain on campus for as long as twelve hours or make multiple trips to campus in a day because of morning meetings.

Tenure-track and tenured faculty who teach during the day, when halls are busy, can enjoy a sense of community and bond with fellow faculty around mailboxes and photocopiers. More importantly, because they are not casually running into colleagues on a regular basis, faculty who teach in the evenings can be left out of informal conversations about departmental policy and long-term plans. Consequently, when faculty who teach predominantly in the evening arrive at departmental meetings, policy can be *a fait accompli*, worked out informally by the tenure-track and tenured faculty who teach during the peak of the day. Since non-parents are disproportionately women from less privileged socioeconomic backgrounds and LGBTQ+ faculty, it is frequently already marginalized groups who are further disenfranchised by parental teaching schedules, and these groups can experience greater alienation and isolation from their departments and universities.⁶ By shifting the responsibility for accommodating parents onto childfree faculty instead of supplying adequate childcare, senior administrators and university boards of trustees are disadvantaging childfree women—who, my survey suggests, are disproportionately from less socioeconomically advantaged groups—and large numbers of faculty with non-normative genders and sexualities. It is important to note that the senior administrators who are shifting this workload onto these two marginalized groups are typically middle-class heterosexual men, as are the majority of the members of boards of trustees at most Canadian universities.

In addition to difficult teaching schedules, childfree women and LGBTQ+ faculty can perform more than their fair share of service. Numerous studies have demonstrated that men faculty overall typically perform less service than women faculty overall and that men dedicate more of their work hours to research (Statistics Canada 2020; Guarino and Borden 2017; Misra et al. 2011; Massé and Hogan 2010; O'Meara et al. 2017).⁷ Not all groups of women perform equal amounts of service, though. Understandably, scholars who are mothers frequently warn other academic mothers to perform minimal service work, to protect their research time while childrearing (e.g., Connelly and Ghodee 2011). Not surprisingly, a survey conducted by Julie A. Kmec et al. (2015) at a major, multi-campus Research-1 university in the US found that faculty mothers perform less service on average than men and than women without children. Given this diminution of service, the heaviest service burden falls on childfree women.

In an oft-cited observation, Joan Acker (1990) points out that it is commonplace to view academic women without children as ideal employees, unencumbered by caregiving demands outside their jobs, always available, committed exclusively to their jobs, and free to help others. In addition to acknowledged service, invisible caring workloads are heavier for childfree women, including meeting with greater volumes of students (Cummins 2005; Ramsay and Letherby 2006). Both mothers and childfree women are affected by an ideology of motherhood in academe: in addition to being perceived by students and other staff as naturally caring because they are women, academic childfree women are expected to put in the time and energy that mothers cannot (Ramsay and Letherby 2006; Verniers 2020; França 2022). Such perceptions lead to the exploitation of women faculty who are childfree, especially if single, inundating them with compulsory emotional labour for colleagues and students and ultimately impeding their ability to publish (Cummins 2005). Simultaneously, scholars from first-generation and working-class backgrounds spend significantly more hours each week advising and mentoring students (Roscigno et al. 2023). Given the intersection of class and gender, it appears that women faculty who are childfree and first-generation university students bear the heaviest load of care work.

The extra service and care work pushed onto childfree women—because of gendered assumptions and practices—can damage the careers of childfree women by syphoning their research time. It is almost as if their workplaces are punishing childfree women with extra service and care work because they failed to reproduce. The displacement of excessive service onto childfree women promotes the exploitation of women who, because they do not have children, are understood by hegemonic ideologies to be less socially valuable than mothers. Simultaneously, for those childfree women from working-class backgrounds, the hegemonic assumption that women from working-class backgrounds are worth less than (most) men and than women from middle-class backgrounds can intensify the demands on them for service and care work, especially since women from working-class backgrounds are from the class and gender that routinely perform service and care work in the larger labour force. Irrespective of their socioeconomic position, according to the logic of pronatalist societies like Canada, LGBTQ+ faculty deserve to be punished, including with extra work, because of their gender and sexual deviance; and they should be de-prioritized vis-à-vis reproductive, heterosexual, gender-normative workers.

Conclusion

Academe is already a difficult career for women, mothers and childfree women alike. Being a professor is especially arduous for women from working-class backgrounds, who, my survey suggests, are less likely to have children than women whose parents possess advanced degrees. There are no easy solutions to the problems outlined in this essay, since sexism, homophobia, and classism are endemic in academe, reflecting the larger society. However, a greater awareness of which groups of women faculty are more likely to have children could lead to more nuanced advice when scholars write about how to negotiate motherhood in academic careers. More pressingly, it is important that faculty and faculty unions understand that different groups of women, along with their LGBTQ+ colleagues, are being pit against each other in the current structure of parental accommodations routinely in place at Canadian universities. Meanwhile, heterosexual fathers fare the best, since, as explained earlier, men typically perform less service and care work than women and instead spend more work time on research. Because there are no signs that university administrators will rein in the service—necessary or not—that they demand of faculty, because there are no indications that heterosexual men plan to increase their service and care work on campus, because there are no indications that heterosexual men beyond academe plan to dramatically increase the amount of housework and childcare that they perform so that their partners bear less such responsibilities, and because Canadian society shows few signs of abandoning its pronatalism, the best approach for childfree women and LGBTQ+ faculty is to join mothers' calls for universal, accessible, and affordable childcare—even though this demand may seem counterintuitive to the childfree. Otherwise, childfree women and LGBTQ+ faculty will continue to be the *de facto* substitute for accessible, affordable childcare, and their careers and quality of life will continue to pay the price.

Endnotes

1. The few investigations of class and motherhood among faculty are typically autobiographical (including Mosier-Puentes 2023; Copland 2019).
2. An alternate description of the survey appears in Arner (2024), which discusses a different section of the survey on an entirely different topic.
3. 1,913 excludes undeliverable messages. Sample sizes for individual questions vary due to branching and because some participants intermittently skipped questions.
4. The fourth restriction bumped 15 (2.41%) participants, possibly including contingent faculty who do not teach every year and faculty on parental or medical leave.
5. Data from the *SED* are unweighted, but the weighted and unweighted data were similar. Data from the *NGS* are weighted.

6. On exclusion and alienation experienced by childfree women and queer workers, see, for example, Ramsay and Letherby 2006; França 2022; Turnbull et al. 2018; Wilkinson 2020; Verniers 2020; Cummins 2005.

7. The Modern Language Association's *Standing Still* (2009) is a rare exception in that this study did not find that women spent significantly more time on service; however, the study found that women dedicated more time than men to teaching.

Conflicts of Interest

The author has no conflicts of interest.

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