

both a professor and a parent. Senior mentors are essential, but beware those to whom you might give your confidence if they feel that their own success in academia was predicated on giving up their chances of having a family. Although this is not universally true, senior women with children of their own are probably the ones most sympathetic to your situation. But, of course, they may be too busy with work and family obligations to be active mentors. That is where we come in. The chapters that follow will try to distill the most valuable advice that the senior professor-mothers on your campus may not have time to dispense.

Connelly and Ghodsee, Professor Mommy: Finding Work/Family Balance in Academia *Lowman*
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Know Thyself, Part I

On Deciding to Become an Academic

I think people did tell me the things I should have been told, but I just didn't understand, internalize, or frankly believe some of them. The fact that it is really tough, that you have to make sacrifices, that your life is sometimes very chaotic. You can hear these things, but you can't experience them in advance or internalize how true they are.

—Helen, a tenured natural scientist and mother of three

The challenges of combining work and family in the United States are greater than those in almost any other industrialized country—Americans work longer hours, have higher parenting standards, and inhabit a highly individualistic culture that views child rearing as a purely personal decision and a private responsibility. Unlike countries in Northern Europe, where the state actively supports young families and protects new mothers in the labor market, the United States prizes its “flexible” work force and remains one of only a handful of countries around the world without mandated paid maternity leave. Adding insult to injury are the deep libertarian impulses against publicly sponsored child care and the growing trend of homeschooling. Many Americans simply don't trust public institutions to care for or educate their children, and instead are embracing a type of hands-on motherhood that our own mothers would have balked at. The cultural shift away from the term *housewife* to “stay-at-home mom” indicates an important change in our society. It is no longer

acceptable to be a full-time wife—that is just too 1950s, *Leave It to Beaver*, pre-Betty Friedanish. But a full-time mom is another thing; partners should be able to take care of themselves, but our children need us twenty-four hours a day for at least eighteen years. It is a career decision to make a job out of motherhood, a choice that our society accepts for women but rarely for men.

There is a whole school of feminism that enables and encourages us to recognize and respect women's choices, whether the choice is to be a working mother or to stay at home full-time. Indeed, we have decades of the so-called Mommy Wars behind us, with a history of furious skirmishes between the working mothers and the stay-at-homers. And we certainly recognize that there are huge costs, both personal and professional, involved in trying to combine motherhood and a career. We know that successful professional women still tend to be childless at a much higher rate than their male peers. In 2002, Sylvia Ann Hewlett found that 49 percent of what she called “ultra-achieving” career women (those earning \$100,000 or more) ages forty-one to fifty-five were childless and 33 percent of “high-achieving women” (those earning \$55,000–\$66,000) were childless, compared to only 19 percent of ultra-achieving men aged forty-one to fifty-five and 25 percent of high-achieving men.¹ Jane Waldfogel disaggregated the gender wage gap and has shown that while women as a whole only earn seventy cents on a man's dollar, childless women actually earn ninety-five cents, leading to what has been called the “motherhood wage gap.”² Add to this the high price and limited availability of high-quality child care, the scientific evidence that a newborn's immune system benefits from being breast-fed for at least a year, and the fact that our best physicists have not yet figured out how to put more than twenty-four hours into a day, and you have more than enough factors pushing women out of the work force and back into the home. There are many rational reasons for opting out.

But there are other, less rational reasons why professional women drop out—there is the guilt brought on by the rhetoric that elevates full-time motherhood to the highest pedestal. There are also personal reasons that stem more from having made bad or uninformed decisions. Many young people do not really know what they want out of life before heading down a particular career path. In this case, it is no surprise if some of these young people, both men and women, later find themselves unhappy with their chosen profession. This chapter is dedicated to helping you figure out whether academia is the

right place for you before you make the decision to attend graduate school (or to finish graduate school, if you are already there).

It is essential to have this discussion before you decide to get a PhD, and certainly before you go on the job market. While later in the book we give you some tips on how you can make an academic career work for you, we do not see ourselves as being in the business of selling everyone an academic career. In fact, the most important piece of advice in this book is to *know yourself*. You need to determine whether a PhD is worth the investment, given that in many fields teaching at the college level is the most common career linked with the PhD credential. Even if you decide that, yes, this is the path for you, it is useful to distinguish between the women who truly opt out of academia for work-family reasons and the women who use work-family reasons as an excuse to get out of a profession that they don't like anyway. As long as these two categories of women remain lumped together in people's minds, it sends the message that being a professor and a parent is much harder than it really is, and it encourages young scholars to delay childbearing or to give up an academic career before it has even begun.

We warn you: this chapter is not for the faint of heart. One graduate student read an early draft of this chapter and started crying, believing that the whole enterprise was just too hard. But our purpose is not to dissuade you; it is to prepare you for the realities that you may have to face (however unpleasant it may be for you to hear them). If you already have a good handle on the challenges of pursuing an academic career, you can skip ahead to the next chapter. Otherwise, brace yourself for some serious but necessary introspection about what kind of person you are and what kind of sacrifices you are really willing to make.

