

REALIZING CRITICAL GEOGRAPHIES OF THE UNIVERSITY

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The university is perhaps one of the strangest institutions in the US. Consistently mistaken for what they cannot be, US land grant universities such as the one at which I am employed sometimes seem almost impossible to sustain, politically, economically, and even culturally. To be a faculty member at such a university is to feel largely on the receiving end, along with students and staff, of far-reaching and structural shifts in the university and its contexts. Of course, it is dangerous to generalize about *the* university in the US. There is a great variety of institutional forms of higher education in the US, including private and public schools, two-year colleges, liberal arts colleges, and so on (see, e.g., Clark, 1987). In addition, institutions such as think tanks (e.g., Heritage Foundation, Cato Institute) now compete with universities in the production of information and analysis (see Wacquant, 1996:20). Furthermore, as Katharyne Mitchell (1999) has argued, US public universities are being changed as new technologies impact instruction and as new online, for-profit universities enter the scene.

Mitchell (1999) believes that these significant changes in the nature of the university are far from being well understood by those who work in the traditional universities. Mitchell (1999) joins others—notably Bill Readings (1996)—in worrying that the ever-shifting contexts of public research universities are not recognized, let alone analyzed, by those who work in such institutions, even when there are quite dramatic changes occurring in daily practices “on” campus—e.g., the rise of “distance learning.” Readings (1996) argues that the US university (in the Humboltian sense) has lost its bearings in the present world. The modern state is no

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longer what it was and the US university's role as producer and maintainer of something called "national culture" has lost its rationale. For Readings (1996), universities are already transforming into transnational corporate entities that, aided by a valorized administocracy, increasingly act according to versions of market logic as applied to higher education and research. Specifically, Readings claims, universities seek to extract surplus from differentials in information, a function less tied to the state than to capital (1996:40). One need only think of the way the eyes of vice presidents for research light up when they boast of their faculty's success in obtaining patents—particularly those for objects or processes that have high market potential—to get a sense of the type of university Readings (1996) is keen to critically assess. Even Alan Greenspan, by many accounts (e.g., that of Reich, 1998) the most powerful man in the US, has given his approval to universities for their submission to "the market." In a speech given in March 1999 he is reported as saying, "What makes the system [of higher education] work effectively is that it has been influenced importantly by the values of a strong market economy—competition, risk-taking, and innovation" (quoted in American Council on Education, 1999).

The daily lives of university faculty, students, staff, and administrators, and the deep changes in the institutions of which they are part, need then to be seen within the broader context of shifts in sociocultural and political-economic structures in a transnational framework (Readings, 1996:13). In *Homo Academicus*, Pierre Bourdieu also makes an argument for a contextual analysis in addition to Readings. He stresses the need for the critical scholar of the academic enterprise to "unwrap in succession all the boxes within which the researcher and the greater part of his [sic] readers are enclosed" as part of the effort to "evoke the structure of the field of power and the relation which the university field taken as a whole maintains with it . . ." (1988:32). Bourdieu takes his own analysis on through to the boxes of colleges ("faculties") and disciplines as "interlocking social spaces" (1988:32), a tack also explored by Keith Bassett (1996). For Bassett, following Bourdieu, the social structure of the university field both reflects and contributes to the wider social fields of power (Bourdieu, 1988:40–41).

Many small and big changes are altering the context in which busy faculty members go about their work. Much of the time they seem minor and go unremarked, while sometimes changes may be seen as peculiar to an institution or locale. Works like Readings' (1996) alert us to the way a host of little shifts in the way universities work are often facets of widespread, deep, and often quite brutal processes of restructuring. Neither the university as an idea nor the university as a set of social practices or a social field is what it was. Changes, be they subtle or not, are not necessarily to be bemoaned. However, given that many faculty members and students (at least) value aspects of the university idea that seems threatened, it is at the least sensible—I would argue crucial—to critically analyze our daily experiences within and of the university in a contextual fashion.

