

**RECONSTRUCTING CAREERS, SHIFTING REALITIES:  
UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFICULTIES FACING TRAILING SPOUSES  
IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

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Faculty members in higher education who move to new cities or provinces often bring their families with them, and this can have both a positive and negative effect on the retention and job satisfaction of faculty. Educational policy makers can play a role in supporting faculty by supporting their trailing spouses, through policies informing careers, skills, and community engagement. This paper explores existing literature focusing on academic trailing spouses, conducts a content analysis of three Canadian universities that relates to support for trailing spouses, and suggests some recommendations. We pay particular attention to the use of inclusive language in these policies, as the changing nature of family systems requires further consideration of diverse needs and experiences.

**Introduction**

Globalization of the workplace has led to increasing levels of compulsory professional mobility among workers, which is a trend that shows no sign of waning (Richardson & McKenna, 2002). This increased mobility forms an important site for research and scholarship as the demands and challenges of relocation can be significant and disruptive to workers and their families. Although there is a significant body of research exploring the experience of professional mobility largely within expatriate circumstances, which Dumont and Lemaître (2005) describe as the departure of one's home country to live in a foreign country, this field is

now expanding to encompass employment areas (e.g., education, energy) which require workers to re-locate to a different community (internal and external to their home countries) in light of labour market trends and job shortages. For academics employed in university settings, increasing (but still not equal) gender representation among faculty (Expert Panel on Women in University Research, 2012) and the sharpening focus on the internationalization of higher education (Deardorff, de Wit, Heyl, & Adams, 2012) results in continued pressure for academics to be “mobile.” Concomitantly, as academe is becoming a compulsory mobile profession, the traditional image of a relocating male employee and his family is shifting to encompass female breadwinners, dual-career couples, same sex couples, and common-law relationships. Academics may also be expatriates (i.e., new to the country and to the institution) or internal migrants that have left their home communities to take up work elsewhere in the country. There are undoubtedly implications for family members in light of these developments.

Trailing spouses are often expected by their partner and by the employer to accompany the mobile worker to the new location. The term *trailing spouse* has been used frequently in human resource and business literature (Gedro, 2010; Luring & Selmer, 2010; McNulty, 2012; Gedro, Mizzi, Rocco, & van Loo, 2013) to refer to individuals who relocate for their spouses’ employment opportunities. These experiences with professional mobility are significant in understanding the support required for a successful acculturation experience in the new work environment. This literature illustrates that adjustment and accommodation for trailing spouses is necessary, although often left out of the equation when considering worker retention, job satisfaction, and work success. That said, we acknowledge that the term *trailing spouse* is problematic and has been regarded as contentious by some, as it implies the spouse lacks human agency (Braseby, 2010; Swanson, 2013). Swanson (2013) addresses this concern in her self-

reflective work on being a trailing spouse and states that “some people dislike the term ‘trailing spouse’ and prefer ‘tied mover’ or ‘relocated partner’ or a similar title with greater dignity. I have no objection to the traditional term and will continue to use it. It describes how I felt: Second-class” (p. 155). With this tension in mind, we highlight how the phenomenon of trailing spouses requires further exploration in light of socioeconomic and sociocultural changes that are shifting the “trailing spouse” role.

As many as one-third of long-distance moves today in the United States are for career opportunities, and it is the well-educated who are most likely to relocate to a new community for work purposes (Swanson, 2013). Luring and Selmer’s (2010) work on business expatriates and their spouses reveals that the expatriate experience is seen to be disruptive and demanding for both partners but particularly for the trailing spouse. Luring and Selmer point out that although the expatriate is likely moving for a better employment situation, the trailing spouse often experiences added stress of leaving their employment and support systems behind and establishing new community networks and resources, reconstructing distal family relationships, and searching for new employment. Research points to both positive and negative experiences of expatriates and their trailing spouses as dependent on multiple factors such as local adjustment, institutional support, community support, language acquisition, and integration of family life (Luring & Selmer, 2010).