Let's start with the story of a woman we will call Amelia, a hypothetical graduate student in English at a major Research I university. Amelia is a composite of several young women we knew who each made choices that ultimately led them to leave academic careers. Let's say that our Amelia was an English major as an undergraduate because she loved reading novels and poetry and doing comparative critical analysis of contemporary authors. She was an excellent student, eager to please, and a creative thinker. Amelia decided to pursue a graduate degree on the recommendation of both her parents and her professors. Although she wanted ultimately to find a partner and start a family, she was convinced that she was still too young and should further

pursue her education. After all, none of her friends were getting married at twenty-two, and certainly no one in her circle was planning to have a baby before the age of thirty.

She was accepted into one of the top English graduate programs in the country, based on strong letters of support and a brilliant writing sample that she had spent the entire final year of college producing as a thesis under the direct supervision of her major adviser. She excelled during the first two years of graduate school, working closely with her classmates and professors on a variety of well-executed critical papers during her coursework. When it came time for her qualifying exams, she began to have trouble. The independent nature of studying for the exams meant that she had to be far more disciplined with herself than she had when she was given specific assignments to complete by specified deadlines. The dissertation proved to be even harder. The long hours spent writing did not appeal to her as much as reading the texts she was analyzing. Amelia needed constant supervision from her dissertation adviser, and found that she repeatedly changed her thesis topic by adding more books to read. However, under the steady guidance of her adviser, she eventually completed the dissertation and earned her PhD.

It is almost automatic at Research I universities, particularly in the humanities and social sciences, that newly minted PhDs are supposed to go on the academic job market. And this is exactly what Amelia did, putting together her dossier and sending out more than fifty applications to colleges and universities across the country. But secretly she was not so sure that the academic life was for her—particularly in a university English department where there would be incredible pressure to publish. The problem was that everyone—her parents, her professors, her colleagues, and her friends—all expected her to get an academic job. After all, why else would one spend six years or more earning a PhD? And her love for literature surely would translate well into the university classroom, where she could teach young college students to savor the joys of close reading and comparative analysis as a vocation.

Her first year on the job market, she had three interviews but no offers. Amelia was stunned. She had always succeeded in everything she had ever tried—up to and including getting into the college and graduate schools of her choice in a subject area that she loved. This was the first real disappointment in her life—although her thesis adviser told her that it was a particularly bad year on the job market, and that she would surely get a job the following

year if she could manage to generate a publication or two in the interim. At this stage, Amelia really began to worry that perhaps an academic career was not the right choice for her. But she would not let herself be a quitter, and that is how she would have felt if she'd abandoned the market after that first year. That was certainly the message she got from her advisers, who warned that it could even take a few years before she landed a tenure-track position in an English department. It was, she was told, a very difficult discipline in which to find a job.

"A whole year?" Amelia asked her adviser. "What am I supposed to do for this next year?" A postdoctoral fellowship was arranged so that she could get some teaching experience and spend some time turning her dissertation into a book. She reworked one of the chapters of the thesis into an article and, at the urging of her adviser, sent it out to a top journal. After an excruciatingly long five months under review, the article was rejected. Once again, Amelia was unprepared for the emotional blow she received when she opened the letter. She had never received anything less than an A on any paper she had ever written. The comments from the reviewers were substantive, and she was advised to revise the article immediately and resubmit it elsewhere. In the meantime, Amelia loved teaching her own class, and she found herself putting in a lot more time and preparation than she had planned.

Amelia had also met someone. He was a young lawyer, a friend of a friend. They had been spending a lot of time together. He was thirty-four years old and already well established in a law firm as a junior partner. Amelia was now twenty-eight and beginning to worry that if she waited too long she might not be able to have a baby, something that she knew she wanted. But she managed to carve out some time to make the revisions to the article, and she sent it off to another journal, this one more specific to her field and in the middle range of the journal hierarchy in her discipline.

By the time the job-market cycle came around again, Amelia's article had been accepted and she had taught two classes of her own design. The young lawyer had also asked her to marry him; she had happily accepted. Since he was relatively immobile, she limited her applications to colleges and universities within a five-hundred-mile radius of her future husband, but in truth, she was not really willing to accept a position outside a three-hour drive. Just as her adviser had predicted, she did better on the job market the second year. She was short-listed for five jobs, had four on-campus interviews, and

received two offers: one at a nearby Research I, and one at a liberal arts college slightly farther away. All of her advisers and colleagues encouraged her to take the Research I job, and her fiancé also hoped that she would choose the geographically more convenient position. When comparing the offers, however, Amelia realized that she might be happier at the liberal arts college, where the pressure to publish would be much less and where her classes would be smaller and more intimate. In the end, she capitulated to the pressure of wanting what others thought she was supposed to want, and to the desire to be near her future husband. She took the Research I job, starting the following fall.