This essay considers a couple of questions: how does a faculty member make a meaningful life under conditions prevailing in contemporary US public research universities, and how does that subset of us which, not without reservations in most cases, tries to engage in critical scholarship exist in the university? Certainly it becomes harder and harder to speak of something identifiable as *the* faculty, since about half of all college instructors in the US are parttime, temporary, and/or “non-tenure eligible” (Watt, 1999). In many ways faculty, especially those who are tenured or tenure track, are a minority university population, albeit a relatively privileged one. Recognizing the specificity of my own position, I nevertheless approach the questions posed above from a consideration of my own experiences in the academy. I work at the University of Kentucky, a public land grant research university in the US South. The experiences I discuss here are in some part shaped by this context, but I believe they have resonance beyond such an institution and place. In this essay, I will try to address how it might be possible to work through daily practices to understand how they are shaped by the ever-changing institutional and broader contexts and how critical scholarship—critical geography—can be attempted within these contexts.

To do this, I consider three situations I have faced and, in so doing, raise some issues regarding the current possibilities for critical geography in the contemporary US university. The first situation has to do with teaching undergraduates about economic geography in a globalizing world in which the politics of consumption appear central. The second concerns designing a professional development course for graduate students. This prompts a critical assessment of the professionalization of graduate students in its wider contexts. The third draws upon reflections on the university as a place indifferent to—and, as such, hostile towards—the fuller lives of its populations. Here I specifically discuss the way aspects of family life and of caring for others get subsumed by the imperatives of the institution. Through these three vignettes I argue that a critical contextualization of our experiences in and of universities comprises a first step to realizing—to grasping intellectually—what is possible in such institutions, and also toward working to realize critical geographies. As Ellen Messer-Davidow wrote of feminist academics, “Universities and colleges are in a strange way us, and we are them . . . We have the opportunity to use them even as they use us, to change them, even as they change us” (1991:282).

Teaching Economic Geography Critically

I am regularly called upon to teach an undergraduate course titled “Economic Geography.” Each time I teach it I find myself changing the syllabus and the content, partly to keep the course current, but also to test ways of teaching theories and concepts in economic geography. I came to

realize that although each student was deeply and complexly enmeshed in the geographies of production and exchange that I was discussing in the course, for many students the objects of study—spaces of the world economy—seemed difficult to recognize on a daily basis. Thus, like many and probably most of us who teach economic geography, I stress the ways in which each person in the classroom is, as both producer and consumer, part of complicated interrelations of production, exchange, consumption, and meaning that link diverse and far-flung materials and people. Mapping the origins of clothing, for example, can demonstrate, albeit rather flatly, aspects of these linkages and prompts further inquiry and analysis.

In addition to this emphasis on connection, the course syllabus usually covers selected debates and issues concerning aspects of the world economy that are in the news. In this way, I hope to connect what may have been perceived as merely scholarly analyses with more popular discourses about aspects of the global economy. To do this, I developed a module on child labor. The class examined definitional issues, regulatory issues (within the context of the changing nature of the state's regulation of the economy), and something of the structure of the industries in question and their historical geographies. The political economy of child labor was stressed through role-playing exercises based upon US congressional committee hearings and a case study, developed at the Harvard Business School, of the difficulties posed by child labor for US transnational corporate managers. We also discussed the prevalence of sweatshops in the US, and students undertook writing exercises based on newspaper accounts of the 1995 raid on a sweatshop in El Monte, California where Thai women and girls worked making clothing for US department stores, essentially imprisoned in the factory.

I was struck by the way parts of this section of the course seemed to succeed. Student interest in the topic was high. They seemed keen to learn the relevant information and to enjoy thinking through some of the implications of child labor, and particularly quick to grasp the cultural economy of meaning that underlay the managerial discourse in the Harvard Business School case study. They all understood completely the ways in which circuits of value accruing to brand names, logos, and corporate image in general have come to be absolutely key. Preserving the brand name—or, more precisely, the reputation of the brand name—has become the impetus driving corporate attempts to deal with political and consumer distaste for child labor. The rows of students, each wearing their expensive Nike shoes, Abercrombie and Fitch shirts, and Tommy jackets, knew exactly the semiotics of the logo. They were savvy practitioners of fashion and style.