One Canadian employment sector that may possess some kind of compulsory professional mobility is the higher education sector. There are a growing number of faculty members who are required to leave their communities and provinces to accept academic positions elsewhere (Pomrenke, 2008; Richardson, 2000; Wolf-Wendel, Twombly, & Rice, 2000). Unlike the business, government, and international development sectors, where accepting

expatriate positions forms a part of the work culture among employees and their spouses, new faculty members and their spouses must increasingly face the harsh reality that their lives will likely be uprooted for the purpose of employment in light of labour market trends and job shortages, even in circumstances where there are multiple universities and colleges within single urban settings. Research in this area is increasingly important in higher and adult education as academics “rarely end up where [they] started” (Careless, 2012, p.41), and therefore require careful planning of how to make the transition smoother for their families. This expansion has serious ramifications for educational administrators of post-secondary education institutions, since empirical research on expatriates indicates that job acculturation is a human resource and policy issue that requires significant attention. Failure to provide accommodation in this way could mean job dissatisfaction, workplace isolation, increased sick leave, and higher job turnover (Kulis & Sicotte, 2002). That said, the questions that focus this paper on trailing spouses in academic contexts are as follows: What does the literature state about the experiences of trailing spouses in higher education contexts? How can educational administrators respond to the challenges facing trailing spouses of academics who relocate for employment? As emerging scholars in the field of education, concerns facing trailing spouses weigh heavily on our personal conversations within our immediate and extended families, which prompt uncharted territory in the way that our families may be divided and united through technology (e.g., video chats) and travel (e.g., short and intense visits).

This paper presents a review of the literature on trailing spouses in higher education contexts and calls to educational administrators of higher education institutes in Canada to carve out necessary space for trailing spouses in policy and support programs. A clearer understanding of the expatriate experience for academics and their spouses/partners and families can lead to

policies and practices that directly support academics and their families who relocate for employment. What follows is a review of the relevant literature, a case comparison of policies for expatriate academics and their trailing spouses at three Canadian universities, and recommendations for educational administrators in Canadian higher education contexts.

### **Literature Review**

The following review of the literature is based on two perspectives: (1) the challenges of the trailing spouse of academic expatriates; and (2) job retention factors for academics who cross geographic boundaries and borders for employment. We explain both in turn.

#### *Academics and Their Families on the Move*

According to Richardson (2000), the academic profession is not new to the concept of compulsory relocation, and yet, academic trailing spouses remain an undertheorized group. The contemporary focus on the internationalization of higher education, increased representation of women in faculty positions, and sociocultural shifts around dual-earner couples and same sex marriage complicate the needs of couples and families who move for work. So while it is not a new trend to feel compelled to relocate for work in academe, it is an increasingly complex one and becoming more of an urgent matter for faculty retention, productivity, and satisfaction. If universities are considering directions more akin to neoliberalism, as Gouthro (2002) says, then it is no great leap that trailing spouses should be on the purview of higher educational administrators as a cost-saving strategy.

Almost thirty years ago, Rosenfeld and Jones (1987) reported on the impact of geographic mobility of academic women and men in the field of psychology and found that it

was a significant factor in career development, noting that “psychologists who moved from the city or town in which they earned their Ph.D.’s were more likely to get first jobs that were on tenure track” (p. 511). To gain better understanding of this experience, some theorists have compared academics to other groups which frequently relocate for employment purposes. In a study that explores the usefulness of the expatriate management framework for understanding cross-cultural adjustment for academics, Richardson (2000) found that one of the most significant factors for academics is the lack of a home or host organization—as many management expatriates would have—to make the transition easier. “Virtually all those who contributed to this study said that because the concept of a home and host organization does not apply to expatriate academics, premature repatriation means not having a job to go back to” (Richardson, p. 142). The pressure to adjust to one’s new location may therefore be significantly higher. Despite the challenges, educational institutions increasingly seek international alliances for competitive advantage and research collaborations, and academics can be drawn to work in other cities or countries making them “self-selecting” expatriates, or those who choose to relocate willingly (Richardson & McKenna, 2002). That said, Baker (2008) warns:

For decades, studies have emphasized the importance of geographic mobility for initial hiring and later for promotion. Finding the first tenure-stream position often involves moving to another institution, city or region... graduates who perceive that they lack geographic mobility may search only for local jobs and therefore find only contractually-limited teaching positions with few promotional possibilities. (p.10)

For many Ph.D. graduates and tenure-track faculty, this initial job search takes place in their thirties—at a time when many have or are starting to plan for young families (Careless, 2011). We can infer from Baker’s above quote that this likely relocation will have implications not only on the academics themselves, but on their spouse/partner and children who will be seeking employment, childcare, schools, health care, and other forms of support.