She was married and already two months pregnant when she began teaching in September. The dissertation had not been revised, and she had yet to send a second article out for review. Her new chair emphasized that a second article publication would be necessary for reappointment, and that he expected her to have a book by tenure-decision time. Amelia hoped that her chair would read drafts of her work and give her helpful feedback, but it soon became clear that the people in her new department were far too occupied with their own scholarship to worry about hers. And between the morning sickness and the fatigue, Amelia could get almost no work done on her scholarship. For the time being, she focused on teaching, hoping that she would be able to return to the book after the baby was born. The demands of her job were many, and her starting salary was abysmally low, not even a third of what her husband earned. More importantly, when she read through the journals to which she hoped to submit, she found herself bored by the scholarship. Amelia was much more interested in novels than the scholarship others produced about them; she found herself questioning the value of her discipline.

Without a thesis adviser to prod her along, Amelia lacked the discipline to pursue the book revision. Slowly, she began to disengage from scholarly commitments. The accepted article had come back with queries from the journal, and Amelia took more than a month to respond to them. She had submitted a proposal to give a paper at the Modern Language Association meetings and it had been accepted, but she pulled out the month before because she did not want to fly at that stage of the pregnancy. Her thesis adviser had recommended that she contribute a chapter to an edited volume. She turned it down by claiming that she needed to focus on peer-reviewed journal articles. After the baby was born, she declined two invitations to give talks, citing child

care reasons, but in fact she did not very much like public speaking. When her chair encouraged her to apply for a National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Stipend, she argued that she would be too busy with the baby to make proper use of a grant.

Her university gave her a semester off for maternity leave and offered to extend her tenure clock by a year. But when Amelia prepared to return to campus the following fall, she was shocked to find that her child care costs would absorb more than half of her salary for the year. In addition, a second article that she had sent out at the beginning of the summer had come back as a "revise and resubmit with substantial modifications." Amelia was terribly disheartened, finding herself wounded by yet another rejection. Listening to the publishing woes of her more senior colleagues, she was becoming aware of how difficult it would be to publish a whole book in her discipline, particularly a revised dissertation. As she read through her own dissertation, she became increasingly convinced that she would never get it published and therefore never get tenure. So why should she waste the time trying?

But Amelia pushed on. She managed to stick it out for one more year, putting her son in child care three days a week and working at home with him for the other two. Between breast-feedings and diaper changes, she did a hurried job on the revise and resubmit and eventually got a second-round rejection. When the letter came, she cried for an hour in the bathroom while her baby slept. Her husband came home from work to find her disheveled and almost hysterical with frustration. Her heart nearly burst with joy when he suggested that she "take a few years off" until the baby was a bit older; he could easily support the family on his salary alone. Amelia informed her chair that she was resigning at the end of the spring semester, citing the need to stay home with her son and really "be there" for him. It was just too difficult, she said, to combine motherhood and an academic career.

A story like Amelia's allows us to show how some people might begin academic careers almost by mistake, without ever really knowing what they were getting themselves into and without really knowing what it takes to achieve professional success. No matter where you are in your life, it is very important to examine your motivations. This is especially true if you are still in graduate school. In what follows, we pose some key questions that will help you figure out if an academic career is really what you want, or if it is something you have been led to think that you want by your parents, professors, partners,

and friends. Think about your own history and your own goals in life as you read through these next sections.

1. WHY DO YOU WANT TO LIVE THE LIFE OF THE MIND?

It is worth reiterating here that Amelia's choice to opt out of the academy was, of course, influenced by the lack of affordable child care, the legitimate stresses of new motherhood, and the tightness of the academic labor market in her discipline, as well as the murkiness and capriciousness of the publishing process. But if we simply chalked up her leaving to the issues of work-family balance, we would be ignoring the many red flags that should have warned Amelia that she was not really a good fit for the academy, long before she found herself juggling her teaching, research, and motherhood on the tenure track.

In the first place, it seems that Amelia went into graduate school without really understanding what PhDs in English *do* after they finish their degree, or the difference between consuming knowledge and producing it. A PhD is a research degree, and doctors of philosophy are meant to produce original scholarship in their field of expertise. It is not, as many young people believe, a credential that simply allows you to teach a subject at the university level. While there are many institutions that do focus almost exclusively on teaching, these are not the institutions that most successful graduate students aspire to or are taught to aspire to (more on institutional types in chapter 5). Most graduate students on the job market come out of Research I universities, and they are encouraged to seek employment in similar institutions. A position at anything less than a Research I is considered a failure—and graduate students implicitly internalize these expectations, even when they are self-aware enough to know that they might prefer teaching to research. In the overall pecking order of academia, the Research I is always on top; at Research I institutions, independent, original research always takes precedence over teaching. It is clear that Amelia enjoyed the learning and teaching much more than she ever enjoyed the writing, and this should have been a clue that she would be better off seeking a job at a school that valued teaching more than original research, or choosing a career completely outside the academy. (More on this is chapter 5.)

