Fundamental Issues facing Women in Distance Education

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MDDE 651: Gender Issues in Distance Education

Assignment 1

There are several issues that face women today when entering any educational institution. Many have been discussed in our readings. Some that have meant more to me are those that outline; childcare, misogyny and the roles of females in homes. I strongly believe that the world around us in North America is starting to be more understanding of these issues. However there is still the social norms that plague women everywhere. It seems that regardless of what your hopes and dreams are you must make some serious sacrifices. If you want children earlier on in life you are most likely to sacrifice post-secondary schooling. If you want to further your education students are more likely to stay at home and go to school, thus prolonging having children and husbands.

Regardless of how supportive a husband can be, finances will continue to be an issue for any woman planning on returning to school. Maintaining a household, mortgages, necessities, children are all expensive and it isn’t get any cheaper. According to Stats Canada the average household with children spent $74,126 on goods and services. This includes transportation, shelter, clothing, food, healthcare and communications. In many cases for one partner to return to school, it would be financially impossible and likely irresponsible. Even if the wife was a stay at home mother, the expenses of the courses could be simply too much to bear. It seems for women whom have decided to have children and focus on their families earlier on in life, the dream of post-secondary educations seems to be put on the back burner.

Women whom opt to focus on their careers, and the path of post secondary educations tend to find themselves at a later stage in life starting families. For career driven women it is hardly a surprise when they are having children in their late thirties. I have recently found myself in this dilemma. This is the year I turn the dreaded 30. I have a great career, and I am on route to a great degree that will absolutely broaden my future. However, I feel as though I am lacking a family of my own. I have not gotten married and I have no children. I work and come home and study. It’s labor intensive on its own, I couldn’t imagine having children to come home to. My boyfriend and I decided to get a puppy in hopes it made me feel a bit better. It didn’t. It made me realize how much work it is to care for something. Coming home after a long day at work to look after an energetic puppy has almost broke me. Entertaining a puppy is a lot of work, sometimes it’s tough to catch up on weekly readings after being drained out. I couldn’t imagine how difficult having children, and going to school would be.

Society puts emphasis on having the perfect family (two kids, a white picket fence and of course fido). This also includes a steady income in which this family can live off of. If we take the statistics that Stats Canada has provided for us an average household would have to bring home over $80,000. This number doesn’t even include the average annual family vacation, putting your kids in sports, or school trips. There are a lot of extras that add up. For families to be successful they need to have great jobs with the proper education backing. It is seemingly impossible to have a family and a well developed career before you are thirty. Personally I feel that the way today’s economy is progressing families (and women) need to focus on one priority at a time; family or career.

To further my financially discussion, sometimes post-secondary is financially not an option. It is expensive to simply register into courses. After paying my fees to get my masters I think it is safe to say that a Masters’ program can cost up upwards from $20,000. There are without a doubt several financial options out there from student grants, loans and of course scholarships. One thing I have run into the problem of was that my parents made too much money for me to qualify. Of course this had me turning to Mom and Dad for the financial support, I was lucky enough to receive from them.

In my readings I came across something that jumped out and caught my attention. That papers reporting a significant difference in performance between men and women are more likely to get published than those that report no significant difference. Rosenthal (1979) called this the “file drawer problem” in which studies that report no differences find themselves in the filing cabinets of the authors. I wonder how many other fields this happens in? This also makes me think how many studies there have been that have reported no difference. I feel these studies would be just as important as the ones that report no differences. The studies reporting no differences could be used in evaluating the progress of women, and perhaps where the difficulties lie. Perhaps the problem isn’t so much time and cultural values – perhaps the problem is linked to financial woes. I would really like to compare and contrast these findings, illustrate where the gender differences are and where the similarities lie.

In Alberta there is definitely a power struggle amongst men and women. Women need to be educated to obtain positions of power and wealth. Men can head up to the oil fields and make considerable amounts of money for labor intensive jobs. These need not attend post secondary institutions for years to obtain degrees. It is this field that also creates a hardship for women to attend post secondary institutions. Their husbands are away working, and if they have kids they find themselves acting as a single mother for weeks on end. It seems to be quite similar to what wives of soldiers would face (although not to that extent).

I currently work as a Marketing Manager for a Casino. We are an international company with our owners residing in Austria. I remember when they first found out I was going to school online in hope of achieving my Masters Degree in Distance Education. The first thing they asked me was if my boyfriend approved of it, and asked how long I was going to wait to have kids. It seems to bring up my earlier point, when you want to further your career, you need to put your family (future family) on hold for a bit. But how long is acceptable in today’s society? Is having children at 35 acceptable? There are definitely more risks involved.

Misogyny has been explained in the readings as men’s hatred of women and men’s day to day practices of malevolence against women. It wasn’t until I read the addition by Gubar which states misogyny can be practiced by women against women (Gubar, 1994) that it really started to mean something to me. My boyfriend is an RCMP officer, which requires him to relocate every five years. With this relocation the members quickly become a close knit family, making new members feel at home and welcome into a new town. Several of the wives are stay at home homes. This is what has become the easiest – there aren’t many careers that can allow you to relocate every five years. It seems sometimes they don’t approve of me wanting to have a career outside the home. Some of them have mentioned it seems almost disrespectful to my boyfriend that I want my own career. While he and I have agreed that I will support his career and all its requirements on the sole assumption he will do the same. In supporting him with his career I have decided to ensure that in these relocations I can stay employed. I would love a career working online and decided to ensure I can achieve this. I sometimes feel that these ladies resent me for doing something they chose not to. The accepted norm is for the wives to be stay at home moms or to become members themselves. Unfortunately I personally cannot see myself doing either. I am making it work for me, something that will keep me happy in my future.

It has always been said that if you want something you have to work hard to achieve it. It is also widely accepted that if you want something you sometimes have to sacrifice to get what you want. It seems that more and more often women are having to make the decision to sacrifice their future families for a couple years or permanently sacrifice their careers. This is a decision that should not have to be made – somehow women should be able to thrive in both areas at the same time. Is such a thing possible? I would like to think it is. I would like to think that one day attaining a post secondary education would be financially possible, while being a mom and wife.

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