We may gain some insight by examining the family contexts that shape the lives of trailing spouses. Notably, as the literature on trailing spouses expands to other employment areas, it reflects sociocultural changes in family structures. There is a growing body of literature around same-sex couples (Gedro et al., 2013; McNulty, 2013), dual-earner couples (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2000; Van Dyke, 2008), and female expatriates whose husbands relocate (Kulis & Sicotte, 2002). These changes in family structure raise a set of different issues and concerns around relocation as compared to the patriarchal model of the male breadwinner–housewife family. Swanson (2013) refers to trailing spouses as all “committed partners,” but acknowledges that the literature is narrowly focused on heterosexual, married couples that privilege the male expatriate experience.

Another group that requires consideration in academic hiring policies is dual-academic partners. Eisenkraft (2004) states that

every Canadian university has had to make decisions on whether, and how, to hire a faculty member’s spouse. A fiercely competitive hiring scene combined with growing legions of academic couples means that universities cannot turn away from this front-burner issue that shows no signs of cooling down.  
(para.3)

Spouses seeking faculty positions in the same institution can lead to concerns of fairness and qualifications (Richardson, 2000). According to an American study exploring the dynamics of academic’ marital choices, 36% were married to other academics (Wade, 2012). Interestingly, the percentage was the same for those who were married to non-academics in any other non-academic employment field. Unless they choose to live apart, which some do (Eisenkraft, 2012), academic couples face the very difficult task of finding two positions in the same geographic region.

In an article on success strategies for women academics, Pomrenke (2008) starts her discussion by stating “the secret to success in the academic job hunt is relocation, relocation, relocation” (para.4). This is partially due to written and unwritten policies that dictate hiring practices, such as, “as a general rule, universities rarely hire their own” (para.11). Because this trend is so common among academics, and because individuals rarely complete their doctoral degrees before their thirties, academics frequently find themselves relocating with a partner, spouse, or family.

Expatriate employees and their spouses can face several challenges in the relocation process, such as potential lack of support from employers, leaving family and friends behind, adapting to a host society, and difficulty for dual-earner couples to both find employment. Traditional literature on expatriate workers focused solely on their experience while disregarding the family that may move along with them, but contemporary literature acknowledges the impact a trailing spouse may have on the expatriate experience (Braseby, 2010; Luring & Selmer, 2010; Cole, 2012; Gupta, Banerjee, & Gaur, 2012). In an ethnographic study of female spouses’ involvement in their husbands’ expatriate positions, Luring and Selmer (2010) found that spouses established social networks with other employees and their partners in order to increase their husbands’ job satisfaction and success. These participants recognized the importance of their support, reinforcing literature on the positive outcomes of the work-family interface. This is, however, reflective of a heteronormative perspective on family dynamics. Mizzi (2014) uncovered that mention of spouses with same-sex partners was left out of the agency’s definition of *family* in training discourses, which led to a form of compulsory silencing among workers with a same-sex spouse and re-categorization of the same-sex partner as being a cross-sex partner.

In sum, the literature describes some of the challenges facing trailing spouses in academic and broader contexts. As stated earlier, trailing spouses have been recognized as being an important consideration in human resource management due to the supportive and integrative role they play for the mobile worker. Growing competition in the higher education sector requires further exploration of the trailing spouse experience for those married to or partnered with academics. Sociocultural changes in family structures also require expanding the literature on trailing spouses beyond the traditional patriarchal male-breadwinner model to consider non-normative family groups.

#### *Academic Retention and Job Satisfaction Factors*

As academics increasingly find themselves required to relocate in order to build a scholarly career, factors such as retention and job satisfaction become a part of ensuring a smooth transition to the new location. According to Braseby (2010), expatriate and trailing spouse support is essential, as

relocating is disorientating. People leave their usual familiar spaces and go to places where perceptions of “normal” often have to be realigned. Primarily their socio-cultural adaptation takes place outside the home but, nonetheless, it involves re-orienting to new places of everyday life such as housing, schools, and shops and building new social networks and friendships. When the relocation is overseas the changes are greater. Not only is the adjustment to a new physical environment, but a new cultural environment where the adaptation means dealing with different social structures and bureaucracies, being surrounded by a new language, and being confronted by different cultural norms of behavior, ethics and values. (p.103)