It is also clear that Amelia disliked independent work and thrived in situations where a mentor directly supervised her. Furthermore, Amelia was

particularly thin-skinned when it came to rejection, and rejection is an ever-present part of the academic life. Of course, no one likes rejection, but the most successful scholars are those who learn not to take it personally and to accept it as part of the intellectual growth process. A disinclination to independent work, a lack of interest in writing, and a deep aversion to rejection would doom the academic career of even the most brilliant young mind, whether distracted by a baby or not.

Thus, the first set of questions you should ask yourself include the following: Why do I want to live the life of the mind? Do the scholarly debates in my field fascinate and inspire me? Am I willing to toil away independently and often in obscurity, in order to advance the collective knowledge in my field or subfield? Can I handle the professional rejection that will accompany the career of any prolific scholar? Am I willing to make personal and material sacrifices so that I can live in the realm of ideas, surrounded by people who value scholarly abstraction as much as they value a good cup of espresso?

If you are having a difficult time writing your dissertation and you are bored by long hours spent doing research, chances are that an academic job with high research expectations is not for you. If, on the other hand, you wake up every morning thrilled to be diving back into the colossal intellectual endeavor that is an original thesis, or you love every minute that you spend in the archives, in the field, or in the lab, and even the time you spend writing, then you probably have what it takes to be a successful academic. If you meet your adviser only once every two months, and then only at his or her instigation, you are naturally suited for the independent work required for a career at a research university or top liberal arts college. On the other hand, if you feel that you need a steady stream of advice, attention, and input from your thesis adviser in order to finish each individual chapter, then it might be worth passing on the research end of the academic job market. If writing is a tortured and frustrating process, and you fear nothing greater than the next rejection letter telling you that your ideas are hackneyed and your prose is dull, then be honest with yourself now.

One of our respondents, Diana, is a professor in a public-policy school at a large research university and a mother of one. She had this advice for young women entering academia: "Decide from the start that tenure at your school is not the only possible path for your career. Life is not over if you don't get tenure. Many excellent scholars did not get tenure somewhere." Like Diana,

we believe that there is absolutely no shame in deciding that your personal priorities do not include becoming a tenured professor at a research university. The important thing is to be honest with yourself about what you want and then do your best to achieve your goals. Getting tenure is hard, and you need to understand that no matter how hard you try, you might just not make it, even if you don't have kids. Realize that if you don't make it, it is not the end of the world, but at least go into it willing to give it your best shot.

Perhaps because of the abundance of American television shows about hospitals, courtrooms, and law firms, young people have a somewhat realistic expectation of how difficult it is to become a doctor or a lawyer. We all know how brutal medical residencies can be, thanks to shows like *ER* and *Grey's Anatomy*, and no one thinks that it is easy to make partner in a law firm. But unfortunately (or fortunately), there are no TV shows about academia that dramatize the trials and tribulations of young (good-looking) academics as they struggle to establish themselves in their profession—probably because watching someone sit and grade papers for fifty-three minutes is not very exciting. But the sacrifices and commitment required are similar, and you should be prepared to work hard.

2. WHAT ARE YOUR PERSONAL GOALS IN LIFE IN TERMS OF FAMILY?

Another key part of Amelia's story is that she ended up in graduate school almost by mistake, propelled by the expectations of parents and mentors and not wanting to start a family too soon. In fact, there are probably many bright and talented women who feel compelled to warehouse themselves in graduate school until they are of the socially acceptable age to get married and have children. The average age of first marriage has steadily increased in the United States over the past four decades, as has the age of first childbirth, particularly for college-educated women. Many of these women will work into their early thirties before settling down with a partner and opting out, a situation that provides them the moral high ground of having sacrificed a potentially successful independent career for the sake of their children. It is really important to know what you want out of life and whether graduate school is (or was) just a holding tank until you felt that you were the "appropriate" age to start your family.

Furthermore, if you entered graduate school because you believed that you would make a good scholar and professor, and then you find yourself

changing your mind because it is not quite what you thought it would be, or because you have fallen madly in love with someone and want to put your relationship and family above all other pursuits, don't be afraid to cut your losses early and pursue an alternative career path. No one ever forces anyone to go into the academic job market (although, admittedly, it does feel that way sometimes). If you do decide to seek a job in the academic labor market, think hard about who you are, what you want, and which type of institution is most suited to your personality. Despite the strong pressure to pursue a career at a Research I, explore the other options and be realistic about what the different requirements for tenure look like at different institutions. Even if you land a tenure-track job, you may have a child and find that being a mother really is the more satisfying part of your life, and that scholarship loses its importance. Again, there is no shame in leaving the tenure track early if you are certain of your priorities.

