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## Research points to crucial role of dual-career programs for recruiting female academics

Submitted by Scott Jaschik on August 22, 2016 - 3:00am

Dual-career programs have become widely seen as vital in faculty recruiting. To get one half of a faculty couple, a college needs to offer a good opportunity to the spouse, the theory goes. Colleges do this in a variety of ways, sometimes going so far as to authorize new lines in some departments so that both halves of a couple have a reason to move. But other institutions do relatively little to help.

Much of the discussion about dual-career issues in academe has assumed that these efforts are important in recruiting both male and female academics. But new research previewed Sunday at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association suggests that dual career may be especially important in recruiting female professors with husbands who are also in academe. These women, the study found, are significantly more likely to turn down good jobs at universities if their spouses aren't offered an appropriate job than are male professors whose female partners aren't offered a good job. (The study examined only male-female dual-career couples, as there were not enough same-sex partners in the pool.)

The authors of the study -- Julie Kmec, a professor of sociology at Washington State University, and Hong Zhang, a doctoral student there -- used survey data from faculty couples at seven universities. They did not name the universities but said that they were all universities that to most academics would be desirable employers.

Kmec and Zhang discussed their findings only in general terms, as their work is currently under review for journal publication. But their paper suggests that the results could be significant for efforts to recruit female academics with male partners, especially in science and technology disciplines.

The couples were asked if they would have accepted their current jobs if their spouses or partners had not been offered "appropriate employment."

Across fields, women were much more likely than men to say they would have turned down jobs if there wasn't a job for the spouse. This was especially the case where the male spouse was in a STEM field.

Within academic couples, of course, one half of the couple may have more stature in academe than the other half does. And this leads to one of the more striking parts of the study.

The women who were surveyed were asked if they viewed their academic careers as

primary to their partner's, secondary or equal. The survey data showed that even women who viewed their career as primary to their husbands' had greater odds than men of turning down an academic job without a good job for the partner. This finding wasn't as surprising to the researchers for those who viewed their career as secondary to their husbands' but was more of a surprise when looking at those who said their career was the primary one of the couple.

Kmec said that the findings point to a reality of continued expectations on female academics to boost their husbands' careers.

"What you have is a problem of gender overriding" career opportunities, she said. While every career decision involves a unique set of personal and professional considerations, she said that the results should concern academic leaders because of the greater chances of women turning down positions. This will make it difficult for colleges and universities to hire leading female academics, she said.

To deal with this, she said, colleges need to make sure that they are giving women "better offers or more money" to compensate for a potential loss in income for male partners if it takes them longer to find jobs. Further, she said, colleges need to make a priority "of finding legitimate opportunities for the men" whose partners are being recruited.

### Faculty <sup>[1]</sup>

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