There are several factors to consider when choosing to relocate, and if one’s family is supported in such a move, job retention, and satisfaction will likely begin on stronger footing. Koczan (2013) writes in a blog about the perspective of supporting the academic job-hunting spouse:

Each semester brings horror stories of her peers who've graduated into the academic job market only to wind up with non-tenure track positions at the South Pole. My understanding of the academic job market is that it's like the entrance to the Holland Tunnel. When they designed the infrastructure seven thousand years ago, nobody imagined there'd ever be so many people, so you funnel fifty lanes to two and hope that most of those who'd be foolish enough to attempt to cross the Hudson give up before they actually get there. (para.12)

This blog post illustrates how the choice to relocate and the location itself may be distressing for an academic trailing spouse. There seems to be little power or benefit in the situation for spouses who need to understand the rules of academe, job markets, and hiring practices.

This relocation is slowly becoming more visible and recognized at the institutional level. Eisenkraft (2004) states: "In a recent survey of Canadian science deans, spousal hiring emerged as one of the biggest issues confronting their faculties. . . . Spousal hiring is a sensitive topic because it challenges some of the most closely held tenets of academic advancement, including fairness, merit and accessibility" (para.4). If institutions want to attract faculty from other cities or even countries, they must consider and support *all* individuals who will be relocating. In her interviews with expatriate academics in Singapore, Richardson (2000) discussed the importance of trailing spouse support for academic retention: "Many of those who contributed to the study indicated that inability to find work [for their spouse], particularly for someone who had given up a professional career in the home country, had been a major barrier to adjustment" (p.144). To support the family is to support the worker.

As has been suggested in the literature, the expatriate family plays a paradoxical role (Richardson, 2000; Meyskens, Von Glinow, Werther, & Clarke, 2009). On the one hand, having one's family in a new location is not only a comfort, but reduces stress on the family dynamic. On the other hand, a worker relocating on her or his own requires far less support and services than a family, and spouses or partners who are unhappy in a new setting can negatively impact

the expatriate worker. Richardson (2000) saw this contradiction throughout interviews with expatriates:

One interviewee indicated that he had not been able to adjust at all until the second year of his appointment when his wife and children had arrived. . . . However, providing further evidence of “the paradox of the expatriate family,” the same academic also agreed that the family’s inability to adjust creates a greater likelihood of premature repatriation and under-performance. (p.141–142)

This data suggests that supporting trailing spouses and expatriate families can help them to settle in their new location, and therefore the experience of the entire family may be more positive and longer-lasting.

In a field where highly educated employees embark on research and study of the changing world around them, support for workers and their families is an essential piece of the academic puzzle. Butterwick and Dawson (2005) believe that “if we do not speak publicly about, and critically examine, the problematic conditions of life and work within our own academic walls, then our credibility as critics and analysts of what is going on in the world outside them is bound to be similarly diminished” ( p.52). It may be tempting for some to ignore these issues, but evidence of its import is clear when we see that “single women without young children fare better than their male counterparts on the market for assistant professorships” (Wolfinger, Mason, & Goulden, 2008, p. 389). We see that family life and family support are still significant issues that must be addressed in academic institutions. While institutional reflexivity is often seen as taboo territory, it is necessary for the critical awareness of everyday concerns and experiences (Butterwick & Dawson, 2005). In sum, the literature describes some important factors for academic job satisfaction and retention. As many relocate for employment, often at the age when young families are a possibility, supports for families are important in increasing faculty retention. Family supports are slowly being acknowledged as key to attracting new

faculty in this competitive job climate. Therefore, from our review of the relevant literature we have identified three significant themes related to the experience of trailing spouses who relocate with their academic spouses/partners: (1) the adjustment challenges for trailing spouses; (2) the importance of spousal support for faculty job retention and institutional acknowledgement of diverse family structures; and (3) changing definitions of the term *spouse*. We will revisit these themes when we consider the role that educational administrators play in supporting expatriate families.