Finally, there are those women who truly want to be both mothers and scholars. If you fall into this camp, then we have good news for you. *It can be done*. Not only can it be done, it has been done by thousands of women at universities around the world. If you head down this path, it is important to be clear about what your expectations about being a mother and a scholar are, and to have a plan for how you are going to meet them. Start by being realistic about the challenges and expectations of others.

3. DO YOU HAVE A CLEAR SENSE OF THE PERSONAL CHALLENGES THAT YOU WILL FACE?

As you consider becoming a successful academic, you will need to think about the labor market, your own work style, your desire for a partner, and possibly a partner's expectations about your relationship. If you do not have a partner yet, you will have to think about where you are going to be located and the likelihood of meeting someone there. If you don't want a partner, think about the availability of support networks to help you raise a child on your own. We have already talked about working independently and the importance of being self-sufficient and self-disciplined in your work, but it is important to recognize that different academic jobs will have varying expectations about teaching, service, and scholarship. Scholarship is often a relatively solitary endeavor compared to teaching and service, so if you have a gregarious personality and prefer to work in teams, choose your future institution accordingly.

Figuring all of this out will take some serious introspection, but the better you understand your own needs and priorities, the better the chance you have of making a successful academic career at an institution suited to what you actually want (and not to what you think you *should* want).

After you do this for yourself, you also need to think long and hard about your partner. Like becoming a doctor or a lawyer or any other professional, academia requires considerable time and effort, and the work and the time it takes will affect any relationship that you have or will have. If you do not already have a partner, how important is it for you to find one? If finding a partner is high on the list of priorities, think before taking a job at a school in a rural area where most of your colleagues could well be already married with children. If you want to find a partner, you might do better to take a job in a large metropolitan area where there will be more single people available. This is especially important if you are looking for a same-sex partner or someone of a particular ethnic or religious background. There is no right answer here, but the key is to be honest with yourself about what *you* want and make your choices accordingly.

If you already have a partner, the decision to become an academic has its own challenges. If your partner already has a career, how flexible is he or she in terms of relocating? An academic couple's relationship can be among the hardest to make work because of the paucity of tenure-track jobs and a still nascent system of spousal hiring. How willing is your partner to support your academic career? How much are you going to ask of your partner, and what do you plan to offer in return? Is your partner willing to follow you? Are you willing to follow your partner? These are all important questions to keep in mind when you are thinking about the job market. No one can become a doctor without putting in the long and grueling hours that a residency requires, and few newly minted PhDs can become professors without being ready and able to move where the right (and sometimes the only) job takes them. Those are the realities of the profession, and they apply equally to men and women, regardless of whether they are parents.

4. DO YOU HAVE A CLEAR SENSE OF WHAT THE PROFESSIONAL SACRIFICES WILL BE?

Every profession has its own internal rules and requirements for success, and academia is no exception. For most professions, these expectations are shaped

around male biology and the assumption that the professional is not also a primary caregiver to his or her children.³ There is also implicit and explicit sex discrimination against women because of the still strong "old boys' network" of senior male scholars who occupy the upper ranks of many disciplines. It would be great if all of these factors could be instantly eliminated by some administrative decree of the American Association of University Professors. The only way things are going to change, however, is for women and mothers (and fathers and husbands aware of these issues) to enter the ranks of the professoriate and start to change things from the inside. We both whole-heartedly advocate for institutional changes that will make academia more family friendly, but we also don't think women should wait for institutional change before starting their careers. For the time being, young scholars should try to work around the obstacles and be realistic about the sacrifices required to become successful academics. We discuss eight major sacrifices here—again, not to scare you away, but to prepare you to make a more informed decision about your future career choice. These are things that we both wish we had known in graduate school.

High Mobility

As already discussed, you have to be willing to move where the next post-doctoral fellowship or tenure-track job takes you. This is particularly true in the sciences, where recent PhDs are often required to do a series of postdoctoral fellowships before starting a tenure-track position. The job market is unpredictable, and you can never know far in advance when or where positions in your field will be available, and what the pool of people with whom you are competing will be like in any given year. There are two key rules here: you should plan to be on the market for at least three years before landing a tenure-track job (up to five years in the sciences), and accept the reality that any job is better than no job. This is not to say that some graduate students do not get jobs immediately after filing their PhD thesis, but merely that if you are serious about pursuing an academic career, you have to go into it accepting the possibility that you will have to move one or two or three times before settling into a tenure-track job. If you don't get a job in your first or second year out, you should regard this as normal and not take it too personally. If you do not get a job after your third or fourth year on the market, you can start to worry. All of this means you have to be willing to move. If

you have a partner, he or she has to be willing to move with you or to accept a commuter relationship (not an easy choice, but one that many academic couples make).⁴