What students appeared to find more difficult to understand were the structures and dynamics of, for example, the clothing industry, even though Kentucky has felt the effects of US trade policies combined with the industry's global sourcing practices. One student had a brother about to be laid off by the Fruit of the Loom factory in her hometown. Another

had worked in a now closed Osh Kosh B'Gosh plant. The most difficult aspect for the students though, seemed to be the varied material realities of children's lives that would lead to them working in the first place. The testimonies of child workers contained in the congressional reports did help in this regard, but students sometimes seemed content to rest with the tone of moral outrage characteristic of the reports themselves rather than to press any kind of analysis of the causes of child labor.

In assessing this part of the course, I counted as a success that otherwise uncritical consumers had become interested—at least for a few hours a week—in the networks of material and particularly human interrelations that lay behind or rather *are*, say, a pair of jeans. I had the sense that students had indeed come to some understanding of a small sample of global connections and their asymmetrical nature. This, I thought, was a critical moment. However, teaching child labor within the context of globalization also made me realize that the sense of connection the students came to feel was not really matched by an appreciation or comprehension of the material conditions that lead children to undertake paid work. They had a comprehension of the global linkages, but their understanding of how these linkages get (re)constituted at a variety of scales in quotidian ways was hazy at best. The unsatisfactory nature of this result became clear to me when many students appeared happy not to go beyond a position of moral outrage. Once they had “discovered” the “problem” of child labor, the “solution” of boycotts seemed to satisfactorily deal with it. The extremely complicated way in which such consumer practices work themselves out remained unaddressed. In the end, while this part of the course engendered some sort of critical awareness, I fear I and the students stopped short of going beyond the apparent answers to examine the host of pressing and deeply political complexities, ambiguities, and questions lying behind practices of child labor in the contemporary global economy.

This is a big issue for critical geographers: how to assist students in thinking about such matters in ways that don't make globalization and its effects seem inexorable, yet also don't encourage acceptance of simple depictions of “problems” and the proffering of feel-good “answers.” Helping students come to critical and analytical grips with complexities, ambiguities, and questions (rather than problems and answers) can be frustrating and is definitely difficult and time consuming. Surely, however, it is a goal of critical pedagogy, just as it is of critical research. Constant autocritique ought to be routine, as should dialogue about the nitty-gritty of exactly how we as critical geographers succeed or fail in our classrooms in this regard. The undergraduate classroom is a crucial site for critical scholarship.

Teaching critically will not always garner the best teaching evaluations. In a context where being entertaining is ranked by college students as the most desirable quality of an instructor (see Sacks, 1996:55), students may be quite hostile to challenging instructors. Untenured faculty who insist

on teaching intellectually and politically challenging material face acute problems. Many are very aware of the tradeoffs entailed in teaching tough or unpopular material. Given that many of us care very much about what we teach and how we succeed or fail in the classroom, recognizing these tradeoffs and how colleagues seem to routinely strike "bargains" with the devil of teaching evaluations can engender feelings of frustration and cynicism which can seriously affect our senses of self and our integrity, as well as impacting how we value teaching and even how we value students themselves (see Nast, 1999; Nelson, 1997:79–84; and Sacks, 1996). Even if teaching "quality" is accorded less importance ("in the last instance") than research productivity—and it nearly always is—student criticism and consequent administrative opprobrium provide additional sources of stress for untenured persons. Teaching critically definitely demands more effort than is usually institutionally and professionally rewarded. However, if we take seriously our responsibilities in the classroom, we keep open one way in which critical geography/ies may be realized—albeit not easily—in an era of globalization in which the politics of consumption plays an ever bigger role.

Participating in the Professionalization of Graduate Students

Historian Burton Bledstein has argued that the US university itself both cultivated and was cultivated by wider social and cultural expectations of middle-class white males (Bledstein, 1976). Specifically, he documents the social history of ideas such as profession, career, and credential and the ways in which colleges and universities were the institutional form through which such ideas became norms (at least for one group). Bledstein (1976) analyzes the US university as the major institution in the professionalization of society. In geography today the accelerating professionalization is of ourselves. Although the reproduction of academic geographers through the professionalization of graduate students—and even undergraduates in some cases—may not be brand new, its present forms beg analysis and action.