### **Three Universities and the Curious Case of the Trailing Spouse**

To further contextualize the issue within a Canadian context, we selected three Canadian universities through purposive sampling due to their diversity in accommodating the trailing spouse. Although we considered other universities, we felt that these particular cases possessed the content that provides a worthwhile analysis. While each institution varied slightly in available supports and language used to reflect family dynamics, there was a significant amount of similarity among the three universities. We therefore felt that saturation or redundancy had been reached, a point in which data collection should end when using purposive sampling (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009).

We collected and analyzed the official documents of the three chosen institutions via their websites to function as a form of policy research called content analysis, and interpreted this information through a critical theoretical framework. Ozga (2000) argues that, “policy research can act as a commentary or critique of ‘official’ research outputs, and assist those who implement or mediate policy to orient themselves in relation to official research claims” (p. 2). Content analysis within a policy research frame is about reading relevant texts, such as hiring

policies and theorising how this policy may shape social realities (Ozga, 2000). Content analysis is an empirically grounded “research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use” (Krippendorff, 2013, p. 24). The roots of content analysis include critical scholarship, and Krippendorff identifies the three purposes of a content analysis framework, which include an analytical purpose “to facilitate the critical examination and comparison of the published content” (p. 35). That being said, a critical theoretical framework involves the questioning of dominant ideologies that maintain systems of inequity (Brookfield, 2005). The higher education sector is increasingly influenced by neoliberal and capitalist systems that permeate public and private spheres, enforcing values of production, competition, and participation in a global marketplace, and there are critical theorists who believe that educational institutions serve to maintain the dominant ideology (Griffith & Smith, 2005; Olssen & Peters, 2005). In our view, a critical theoretical lens prompts a reconsideration of neoliberal and capitalist systems by stressing whose voices are underrepresented and marginalized in higher education discourse. Trailing spouses are one group of stakeholders in higher education that are seldom recognized in practice or in policy and may be able to “speak back” to neoliberal and capitalist agendas.

The information obtained for the content analysis of this paper was found through university websites. Websites function as a window to the outside world, and with that in mind, it is no great leap that universities may wish to put their best foot forward on their website in order to attract well-qualified applicants. Besides text, we also looked at programmatic implications. Although policies may be stated on university websites, this does not guarantee practical support for faculty and trailing spouses (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2000). We looked for signs of this disconnection between the literature and the policies in our data collection. The

three institutions chosen were Dalhousie University, the University of Alberta, and McGill University. We explain each in turn.

### *Dalhousie University*

Dalhousie University is located in Halifax, Nova Scotia and has a complement of 18,220 students and almost 1,100 professors (Dalhousie University, 2012). A search through the Human Resources webpage for new employees showed links to on-campus childcare services and a Nova Scotia government directory of licensed childcare facilities, which is important for supporting new faculty and employees relocating with their families. The Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) is available for full and part-time employees and their dependents, providing resources for health, financial support, career support, and counselling. According to the Dalhousie EFAP webpage, this service aims to “provide confidential assistance with concerns that affect an individual’s personal, family, and work lives or general well-being” (see [www.dal.ca](http://www.dal.ca) for more information). The EFAP program connects employees and their family members with career counsellors and various other supports.

The Dalhousie Faculty Agreement gives guidelines for spouses of new employees. Under these guidelines, spousal appointments are “for an academic or senior administrative appointment” who states that his/her acceptance is contingent upon his/her spouse obtaining an academic appointment. There are several requirements outlined in this policy, including one that states that “s/he has been short-listed for not fewer than two (2) such appointments within five (5) years of the date of the application” (p.43). There are six requirements under this clause, but it is uncertain if common law partners or same-sex couples are eligible as the language used is not clearly inclusive of diverse family structures: “This clause shall apply when a candidate . . .

states that his or her acceptance of an offer is contingent upon his or her spouse obtaining an academic appointment” (Dalhousie Faculty Association, 2011–2014, p. 42). While this does not specifically exclude same-sex couples, inclusive language signals support and welcomes new faculty and their families.

### *University of Alberta*

The University of Alberta in Edmonton is a sizeable research institution with an enrollment of almost 38,800 students and almost 8,500 academic staff (AUCC, 2014). The Human Resources section of the University of Alberta website has a Relocation Support Services page for spousal/partner employment consultation. They are clear to say that this does not guarantee employment, and is to support partners seeking employment opportunities in the city of Edmonton (not at the university). There is a fee for this service which involves representatives meeting with the spouse to discuss skills, qualifications, industry information, and to provide a list of potential employers. The EFAP (same name as Dalhousie) outlines a multitude of supports from health care to counselling and family mediation. Elder and family care services are also provided.

