

Anne Joh, Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary



Anne Joh is an associate professor of systematic theology at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary. Her areas of teaching and research are at the intersection of constructive theology, psychosocial theory of oppression, postcolonial theory, critical race theory, gender, and sexuality. Joh is the author of Heart of the Cross: A Postcolonial Christology (Westminster John Knox Press, 2006). Her numerous articles include “Violence and Asian American Experience: From Abjection to Jeong” in

Asian and Asian North American Women’s Theology and Religion

; “The Transgressive Power of Jeong: A Postcolonial Hybridization of Christology” in Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empires

; “Loves’ Multiplicity: Jeong and Spivak’s Notes toward Planetary Love” in Planetary Loves: Gayatri Spivak, Postcoloniality, and Theology

; “Race, Class, Gender, Sexuality: Integrating the Diverse Politics of Identity into Our Theology” in

New Feminist Theology: Many Voices, Many Views

; and “Cross-ing Life amid Death: Reading Jan Mohamed and Paul” in

Semeia Studies: Psychoanalytic Mediations between Marxism and Postcolonialism

. Joh’s current book project is

Terror, Trauma, and Hope: Postcolonial Spectrality of the Cross

I am an associate professor of theology at Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary. I research, write, and teach out of an interdisciplinary method engaging in, and I dare say, competent in Asian-American cultural studies, critical race theory, postcolonial theory, feminist theory and theology, poststructuralism, and psychoanalysis. These are what you can find online when you visit [my institution’s website](#) . It’s what “counts” as my professional data. There are things, though, that do not get into the calculations of my professional bio. These are things that I cannot account for, that institutions cannot include, because our economic structure does not calculate these as assets to my professional career. For example, because I am an Asian-American feminist theologian with interests in teaching postcolonial theory in my classes, it became clear to me that I was attracting many students of other faculty to my office for various

consultations — from personal to professional — and all the time spent in these consultations and mentoring sessions took many hours away from the energy needed for my own research and writing. So not only did I continue to tend to my own advisees, but also to students who found they had been marginalized in one way or another. During one of my past yearly reviews elsewhere, I took note of this time consumption in addition to all my publications and professional involvements because I was asked to give a report of my activities for that year. I was told later that my report was a “laundry list” by one of the committee members.

I would like to share a few more examples that have contributed enormously to the kinds of work I do and to my ways of being in the world and how I process knowledge. While this “unaccountable” list of how I contribute to my profession might seem “tedious” or “trivial,” these unaccountable dimensions also have the power to make or break me. I find that these dimensions, while mentally and spiritually rewarding, are often not considered with enough seriousness. While this might be particular to my own experience, I have heard many similar stories from other women scholars — and especially from women of color scholars — who feel the extreme “cultural taxation” that depletes them of energy and eventually also takes a toll on their ability to produce publications. Though I want to desperately dedicate, with all my heart, to research and writing, the heavy toll extracted by being stretched too thin has a way of drying up even the most protected spring of intellectual creativity.

So what are these other dimensions of my life that you won’t find online? I am a mother of two boys. I began my doctoral program after becoming pregnant with my first child. He is now seventeen years old and my second son is eleven. I mothered them all through my doctoral program and into my teaching career. I was not as fortunate as some people and carried most of the child-rearing responsibilities. About six years ago I began to single parent. I am also a Korean-American feminist theologian with a strong penchant for interdisciplinary work. This means that I am a magnet for all kinds of students, organizations, administrative, and institutional programs. I am not only “invited” to participate in events because I am a theologian, but because I am a “woman,” “Asian/Asian American,” “feminist,” “postcolonial feminist,” “immigrant,” etc.

There are many studies out there that I would recommend for you to look at for suggestions and tips on best practices and family-friendly policies. There is the [American Association of University Women](#), and also the [University of California, Berkeley](#)

’s wonderful website. For the panel on which this paper was given, I was asked to share my experience of being both an academic and a single parent and to recommend some family-friendly workplace policies that I would like to see adopted by many institutions. I titled my paper as freeing the mother-lode from mother over-load. I have found that my mother-lode of intellectual creativity is undertapped because of my overwhelming parenting mother

over-load. With just a few structural and policy changes, institutions can make noticeable differences contributing toward the health and wellness of their faculty and can also nurture an institutional ethos of appreciation for sustaining an ongoing support for faculty development. If institutions can shift their thinking from what they can immediately and maximally extract from their faculty toward creating an institutional culture of care for their members, I think they will receive much more in return.