Although the discipline of geography in North America may not be in as severe a state of chronic Ph.D. overproduction as that of some other disciplines, few academic geographers can be unaware of the currently tight US job market for human geographers with doctoral degrees seeking careers in universities and colleges. Those of us working in Ph.D.-granting institutions have a serious duty to reflect upon our implication in the range or lack thereof of futures that await our Ph.D. students. Human geographers on the academic job market are in a highly competitive situation. The credentials that a job applicant must possess before she or he is considered for an interview have multiplied even within my relatively short memory. In order to prepare students to compete in this

arena, those of us at institutions offering graduate degrees find ourselves advising students to seek extramural research grants, to submit papers to peer-reviewed journals, to present papers and organize sessions at regional and national meetings, to participate in professional bodies such as the Association of American Geographers and its specialty groups, and so on. In short, we suggest they do everything faculty members are supposed to do. While the desire to engage in and contribute to wider intellectual debates around one's research may be a large part of a graduate student's motivation for seeking to publish, none would be unaware that such a strategy is also vital to becoming competitive in the job market. Indeed, many times the *means*, for faculty as well as students, seem to have become the *ends*. "Résumé building," rather than contribution to the textual record of a scholarly community engaged in critical reflection and analysis of key issues, often appears to be the chief motivation for publication. Pressure to publish is not the only aspect of the professionalization of geography graduate students but is an important one and alerts us to some of the implications of the dynamics affecting Ph.D. and even MA students. Graduate students are unlikely to need any prompting to reflect critically on what is happening, but those of us complicit in the oversupply of doctorates in human geography and in the wider processes of professionalization might pause to think through some of the implications of our strategies in this regard.

My account of aspects of the professionalization of graduate students in geography might seem to indicate I hold a nostalgic view of some previous era when graduate students didn't have to do all the things expected of faculty members. Not so. In fact there seems much to be happy about in the current situation. First, debates in geography journals are often richer and more interesting because graduate students are participating, offering incisive contributions, or taking the lead in developing new arguments. Second, a competition for jobs that is based on comparing track records ought to be somewhat more meritocratic than one where candidates are compared based mostly on advisors' letters regarding promise—a situation in which old boys' networks might be more influential. Third, such professionalization might lead to "better" (or more successful, according to the institution) faculty members, or at least to new appointments at the assistant professor level who are familiar with, and indeed successful at, the sorts of things they have to keep doing to get tenure.

However, I do think that there are at least three dangers to the current situation. One is simply that the professionalization of graduate students adds worries and stresses to their everyday lives. Second, in my experience, the sorts of conversations advisors have with their advisees about publication strategies, networking in the profession, and so on can engender a kind of cynicism and even despair, often in the most able students. This cynicism and the conversations and practices that engender it only add fuel to the fire of professionalization. That is, even publishing

becomes, in Readings' terms, "dereferentialized" as it comes to signal itself (Readings, 1996:17). The individual and competitive practices in which we as scholars and as members of graduate programs engage are geared towards preparing our own graduates to compete in a tight market. What is missing, at least to my knowledge, is any collective and critical analysis of the whole picture. It is as if we are treating the "job market" as exogenous when we have, at least in critical geography, learned that markets are not thus and that treating them as though they were has analyzable and particular effects.

Even as the professionalization of graduate students proceeds apace, high profile initiatives (such as that run jointly by the Association of American Colleges and Universities and the Council of Graduate Schools with funding from the Pew Charitable Trusts titled "Preparing Future Faculty" [PFF]) and recent books (including one by Donald Kennedy, former President of Stanford University) are driven by the idea that graduate students are not professionalized *enough*, especially with regard to teaching and administrative responsibilities. Indeed, at many universities a stratum of faculty and staff has developed that exemplifies the professionalization of professionalization. These folks are making career paths in the field of PFF as universities recognize that it is in their best interests, politically as well as competitively, to have teaching assistants who are competent teachers and to turn out graduate students who can compete in their various job markets. Of course, the ideas behind initiatives such as PFF are laudable in their aim to assist graduate students and provide resources to them as they teach or prepare to teach and as they face the job market. However, an initiative such as PFF, with its emphasis on teaching, cannot be divorced from its contexts. These include the widespread use of graduate students as instructors with full responsibility for courses, often those with large numbers of students, and public skepticism about the quality of teaching in US research universities. Following Readings (1996), we can also see the connection between the development of teaching portfolios as devices to demonstrate commitment to teaching on the part of job candidates (part of the PFF strategy) and the frequent use of such portfolios in university assessments of faculty performance, another example of the institutional imperative to discipline through successive rounds of assessment and evaluation.