For academics and their families recruited to the University of Alberta from another country, there is a section on the Human Resources website for immigration support and policies:

Under the Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) Spousal Program, a spouse (husband, wife, same-sex partner or common-law partner) of a skilled foreign national may qualify for a work permit that is “open” to enable him/her to accept employment in most occupations without the need for Canadian employers to obtain prior approval to hire (i.e. Labor Market Opinion). (University of Alberta, 2014, n.p.)

This document also states that common-law or same-sex couples must provide proof of having lived together continuously for at least one year. Evidence of this may be a joint lease, property, wills, or joint tax returns (University of Alberta, 2014).

### *McGill University*

McGill University, located in Montreal, has over 39,000 students and almost 1,700 faculty members (McGill University, 2014). The language in the human resource policies of McGill University varies significantly from both Dalhousie and the University of Alberta as “McGill strives to create an inclusive and accepting environment, and recognizes and values diverse family structures” (McGill University). The faculty and partner Worklife Assistance supports are not defined by traditional ideas of married, heterosexual spouses; rather, “McGill considers your ‘spouse’ to be your partner of the same or different sex. It may refer to someone to whom you have been married or joined in a civil union, or to someone with whom you are cohabiting (de facto spouse)” (McGill Human Resources, 2014). This is the only one of the three universities to explicitly state that they support common-law and same-sex unions.

Career supports for spouses or partners of McGill employees include resume preparation, career counseling and transition, interview coaching, job search strategies, and networking. The focus is on seeking employment both at the university and in the greater Montreal area. In addition to employment services, the Faculty Relocation Office at McGill University will also provide information and support around issues of housing, childcare, schools, public transportation, health care, volunteer opportunities, and language learning for new faculty and their families (McGill Human Resources, 2014).

In sum, it is clear that universities see it necessary to highlight the supports in place for newly hired academics and their families, and that relocation is indeed very common in this employment sector. The supports offered through Dalhousie University, the smallest of the three institutions, are stated less clearly than those available at the University of Alberta or McGill University. Whether or not these resources are available for common-law or same-sex partners is unclear. The University of Alberta provides employment support spouses regardless of gender or marital status, but requires proof of co-habitation. What follows is a critical analysis of the three universities' policies in relation to the three major themes identified from the literature review: (1) adjustment challenges for trailing spouses; (2) importance of spousal support for faculty job retention; and (3) diverse family structures and a changing definition of the term *spouse*. We contrast these themes against each university as a means of organizing our analysis, identifying gaps, and highlighting new approaches not considered in the literature.

### **The Role of Education Policy Makers**

#### *Dalhousie University*

To ease adjustment challenges for trailing spouses, Dalhousie University's Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) provides not only employment but also health and well-being support to faculty and their dependents. This is a voluntary service that connects individuals to community professionals in certain fields such as career, legal, health, and financial services. Pointedly, these support services are not actually provided by Dalhousie staff, but rather volunteers from short-term counselling and advisory sectors connect individuals to various services outside the university.

Dalhousie also supports trailing spouses. The EFAP provides services that would also support a family—ranging from childcare to elder care and couples counselling. This focus on support from various perspectives and for diverse ages suggests the importance of supporting the entire family in order to attract and retain faculty. Assisting spouses in finding employment can help in the adjustment of the family, where inability to settle in a new location can lead to faculty under-performance and leaving their new employment and location (Richardson, 2000).

In relation to the third theme from the literature, which is changing family structure and definition of the term spouse, the language on the Dalhousie website does not explicitly acknowledge diverse interpretations of families. The terms *family* and *dependent* are used, but same-sex partnerships and common-law couples are not identified. We see this exclusion as problematic given Canada's diverse population. An exercise of inclusion would see language variances to reflect diverse backgrounds as well as some consideration as to what may be necessary for these groups (e.g., information about local LGBTQ organizations for same-sex partners). In sum, a review of Dalhousie's policies as published on its website indicates that there is some interest in supporting faculty and their families in various ways, but the language reflects more conventional ideas of a cross-sex marriage. This is not to say that same-sex or common-law couples would not qualify for these supports when it comes to actual implementation, but that the language, as stated on the website, does not support this diversity and is instead representative of a narrower frame of the terms marriage and family.