Living Someplace Undesirable

Related to the first sacrifice is the reality of having to live somewhere undesirable, by whatever your own criteria are. It could be that you are moving to an unaccustomed climate or that you are moving to a rural area from a big city, or the reverse. You may have to move far away from your partner, your friends, and your extended family. You may have to live in a part of the country populated by people with political views very different from your own, or relocate to a state that you consider to be a cultural backwater. All of these are very real considerations to keep in mind as you go out on the job market; however, the more you limit your search, the harder it will be to find job opportunities. It is much easier to find a job when you already have one—so it is best to take what you can get and then, if you find your current situation unbearable, get back on the job market the very next year to see if you can improve things. The truth, however, is that most new faculty are so overwhelmed with research, teaching, and service commitments that they rarely even notice where they are living—so maybe you won't mind the bitter cold or intense heat, the interminable street noise or the deafening rural silence, as much as you thought you would. You might even come to like the place.

Not Having a Life Outside of Work

Depending on the institution, there will be different expectations for receiving tenure and promotion. Some institutions will focus solely on research, while others will require more teaching and university service. In either case, the early years of any academic career will be consumed by the demands of your job, something that is true for many other professions as well. If you are not truly enamored of the work life of those academics around you who gladly spend all of their free time reading journal articles or toiling in their labs, these will be very difficult years indeed. If you already have children, it will be hard to continue with hobbies or non-work-related activities. The good news is that you may not really mind this if you are living somewhere undesirable in the first place. Furthermore, you probably won't earn enough money to go out much anyway. Which brings us to . . .

Accepting a Lower Starting Salary Than You Expected

To add insult to injury, most academic jobs offer relatively small salaries to the newly initiated. If you have student loans to pay back, this means that your first few years on the tenure track could be spent with less disposable income than you had even as a graduate student. By the time you earn your PhD, many of your classmates from undergraduate school who went straight into the work force will be firmly established in their respective careers, buying cars and houses while you are still living in run-down faculty housing and willing your car to make it another year. Salaries do not stay so low as you move up through the ranks, and indeed at some schools there will be substantial raises at the promotion to associate and full professor. But these beginning years can be very financially challenging, especially if they are accompanied by child care expenses.

Delaying or Limiting Fertility

All of the aforementioned sacrifices apply equally to men and women beginning an academic career, but this sacrifice generally applies to women. It is an unfortunate reality that most young academic women will spend their prime child-bearing years earning their PhDs and then trying to earn tenure. Because these early years are especially stressful, many women consider waiting to have a first baby, or postponing the birth of a second child until after tenure. (We will discuss the timing and spacing of children in more detail in the next chapter.) There are certainly some advantages to postponement, but there are also advantages to having your first child late in graduate school or early on the tenure track. Either way, you will be stuck in a professional culture that often assumes that there is a *Spousus supportus* at home.

Working Long Hours When Your Kids Are Young

If you do have a child while in graduate school or during the early years on the tenure track, you will have to come to terms with working long hours when your kids are very young. This means that "Mama" may not be your child's first word, and that you will probably not see your son take his first step or be there when your daughter reads her first word. For many women, this is the hardest sacrifice to make, because they feel that they are missing important milestones. But these are milestones that are externally defined by society, and we have to ask ourselves if being there to see your child's ninth

step is really that much less meaningful than seeing the first. Missing the first word or the first step will not make you less of a mother, any more than missing these events makes a man less of a father. Thinking critically about our society's ever-increasing mothering standards is essential if we are to deal with this particularly difficult sacrifice.

Not Being in Control of Your Destiny

This sacrifice is in some ways the most difficult to bear. The good news is that it applies equally to everyone: men and women, parents and nonparents, senior scholars and newly minted PhDs. Academia is far from the meritocracy we are led to believe it is, and there are certain aspects of the job that make it much harder to bear than other equally prestigious professions. Unlike many other jobs where you are evaluated on your performance immediately by your known superiors, in academia you are evaluated secretly by unknown colleagues over months of prolonged silence. With tenure clocks ticking, there is nothing more frustrating than knowing that your paper (the brilliant paper sent to the top journal in your field that will ultimately make or break your academic career and therefore change the course of your entire life) might well be buried under a stack of *New Yorker* magazines on the desk of some senior academic gatekeeper who has spent the summer kayaking with his buddies on the Chattooga River rather than reading your manuscript. Your papers often go out for double-blind review, your book manuscripts go out for single-blind review (i.e., they know who you are, but you do not know who they are), and your tenure case is decided based on letters that you will probably never see from researchers whose names you may or may not know and anonymous student evaluations of your teaching. Fellowship and grant criteria change from year to year, and you never know who is judging the applications. Your book will be sent out to reviewers who know nothing about your personal circumstances. In short, becoming an academic means putting yourself at the mercy of the unknown. It doesn't matter how smart you think you are or how smart other people say you are; you are only as smart as the blind reviewers are willing to admit. And heaven forbid that you forgot to cite them.

