

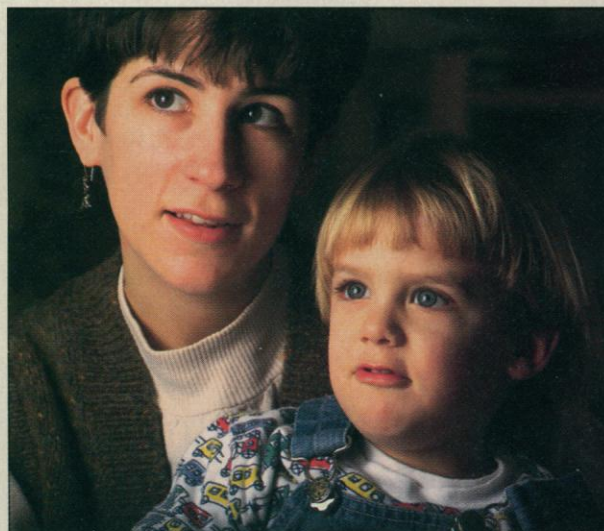
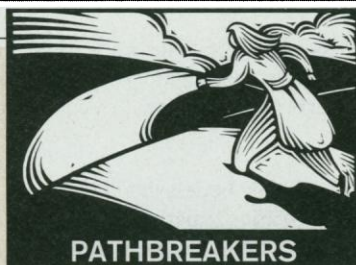
No More Stressed-Out Supermom

"There's just no allowance in the system right now for women to have a family and do research," says Pennsylvania State University molecular anthropologist Linda Vigilant.

Vigilant, 28, knows both research and motherhood. After a knockout performance as a graduate student in the Berkeley lab of the late Allan Wilson, where she was an author on several landmark papers that established the "mitochondrial Eve" hypothesis, Vigilant came to Penn State in 1990 with her husband, Mark Stoneking, a molecular anthropologist she met in Wilson's lab. Stoneking came to Penn State as an assistant professor on the anthropology department's tenure track. Initially, Vigilant was a full-time postdoc in the same department, using mitochondrial DNA to trace the ancestry of Africans and other modern populations.

But after 2 years, with a new baby at home, Vigilant decided too much was enough. It was "extremely difficult," she says, "trying to adjust to having a new baby, putting time in at the lab and at home. I felt frustrated. I couldn't do as good a job as I wanted at either place. I couldn't be in the lab as much as I wanted or at home as much as I wanted." Something had to give, and what gave were the long hours in the lab. Last year the anthropology department offered her a half-time research associate position so she could spend more time at home with her son, Colin.

In one sense, Linda Vigilant is on an unusual path. Plenty of women in American universities are in part-time, non-tenure-track positions. And her job is a renewable non-tenure-track, 1-year appointment. But many women who drop off the tenure track don't expect to get back on. Vigilant does. She continues to publish, and, though she concedes she "might not be as prolific" as she would be working full-time, she insists "the quality of the research is there." She was a co-author on a



Maternal lineage. Linda Vigilant cut back her research, which exploits DNA to trace the maternal descent of modern human populations, to spend more time with her son, Colin.

recent paper proposing a new method for dating the time when the last common maternal ancestor of modern populations lived.

Combining high-quality research and motherhood makes Vigilant feel "very lucky." Yet she knows her part-time work could be looked on askance when it comes time for a try at tenure

later on. Even more disconcerting, she's had to face disapproval from successful female researchers who combined full-time research and motherhood. "There's not as much acceptance from some of these women for not following the traditional track," says Vigilant. "They say, 'I toughed it out, so should you.'"

In fact, though, Vigilant is toughing it out—she's just doing it her own way. She continues struggling to find ways to be both a mother and a researcher without contorting herself painfully. The next barrier she wants to break down is the one that makes it difficult—if not impossible—for new mothers to attend scientific meetings. She's particularly peeved at the Gordon conferences, key insider get-togethers in biology, whose organizers refuse to allow children under 12 near the cafeteria or conference

proceedings. When Vigilant wrote to protest, the Gordon conference organizers responded that they barred children because of liability insurance and because they thought children could be a "distraction" to scientists at the meeting. "Who's going to pay the price for that?" asks Vigilant. "Women, obviously."

If Vigilant has her way, women will soon be paying a smaller price for the way the system works. "I think women are tired," she says, "of feeling they have to make a choice between having no children or being stressed-out superwomen. A lot of questions are just starting to get raised about how women can do both. Everyone seems to be finding her own way." Especially Linda Vigilant.

—Ann Gibbons

more personal approach to her students. As a black woman, Searles remembers feeling inadequate and out of place early in graduate school. Rather than just show her students her present, successful self, Searles, who recently received tenure, shares her early experiences with her students—especially the women—to show them that feelings of inadequacy and isolation can be overcome. "I try to make it clear that it's OK to feel that way," she says.

Rather than fueling her students' competitive fires by setting them against one another—something that's often done in high-pressure labs—Searles adopted a lab management style in which she consciously refrains from encouraging rivalry among her students or holding them to up to absolute standards for performance. Instead, she says, she lets people develop in their own ways. "I feel like different graduate students have different styles and different ways of being effective," she says. Though she's reluctant to label her style "uniquely

female," Searles admits that "to the extent I've been influenced by my experience as a female, that is certainly reflected in how I deal with people."

Despite Searles' hesitance to categorize her lab management style as female, she may indeed have chosen a style favored by women, at least according to a small study directed by sociologist Henry Etzkowitz of the State University of New York at Purchase. Etzkowitz and student Carol Kemelgor investigated lab management styles of faculty in a medical school microbiology department. "We found there were two styles by which the investigators were running their labs," says Etzkowitz. Male faculty members were more likely to have students "competing with each other for the professors' attention," he says, while students in women's labs generally felt less competitive pressure. In preliminary results from a larger study of nine departments, Etzkowitz has found evidence that, like Searles, many female faculty members feel additional responsibility for giving