#### *University of Alberta*

In terms of adjustment policies for trailing spouses, the University of Alberta guidelines state that common-law and same-sex couples are included under the Citizenship and Immigration

Canada Spousal Program. However, couples must provide proof of their co-habitation, as previously stated. Supports for faculty and their families seem extensive and diverse and international relocation and diverse cultural representation are acknowledged through immigration supports and cultural sensitivity counselling. These approaches to supporting not only the employee but also the spouse, family, and university community in general reflect a critical understanding of the need to support diversity, create awareness of those who are marginalized, and provide cross-cultural support to faculty and their dependents.

The holistic approach of support for faculty and their families at the University of Alberta draws a link between health and satisfaction in family and faculty retention (Cole, 2012; Gupta et al., 2012). In a qualitative study on faculty retention, Ambrose, Huston, and Norman (2005) found that in terms of the physical location of the job and family adaptability

several faculty members remarked that their spouses'/partners' ability or inability to find work in the city was highly influential in their decision-making. . . . For instance, most current faculty members who were unhappy with the institution were considering leaving, *except* for a small group who had spouses or partners who were happily employed in the city [original italics]. (p.819)

The various ways that faculty and their families can be supported through the policies of the University of Alberta may reflect a desire to attract and retain desirable faculty members.

What strikes us about the University of Alberta is the theme of diversity, both in supports and identities, when it comes to trailing spouses, family structures, and mobility issues. This type of language can be meaningful to traditionally under-represented groups. For example, in an exploration of mobility concerns for LGBT employees, Gedro et al. (2013) find that “*awareness* of the challenges faced by sexual minorities when they travel or relocate is perhaps the most important part of creating organizational cultures

that are attuned to sexual minority diversity [original emphasis]” (p.12). Yet the issue around diversity is that it remains a time-sensitive discourse. What is diverse 10 years ago may be different than diversity in modern day, and this again with social change. The copyright date of 2002–2014 is an indication that this policy is under constant review.

### *McGill University*

In terms of the challenges facing trailing spouses, McGill University has clearly-stated multi-faceted employment supports, both at the university and in partnership with the city of Montreal. There is clear recognition of the diverse needs of the whole family and, as a result, there is support for faculty and their dependents through a wide variety of resources including French language learning. Housing and transportation information is also made available for families, which eases some of the tensions of relocation as identified in the literature (Ambrose, Huston, & Norman, 2005; Smart & Smart, 1990).

Faculty retention depends in part on the ability of family members to assimilate into the new city or country—if there is an accompanying family—and McGill University seems focused on supporting this adjustment with their many inclusive policies and practices. As stated in the literature,

institutions and departments can do more to assist women and men faculty with managing work and family demands by both adopting formal policies and encouraging use of these policies. Among the most important policies may be on-campus childcare, employment assistance for spouses and partners, and flexible schedules and leaves. (Perna, 2005, p. 302).

The Faculty and Partner Worklife Assistance page of the McGill website states that guidance is provided for areas such as employment assistance, childcare, and schools; therefore, some of these essential needs of faculty members and their families may be met. Critically, these policies

and practices acknowledge the challenges of relocating for employment, and, by providing such extensive and broad supports, the implication is that it is not the individual's responsibility to meet these needs on their own. Critical theory challenges the values of neoliberalism that hold individuals responsible for finding and managing their own supports—being responsible for the consequences of their choices as opposed to exploring systemic consequences (Saunders, 2010)—so it is important that relocating families are clearly provided these options.

The family support policies of McGill University are also stated using inclusive and supportive language, language that breaks down “the socio-cultural norms regarding gender roles that involve men as breadwinners” (Cole, 2012, p. 321), including LGBTQ family groups (Gedro et al., 2013) and families where women are the primary income earners. Supportive policies and the use of inclusive language becomes increasingly important for supporting our diverse workforce, faculty who relocate from other countries, and the many women and men graduate students who will be seeking academic employment at a time when jobs are scarce and competition is high.