Exposure to Lots of Rejection

This final sacrifice is very much related to the last. If you are thinking about becoming an academic, the best thing to do is convene a group of your

closest friends and family members and have them sit around for a few hours pointing out, in excruciating detail, all of your faults and shortcomings. If you can emerge from this sort of harsh treatment as a better person willing to work on improving yourself, then academia is the place for you. Similarly, if you are able to listen to their criticism and convince yourself of their inferior intellectual abilities and be confident that you are, after all, one of the most intelligent, hardworking, and compassionate people you know, then you will have a great future in the Ivory Tower. If, instead, you sit there seething at your loved ones, determined never to speak to them again, or, worse, you find yourself contemplating joining a convent or monastery, then the academic life is definitely not for you. Being an academic means being able to handle a sometimes overwhelming amount of rejection. Your grant applications will be rejected. Your articles will be rejected. Your book proposals will be rejected. There will be students who don't like you and make that clear in their student evaluations. But if you want to stay in this business, you will have to develop a pretty thick skin, and learn to take the good with the bad. The flip side of all of this rejection is that when you do get a journal article or book manuscript accepted, the pleasure, satisfaction, and relief are enormous. If you are into instant gratification or have a delicate ego, get out now. You will live a miserable life in the academy if you cannot roll with the punches.

5. HAVE YOU THOUGHT ABOUT ACADEMIA VERSUS OTHER PROFESSIONAL CAREER PATHS?

After that long list of negatives, you must be ready to quit your PhD program and give up on the academy altogether. As reasonable as this impulse may seem, what will you do instead? Will you quit working altogether? Or will you look for employment in another profession? Not working—that is, letting your partner support you—is potentially opening yourself up to some huge costs in the case of death, disability, or divorce. Leslie Bennetts's 2007 book, *The Feminine Mistake*, is a "must-read" for anyone who is convinced that a man is the best plan.⁵ Even with alimony and child support, the standard of living of most divorced women plummets after marital dissolution, and it is very difficult to get back into the labor market after one has been out of it for an extended period of time. In academia, an extended period out of your field leaves you out of touch with the literature and the current debates, and this problem is even greater for those working in the natural sciences, where

scholarship moves at break-neck speed. Long gaps in a CV make it difficult to find a tenure-track position if you try to return to the academy. It would be wonderful if there were more on and off ramps in academia, so that parents could spend a few key years home with their children and then resume right where they left off, but there are few, and, sadly, that is unlikely to change anytime soon. The excess supply of PhDs in most fields guarantees that there is always someone eager to take your place.

The other alternative is to find a non-academic job, something that is strongly encouraged by some books like *Mama, PhD*. But the key thing is to realize that other jobs have trade-offs as well. For instance, working for a non-profit organization may require just as much time and be as badly paid as an assistant professorship. Our advice is to keep in mind the sacrifices that we have listed above and to make a similar list of sacrifices required for whatever other careers you are considering. It is also worthwhile to keep in mind the rewards of the academic life (yes, we honestly do think there are many, despite the negativity of the discussion above). Some of the advantages of the academic life we count: being paid to read and think; self-directed research on a topic of your choosing; international collaborations with colleagues in your field; creative writing; working with young people; making a difference; flexible scheduling (especially during the summer months); sabbatical years off from teaching that provide long, uninterrupted stretches of time for research; working in a relatively prestigious profession; and being paid a decent salary (eventually). This list can go on and will be different for different people in different disciplines.

Indeed, there are those among us who speak in reverential terms about their jobs and the pleasures they bring. For instance, Susan Athey, the first woman to win the American Economist Association's John Bates Clark Medal in economics for the top American economist under age forty, wrote in an interview in 2001:

I love being in the middle of the research process, or the beginning. Coming up with a new theory, and developing a model and proving some results, and then changing the model, and getting to the point where you have just the right model and into discovering how it works—just the moment when the model really “sings” to you—is just a “high” that it's [sic] hard to match anywhere else. Sometimes I get a hard time from my friends about how hard I work, and sometimes they may be right, but I have to say that that kind of “rush” from

solving models is a lot more interesting than a lot of other things that I could think of doing. The other part [of the job] that I've really loved is working with students; in particular, mentoring students and watching their careers develop. That gives me a lot of meaning—it feels like the impact that I have there will outlast a lot of the other things that I do.⁶

All the academic mothers we interviewed expressed sentiments similar to these, differing only in the specifics of the respondent's academic discipline. Beyond enjoying the primary work of research and teaching, almost every one of our respondents claimed that one of academia's most positive aspects is flexibility. While they all acknowledged that academics must work exceptionally hard and that they put in many hours, the ability to set one's own hours and to be more or less one's own boss appealed greatly to the women we surveyed. Miriam, an associate professor of history at a large Research I university who is the mother of one child, claimed there were important pros to working in academia, particularly

[the] ability to control [my own] schedule and time on campus when necessary; flexibility of work schedule except for teaching and meetings. Research and writing can be organized according to one's own schedule and familial patterns, [and one has the] ability to work, vacation, and travel because of research interests. I chose academia for the above reasons and as a working parent, this is the best situation for professional parents in regard to family and work balance. We might work hard but it is on our terms—especially after tenure.

