SESSION 12: Opting Out

Readings to complete before class:


   http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,993641,00.html


Discussion notes:


• How wide-spread are these phenomena?

• Profiles mainly of white, upper-middle-class, highly educated women.

• An important cultural clue for other groups, though.

• Work isn’t about “self-fulfillment” for everyone – most working women don’t have the choice to stay home with their kids because their families need the income.

• Sad for men that they don’t often feel they have the same “opt out” choices as women.

• Why is the media so enchanted with this issue?

• Do these articles confirm traditional ideas/fears? Progressive? Feminist?

• How realistic is the “detour” career option? (Education, good start to career, pause for a few years for little kids, resume at same level when kids are in school.) Not much data yet…

(3) Boufis, “Does Academic Life Lead to Divorce?”

• Anecdotes of many MIT female professors single or divorced, with no or few children, fertility problems post-tenure.
• Efforts by MIT and other institutions to alleviate tenure pressure on new mothers (and sometimes new fathers), especially to make tenure extensions automatic and not require a request (which may depend on the whims of an advisor or a woman’s worry over looking “weak” or “not dedicated”).

• Frenetic tenure questing bad for men too, not just women, of course!

• Different biological clock for men and women. Tenure track years = women’s fertile years.


• Physics problems not just for girls: low retention of female students (and faculty as they advance forward) indicates problems for everyone.

• Lack of mentoring: a vicious cycle.

• Leaky pipeline: conflicting reports.

• Astronomy generally much better than physics on gender ratio. Possible explanation: astronomy much more of a solitary pursuit, without downsides of heavily-male group lab environments.
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