In addition to better preparing Ph.D. students to teach, many argue for educating these students, found mostly in research universities, about the varied settings—from research institutes like their own to small liberal arts colleges and beyond—in which they are likely to find employment. Donald Kennedy's (1997) suggestions in this regard are driven by his feeling that most people who become faculty members are largely unaware of their potential institutional contexts; they do not understand the range of different types of universities and colleges, how they evolved, how they are funded, how they are governed, and how they are run on a daily basis

(cf. Kolodny 1998:14–16). For Kennedy (1997), understanding one's institution and playing one's appropriate role within it is part of "Academic Duty." In general he feels that there has been too much attention given to the rights of the professoriate and not enough to its duties (Kennedy, 1997). At the present time, however, it appears that universities devote resources to PFF and similar programs because, until every university has an equally effective program, such programs offer another credential to a university's graduates with which to arm themselves to compete more effectively against graduates from other institutions.

It was within these contexts, but driven largely by competition in the discipline, that I found myself considering how my department's one-credit graduate course entitled "Professional Development" might be organized and taught. I assembled a list of potential topics and, via a mail survey, asked recent doctoral graduates from our program to rank each topic by its level of importance. The results were very helpful and will influence the design of the course when I run it next year. Most thought-provoking, however, were responses to a sentence I had in the cover letter in which I noted that such a course can be a depressing experience as it introduces the harsh realities of the job market, rising expectations, and so on. These responses reflected that for many a feeling of distress comprised a chief memory of the course as it had been offered previously. Others seemed to feel that the "reality check" the course offered was important in deciding what sort of career to pursue and how to do so successfully.

I feel that it would be negligent not to prepare students for success in their professional life. On the other hand, I wonder to what extent I am complicit in and contributing to the problematic aspects of professionalization. This dilemma has prompted me to reflect on how critical geographers might begin to understand and change the paths along which some of the less positive dynamics of professionalization are playing out currently. Thinking through these issues entails analyzing, more systematically than I have begun to do here, the ways in which disciplinary and institutional imperatives intersect. In addition, debate as to the potential for critical practices within professionalization might be productive. Understanding the histories and structures of the institutions in which we work doesn't have to lead to the professoriate playing an assigned role; as dynamic social assemblages, institutions such as colleges and universities can be changed. Thus, for example, a clearer understanding of the models of governance and the nature of real and potential faculty power can enable faculty members to act more effectively around strategic issues in their institutions and could work against the tendency for the administocracy to set institutional agendas. Spinning out from concerns about the professionalization of graduate students, these sorts of issues are a matter of some urgency—not least for those facing the job market.

Who is Homo Academicus?

In 1998, women earned just over 30% of geography Ph.D.s awarded in the US, an all-time high (National Science Foundation, 1999:appendix table 4–31). What do we tell female doctoral students who are heading for an academic career?¹ As feminists we want to give every assurance and encouragement to bright women students at all levels. However, what do we say when a graduate student looks at us—supposedly her “role models”—and says, not “I don’t think I can do what you do” (the pesky lack-of-self-confidence problem), but instead a more difficult “I don’t think I want to live like you do”? In my experience such a remark, far from being a casual comment, is a carefully considered assessment, based on observation, of the pros and cons of life as a faculty member at a research university.