Belinda, an assistant professor of women's studies at a large comprehensive state university who had a child on her own when she was forty, told us:

I think the academy is a great place to be a parent. Even though I may complain, we have such a huge amount of independence and flexibility in our schedule and that is very helpful with children. Of course, the fact that our job is never really done and we bring it home with us all of the time is a bit of a con and requires that you be very well organized.

The ability to take sabbaticals and to win grants to buy time off from teaching is also quite unique to the academy. At many institutions, faculty are given a full semester of paid leave after twelve semesters of teaching, meaning a

professor would have a sabbatical about once every seven years. Some professors are able to get enough money to take the entire year off, and others can sometimes extend their leave to two years if they have the external funding. At top institutions, such as Princeton, Yale, or Harvard, faculty earn a sabbatical semester every three years, and even liberal arts colleges like Bowdoin are trying to reduce the number of years of teaching between sabbaticals from six to five. For many women in the academy with children, sabbatical years are a wonderful fringe benefit of working at a university. Diana, the professor of public policy, explained:

Sabbaticals are a huge advantage of the academy. . . . Start planning sabbaticals away from your institution several years in advance. Figure out how to go away, and do it as soon as you become eligible. Take the whole year at half pay, even if you have to use up savings. Sabbaticals are a lifesaver. They can be a good time to do a lot of research, or just a breather from the usual nonstop routine—a time when you really can go to the gym three times per week. I have come back refreshed and reinterested in my courses and research.

The advantages of flexibility and time off were repeated over and over again by professor parents, but others talked about the rich personal and political rewards of being an educator and a creator of knowledge. Marissa is full professor of history at a Research I university and has two children. She told us that an academic position offers

flexibility in the work schedule, a more gender meritocratic system (we complain a lot, but I wouldn't dare imagine what sexism in the workplace looks like in a high-powered corporation), and the ability to control a lot of the content of what I do (meaning teaching what I want), and of at least being able to stand behind my "product" intellectually and ethically, with a sense of making a difference for the greater good. As an educator, I might be frustrated by lazy students, but my expectations are always linked to my own sense of my intellectual and ethical self, and if I am able to communicate my ideas somewhat effectively to at least some of my audiences, I can go home without worries about being an agent of good in the world.

For the women we interviewed, the sacrifices were ultimately worth the rewards. But whether the sacrifices are worth the rewards is up to you to decide. For instance, things that are positive aspects for some (the ability to travel for

research) may be negative aspects for others (the necessity of traveling for your research). You should make your own list of pros and cons given some of the sacrifices we have outlined above, and then make the decision that is right for you.

6. ARE YOU WILLING TO ACCEPT THE CONSEQUENCES OF YOUR CHOICES?

Of all the things that we advise you to do in this book, this will be the hardest to follow: accept the consequences of your choices. You cannot be everything to everyone all at the same time—a super-scholar, a super-teacher, and a super-mother. However, you can be a well-respected scholar, a good and conscientious teacher, and a loving and attentive mother. That needs to be good enough. There will always be people who are smarter than you are, more productive than you are, more dedicated than you are, and more successful. It is good to keep in mind that this is also true if you don't have children, but it will be true to a greater degree if you do. Yes, men will have it easier, especially those of your colleagues with partners at home, but it is just not worth worrying about. More importantly, it might be worth remembering that there will be senior women out there who would gladly give up half of the publications on their CVs for a child, and that they could be as envious of your life as you are of theirs. There is some truth in the old adage about the grass always being greener on the other side of the fence. It is natural for us to compare ourselves to others, but we should also be realistic about how much we can actually expect ourselves to do. Helen, the tenured mother of three, explains:

The "having it all" myth is something I still want to believe in—or at least some sort of internal standard I hold myself up against. For example, when I visit someone else's house and it seems so neat and tidy, it makes me feel like I'm not doing my job as a mom well enough. Or, when I see others excel professionally in ways that I haven't yet, it makes me question my abilities to juggle everything. That idea that I really should be able to do everything very well—because there appears to be evidence that others are doing this all around me—is difficult to let go or shake off.

You must have reasonable expectations of yourself. Yes, you can do it all. But no, you cannot do it all perfectly. If you can accept this, you will already be one step ahead of the game.