Given the traditional gendered structure of many patriarchally determined networks of responsibilities and relationships, achieving work/life balance is very elusive for professional women, if not simply impossible. Moreover, the burden of accomplishing such a balance as a lived reality, if and when it rarely happens, is often a solitary, individual, and private endeavor.

Over the past fifty years substantial changes in the composition of the American work force have taken place. Over 64 percent of women with children under the age of six are in the workplace and over 22.9 million families in the United States care for an adult family member or friend over the age of fifty. Flexibility is required when it comes to work schedules and schedule adjustments, along with the right to part-time parity in wages, benefits, and government protection.

As an academic and as a mother, I am grateful for my work because — as some of my family members always insist — I have a great job. I don't have to "work" a 9–5 eight-hour shift. However, we all know that academics do not just teach a course and come home. Contrary to popular perception, we are "at work" 24/7. We have endless meetings that we sit through, e-mails that pile up, papers that must be graded, students who need mentoring, colleagues who need mentoring, classes to prepare for, books to read, and writing deadlines to meet. It is still a guild with a "publish or perish" ethos and it does not care that you did not publish because you have given birth or adopted a child, you have had surgery, or you have spent time and energy caring for your elderly parents or your sick partner. While it is true that this ethos is shifting in many schools, publishing is still vital for our career. Yet we hardly have time for writing and publishing because, while the priority and main criteria for promotion is still focused on our publishing history, institutional demands take up most of our time. We are to research and publish on our weekends, on our vacations, and during the wee hours of the night. Though it seems like we have it easy, academics put in on average more than fifty-hour weeks. We work around the clock and are never "off." We work on weekends as well as holidays. Because I know what it's like not to have had a faculty member of color as my professor, it's not easy turning students away or denying opportunities to engage and address issues that come up in their studies and lives. I tend to and care for students in my professional life. But those hours are somehow not "clocked." These hours of caregiving and nurturing students are often not accounted for in our professional assessments.

As a mother, I struggle with guilt when I have to leave my children to fend for themselves in the evenings because I have to attend unplanned events in which the unspoken expectation is that faculty be present. When courses are scheduled to begin before my children's school I end up scrambling. When my children become sick — because I am on my own — I scramble with what to do with them while I have to attend classes and meetings. The other day a thought I had never had passed through my mind and it was “Why did I ever have kids?” And I realized it was not my kids that prompted that thought, but my crazy schedule in which I want to be sure that I pull my professional weight as well as my mother weight.

This makes me think of all the prep work I had to do in preparation for the AAR Annual Meeting while teaching, attending meetings, getting together with students, driving students around, doing laundry, cooking, meeting deadlines, working through AAR-related e-mails, and trying to find time to write my AAR presentations. I actually had to cook for my children in advance for the days that I would be gone, make sure there was no laundry left to be done so they had all the clothes they would need, make sure that my childcare provider had all the medical, school, and after-school information and instructions for both boys, and even send e-mails to teachers to bring to their attention that I would be out of town. Even after arriving at the Annual Meeting, I was constantly in touch with my children and caregiver to see if all was okay. As I was walking into the first presentation, my eleven-year-old called to say that he might need to go see a doctor. You're probably exhausted just listening to this list!

Now, as we know, when we leave the AAR Annual Meeting we are like limp rags...“limper” than ever before; we are mentally and physically depleted. However, when I return home I cannot take days off to recoup. I have to be sure that I hit the grocery store and replenish our kitchen, do the piled-up laundry, go through stacks of my children's school mail, my mail, and a backlog of all kinds of things that I will stay up until the wee hours of the night sifting through. And then I have to wake up early again in time for the morning school rituals with my boys.