Of course, it would indeed be very surprising (as well as boring) if every student wanted to be “just like us.” However, what is signaled by such skepticism is worth pondering. Often what a graduate student may be unwilling to submit to is the never-finished nature of academic work, or perhaps the demands of teaching and doing research at the same time and, moreover, of doing both “excellently” (Readings, 1996). It may also be that the student finds unattractive the implications of the prioritizing that a successful career in academia often requires. Making certain things one’s priorities entails deferring other things, potentially including a varied social life, hobbies, desires to live in a particular place or region, pregnancy or adoption, and sometimes more general family life. I specify deferral rather than refusal because often the gaining of tenure, maybe a sabbatical, or even retirement is seen as permitting the pursuit of goals that have been “put on hold” up until then. In some ways the critical eyes of the student upon the mentor can give both pause to reflect upon the personal costs and satisfactions of pursuing an academic career. While one could dismiss these issues as belonging to the deeply personal realm of individual life choices and desires, academic lives get lived and choices get made within contexts—notably within the context of the institution of the university.

For example, one cannot entirely blame the university for expensive, emotionally and physically draining fertility treatments, arguing that deferred childbirth and its negative effects on female fertility were forced upon one by the tenure system. However, I have to say the thought has crossed my mind. Although this has remained largely unspoken, many of us women in academia, after postponing motherhood as we worked hard to make livings and careers for ourselves—challenging the masculinist geography professoriate along the way—have found that motherhood is distressingly elusive.² Few women in US academia who have ever even considered motherhood are unaware of the lack of institutional support for those pregnant or with responsibilities for babies or young children.

The lack of any parental leave or even maternity leave policy at many US universities,³ combined with a sense of the largely implicit but distinctly negative professional implications of having a child or children while the tenure clock relentlessly ticks away, serves as a major deterrent to pregnancy for tenure-track women faculty.⁴ (This sense, by the way, was confirmed when, on officially informing the Dean of my college that I was pregnant, I was congratulated on having the good sense to time the pregnancy so that it occurred [or perhaps was physically obvious] only after the all-important tenure file had got through key committees. Little did he know that if it had been possible I might have had a pile of kids by the time that file went in.)

The tenure clock is clearly gendered in that it assumes a body whose reproductive activities are irrelevant to duties of the professor. That bodies and associated gender performance have crucial effects in workplaces has been a key issue for critical geographers (see, e.g., McDowell, 1997). No one who has been through the sheer physicality of pregnancy at work can seriously claim that there is no difference in that environment between the pregnant body and the non-pregnant body. It is quite revealing to see inter-colleague relationships transform themselves, students' behavior change, and so on. But why shouldn't things be different? In truth, given the gendered nature of the faculty, a professor with a baby inside her is strange, while in the wider scheme of things this is perfectly ordinary.

More important than pregnancy, however, are the responsibilities of a diverse range of people who find themselves acting as caretakers. New babies, whether adopted or not, sick children, parents, and partners need looking after. Here we can see the ways in which institutional refusal to acknowledge familial responsibilities hurts more than just women employees. Indeed, men who care for children, partners, or other relatives may find themselves even less understood by colleagues and administrators. And, in different ways, same-sex partners and adoptive parents are still more marginalized by the heteronormative assumptions about what families are supposed to be like that undergird many universities' policies on family leave. The fact is, though, that in general it is women who shoulder the bulk of childcare and dependent care, and who bear the costs of universities' indifference to these significant activities (see Kolodny, 1998:139).

If we believe that critical scholarship can only thrive in an open and inclusive setting, then we have a responsibility to work against discrimination. With regard to gender, there is much that could be done to change the university in ways that would somewhat "level the playing field" for men and women academics. This is not to say that practices that work against largely unstated assumptions about gender and academic work are easily enacted, or that it is only women who lose in the present situation (see Sullivan, 1997). Nonetheless, because tenure and promotion rules at most places were codified with the universalized person of the white

heterosexual male as norm, it is clear that there is no recognition in these places of the importance of familial context and responsibilities. That these things were not considered is a symptom of the fact that they were presumed not to matter: that is, family responsibilities (the perhaps acute demands of a sick parent or a young child, or even the chronic but rather important demands of social reproduction like grocery shopping, cooking, and cleaning) were presumed to be taken care of by someone else—specifically, a wife. In my first year as a tenure-track assistant professor, a senior colleague invited me to be a guest at one meeting of the graduate seminar on professional development that he was leading. The topic was something like “The first year on the job.” I recall offering the unplanned observation that it seemed to me that “the ideal tenure track faculty member is an unmarried man with a wife”: unmarried, so that he could feel no regrets or guilt at being at the office most of his waking hours and so that he could join faculty colleagues and students for social drinks and so on without hesitation; married, because he might stand a chance of getting nutritious meals (with even his lunch packed for him), having his shirts washed, dried, and ironed, and enjoy the payoffs with colleagues who like to think that their junior colleagues are somehow settled—that is, that they appear to be comfortably heterosexual and somehow mature. While this remark was greeted by laughter all around the table—including my own, as I had not planned for the phrase to come out as it did—we all recognized the pressures that the newly hired faculty members feels and could see that these are definitely undergirded by normative presumptions of gender and sexuality.