### **Recommendations**

It is clear through the aforementioned examples there is no one set direction in supporting new faculty and their trailing spouses and families, and there is some dependency on institutional commitment and resources to support trailing spouses. In order to make meaningful change, higher education policy-makers may wish to understand and act on the experiences of and supports for trailing spouses of academics so that higher education institutions may remain competitive in the marketplace and can retain top faculty. Clearly-stated policies around tenure as well as part-time tenure possibilities, childcare, mentorship, and parental leave have been

identified as important in supporting academics (Baker, 2008; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004). Where policy-makers may be helpful here is the creation and implementation of policies and programs that support the participation of trailing spouses in the relocation processes. Post-secondary educational leaders can work with the incoming faculty member and human resource departments to assess each employment situation and conceptualize challenges that spouses may face in the new work context based on their knowledge of the local contexts and networks. As noted in the McGill example, this means education leaders being inclusive and proactive from the onset and addressing the issue with clearly laid out opportunities. It may serve as good practice to include this effort in the initial offer of employment.

Partnerships with other groups or organizations such as local government, businesses, and community organizations may help to assist spouses in finding employment, rather than focusing solely on positions at the university. While we argue that administrators in post-secondary education contexts should concern themselves with supporting spouses/partners as a retention strategy for their faculty members, some individuals may need training or re-training to acquire employment, and help in this area would be beneficial as well. That being said, we acknowledge that there may be a difference between the policies identified online or in collective agreement documents, and the actual implementation of supports for faculty members and their families. Support may not be so easily accessible and programs may not actually meet the needs of faculty or their spouses/partners. A review of policies and their relevant programs may need to be an ongoing and dialogical process.

It is evident that clearly stated policies and programs that support trailing spouses or partners of new hire faculty members are important in the planning stages of relocation. Setting up a website or support group, for example, for families of academics might be helpful at re-

shifting attitudes towards the transition. McNulty (2012) explores the importance of organizational supports as compared to spousal support for expatriate retention from a human resource point of view. She believes that situational aspects such as dual-career status, gender, and family stage are an important consideration in adequately supporting trailing spouses in various fields, and the participants point to a need for communication, information, assistance in finding a job, reimbursement for professional re-training, networking support, and coaching or counseling as essential to supporting trailing spouses in their new location. We see this work as being similar to what McNulty suggests, where a comprehensive approach may benefit trailing spouses, academics, and the institution as a whole. Simple planning exercises with academics and their spouses can eventually become a cost-saving measure, as it signals that institutions are very much aware and concerned about trailing spouses. The three universities discussed above have information available online for faculty and their partners/spouses related to career, networking, relocation, and health care supports. Some may utilize more inclusive, diverse language than others—McGill University—while others explicitly identify supports for those immigrating from outside Canada—University of Alberta. However, McNulty (2013) states that “even in the absence of a formal policy, more than a quarter of academic institutions without policies say they will help if asked” (p. 158). McNulty’s prompt is aimed at academics and their spouses to also engage the prospective employers and to seek assistance.

In terms of our three themes that have emerged from the literature and analysis of the supports offered at three Canadian universities, it would appear that multi-faceted, context-specific, and diverse support for family members is essential in creating both a satisfying experience for the expatriate academic and their family, and in attracting and retaining quality academics to Canadian campuses. And perhaps most importantly, with changing definitions and

awareness of diverse lives, perspectives, and experiences comes the need to use inclusive and supportive language that challenges dominant ideological notions of terms such as *spouse* and *family*. To create working environments rich in perspective, and a demonstration of sustaining this richness vis-à-vis the faculty members, the lives of trailing spouses must be a consideration in the relevant policy-making processes.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

In conclusion, a content analysis of the readily available policies and practices of three Canadian universities related to support for trailing spouses reflects the shifting nature of academic careers, the internationalization of higher education, increased gender representation among faculty, and shifting family dynamics. Faculty members have historically been expected to relocate to other cities, and perhaps countries, to obtain employment, but these aforementioned changes require continued exploration of university policies that support faculty and their families. As the literature identifies a connection between family supports provided by academic employers at the administration level and faculty retention, we see an increasing and timely usefulness among Canadian post-secondary institutions to invest time and resources in making this geographical transition easier for academics and their families. In addition, to support academic “families” requires the use of diverse and inclusive language practices that reflect the changing nature of family systems.

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