Most people do all these things, but I also know that in my academic career it has been very rare to find colleagues who are in the same boat as me — with children and being a single parent. My life as a mother hardly ever makes it into my academic work life. I'm fortunate that I have colleagues who are concerned about my boys and often ask how they are doing. However, as well-intentioned as my colleagues are, because I have lived under conditions in which I've had to pretend that part of my life does not exist, I am very wary of making my children visible in my work life. I say this because our sexed bodies that are gendered and raced can at times be used to diffuse our intellectual capacity. What I mean by this is that if my mothering, or my mother function, were to become visible in my work life, it might actually work against me. My academic endeavors might become dismissed or not taken seriously because I could be easily reduced to “biology is destiny.” Mothering is part of who I am but it is not the sum total of my life. However, once the mothering part creeps into my professional life, even in

the most benign settings, it can work to unconsciously reduce my professional life into the narrow confines of being a good mother. As it is, I've had to be multilingual by learning and becoming competent in many different disciplines because of the nature of the types of research I do. In no way do I want to, or should I be compelled, to reduce my achievements into the shadow of being a "good mother" alone. Making mother-load visible in an institutional context can sometimes work to make freeing my mother-load nearly impossible.

Institutional policies are important because when things arise, one does not have to be isolated as the exception. If something is an institutional policy, there would not need to be a distinct discussion on an individual basis, which only works to increase visibility of the mother-load. If policies are in place, these guidelines become a normative practice so that no one has to make his/herself visible to make use of them. So, what kinds of practices would I like to see? Some I already have at my institution, which is very significant indeed, but I'd like to see them become a very open practice in other places.

- Equal pay in parity...maybe even more! The [Chronicle of Higher Education](#) reports that women often make \$7,000 less than their male counterparts. Yet we also tend to do more unaccounted "for care" work. Women earn 77 cents to a male dollar. Women of color make 67 cents on the dollar. Latina women make about 58 cents to the dollar. With the economic downturn, women are even more vulnerable to salary cuts and layoffs. Wage discrimination not only hurts women and their families right now, but keep in mind that it also lowers their total lifetime earnings...reducing our benefits from Social Security and pension plans, and inhibiting our ability to save not only for retirement but for even buying a home and paying for our children's college education. For more, please check out the [American Association of University Women website](#)

- Schedule flexibility. Often classes are scheduled in fixed blocks. Flexibility here for people with young children would allow for less anxiety.

- On-site childcare would also induce better performance and would provide a network of emergency back-up childcare.

- Schedule and end faculty meetings no later than 4:00 PM. When meetings or events are scheduled for after 5:00 PM, then faculty with children or other care responsibilities should not be expected to attend.

- A general stipend fund should be available and known to those with care issues; e.g., children, elderly, or sick family members. That way, if a faculty member is presenting at a conference, allowances should be made available.

- For those who are becoming parents, there should be an option for tenure clock extension, paid maternity leave, etc.

These are some of my recommendations for institutions wanting to make a difference in the

lives of their female faculty with family.

I arrived at the Montréal Annual Meeting on Thursday. I made sure that I got in one last morning school send-off ritual with my kids before departure. My kids have been with a caregiver. They are anxiously waiting for me to return and bring normalcy and rhythm back into their lives. They will need extra emotional input from me to stabilize them. I have been working hard here in Montréal. I am exhausted and eager to return home. My school is wonderful in that they provide me, like other faculty, with a stipend to attend the meeting. In fact, my institution also provided me with funds for childcare. Many institutions, especially and surprisingly seminaries, do not have this kind of policy. But what is important is that this become a policy and advertised by my administration so that we know it's there and available. While the work I did here in Montréal will benefit my career, it also benefits my institution in many ways as well. If I perform, I do not perform alone; I perform on their behalf. I think what's really important for institutions to remember is that if they want their faculty to thrive and shine and free their mother-lode so that the faculty's achievements also become institutional achievements, it is crucial for institutions to put into practice policies that will enable faculty who are mothers to free their mother-lode of creativity and intellectual prowess by helping to free them up from mother over-load.