Critical scholarship surely entails turning a sharp eye on the institutions in which we live and, in many cases, thrive. The current ways in which many universities’ policies (or lack thereof) serve to reproduce inequitable social relations cry out for analysis and action. For example, in her recent book reflecting on her term as a dean at the University of Arizona, Annette Kolodny (1998) details, in refreshingly pragmatic terms, ideas for “Creating the Family-Friendly Campus.”⁵ These ideas follow from her observation that “gender-based inequities should be countered by policies that allow—and, more important, *invite*—men to share in family care responsibilities” (Kolodny, 1998:139; emphasis in original). Such policies, and the process of making them, do not wait for social transformation but actively seek to engender positive change. Of course, while the present situation is inhumane to faculty, in many cases they make enough money to consider saving to fund an unpaid leave (as is permitted under the FMLA). Other employees of the university do not have the luxury of even considering an unpaid leave from work. As Kolodny (1998) argues, a campus that was restructured along the lines she suggests would also have to recognize and meet the needs of students and staff who have family responsibilities.

Conclusions

The three situations discussed above may not have much in common, but all of them made me wonder about how we as critical scholars might think through some of the institutional arrangements we inhabit. What can happen if we inform ourselves about, and turn our critical eyes upon, the institutions in which we spend most of our lives? I do not mean to suggest, of course, that universities can be understood in and of themselves. As I hope my three examples demonstrated, at every turn the university and its many populations are embedded in wider circuits of capital and meaning, and in relations of social power. However, universities continue to be significant institutions, in the US cultural economy at least, and are a significant nexus of social reproduction. As present and future faculty members, we cannot ignore the shifts in the nature of the university or of academic work (cf. Nelson, 1997:30). Indeed, they seem to come at us daily in the form of recurring budget crises, demands that data be compiled for the latest strategic planning exercise, and so on. Each department or program seems to find itself reacting tactically to these situations, occasionally effectively maintaining or gaining resources. It is understandable that few have the time or inclination to step back from these daily battles to consider their contexts and implications. However, it is also worth considering the potential costs of not doing so.

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Notes

1. In this essay I focus on issues around gender and, to a lesser extent, sexuality. I do not treat issues of race or racialization, which, while pernicious and complex, I have not thought through well enough yet to write about. See Johnsrud and Sadao (1998) for an account of pervasive experiences of marginalization felt by ethnic and racial minority faculty at a US university.
2. See Taylor Fleming (1994) on her experience as a feminist and journalist facing infertility.
3. For example, at my university, maternity is treated under the provisions for sick leave (up to six weeks paid) and only if the pregnancy or birth is medically problematic. Of course fathers, partners of new mothers, and those adopting cannot be considered for such leave under rules which treat pregnancy only as an illness. The tenure clock does not stop for sick leave. The Federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) permits up to 12 weeks

unpaid leave, although universities vary in how they define the family. In some cases domestic partners are included, while in others the definition revolves around heterosexual relations within marriage.

4. This is not to suggest every deferral is fully conscious and unwillingly done. In fact, in my case, it was more like the "Oops, I forgot to have children" joke. I was having a lot of fun concentrating on my work and generally having a good time, though always cognizant of the institutional and professional pressures to decline or defer parenthood. Statistics about the decline in female fertility with age seemed very distant, before the routine of doctors' appointments became a rollercoaster reality.
5. Kolodny (1998) even includes a "Summary Checklist of Selected Family-Friendly Initiatives and Programs" as an appendix. Importantly, Kolodny is clear that she is being inclusive of all sorts of "non-traditional" families in her definition of the family.

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