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Every year, American universities publish glowing reports stating their commitment to diversity, often showing statistics of female hires as proof of success. Yet, although women make up increasing numbers of graduate students, graduate degree recipients, and even new hires, academic life remains overwhelming a man's world. The reality that the statistics fail to highlight is that the presence of women, specifically those with children, in the ranks of tenured faculty has not increased in a generation. Further, those women who do achieve tenure track placement tend to report slow advancement, income disparity, and lack of job satisfaction compared to their male colleagues.

Amid these disadvantages, what is a Mama, PhD to do? This literary anthology brings together a selection of deeply felt personal narratives by smart, interesting women who explore the continued inequality of the sexes in higher education and suggest changes that could make universities more family-friendly workplaces.

The contributors hail from a wide array of disciplines and bring with them a variety of perspectives, including those of single and adoptive parents. They address topics that range from the level of policy to practical day-to-day concerns, including caring for a child with special needs, breastfeeding on campus, negotiating viable maternity and family leave policies, job-sharing and telecommuting options, and fitting into desk/chair combinations while eight months pregnant.

Candid, provocative, and sometimes with a wry sense of humor, the thirty-five essays in this anthology speak to and offer support for any woman attempting to combine work and family, as well as anyone who is interested in improving the university's ability to live up to its reputation to be among the most progressive of American institutions.

## **Mama, PhD: Women Write about Motherhood and Academic Life Details**

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## **From Reader Review Mama, PhD: Women Write about Motherhood and Academic Life for online ebook**

### **Lulu says**

This is another one of those "dipping" collections: where I keep this on my bedside table and dip into it everyone now and then to read one or two entries on a weekend afternoon or perhaps before bed. The authors of "Professor Mommy" suggest that this collection tends toward the "impossible" view of the academic-mommyhood debate, but I'm not sure if it's there yet. There have been at least two pieces already by women who aren't mothers, but who do talk about the ways in which they connect with their own mothers and their students in fruitful ways which I do appreciate. Academia and motherhood aren't for everyone (nor can they be always be balanced together successfully) but these kind of conversations are necessary for anyone who may wish to be a parent, or even just a positive role model, to have within the context of academic study. It can't be all "publish or perish" even as it tends that way.

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### **Literary Mama says**

My first reaction to *Mama, PhD*, a provocative collection of 35 personal essays and commentaries by 42 women about motherhood and academic life, was a powerful desire to tell my own story. Edited by Elrena Evans and Caroline Grant, the book features deeply personal and engaging essays that bring to life many facets of this topic: the internal fracturing that comes with considering whether or not to have a child, vivid descriptions of the body's blossoming during pregnancy, poignant accounts of how it feels to be sidelined by insensitive comments, the heartbreak of leaving one's child in someone else's care, the infamous fog of Mommy Brain. In addition, much of the writing is peppered with winsome humor, including laugh-out-loud descriptions of wedging a pregnant body into a desk-chair combination of the type that graces most university classrooms (Evans) or of fielding potential names for a baby from mostly male undergraduates (Sheila Squillante).

The essays are loosely grouped into four sections: The Conversation is about attempts to synchronize motherhood with the demands of an academic career; That Mommy Thing describes being in the thick of parenting and scholarly work; Recovering Academic tells of academic mothers who redefine themselves after their ivory tower experience; and Momifesto explores strategies to better align motherhood and an academic career. It's all there: women who decide to remain childless, some who experience infertility, pregnancy loss (abortion as well as miscarriage), and adoption, some who want one child only (and one who ends up with six), some who co- and tag-team parent with supportive spouses and others who endure nasty break-ups and divorce or make do as single mothers. Still, I suspect these stories only scratch the surface of the topic.

Read the rest of Esther Wyss-Flamm's review at [Literary Mama](#)

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### **Asho says**

If anything, this book simply drove home a suspicion I have had since joining a PhD program at a major research university: motherhood and the tenure track are not compatible. Although the essays were insightful, I was hoping for a more uplifting collection. It's depressing how few of the women represented seem to satisfactorily juggle parenting and academia. It seems like the essay writers either gave up or vastly modified their academic careers to suit family life, or gave up spending time with their children while they were young in favor of continuing to pursue an academic career. I realize that the work/life "balance" is very much a myth and all working mothers make these decisions (and all mothers who opt NOT to work end up worry about that choice, too), but it's particularly depressing to read the essays in this book that point out seemingly simple solutions to some of the challenges facing mothers in academia that the system cannot seem to embrace.

I'm glad I read this book now because it made me realize how greatly women underestimate how a baby will change their lives. Reading it inspired me to finish as much of my dissertation as possible before the baby arrives and then to be flexible in considering academic jobs after he arrives.

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### **Jeannette says**

This book made me feel like I wasn't a loser after all.

It is a collection of several essays by women grappling with their scholarly and motherly identities.

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### **Mary says**

This book is needed. And more research on mothering in academia, or anywhere outside of the home, is necessary and important. It's an excellent book.

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### **Jennifer Glass says**

A thought provoking book, that brings up common themes: (1) most academics don't know how to deal with people with babies and (2) babies are way harder than you think before you get pregnant. I was disappointed that so few of the essays were written by women who successfully combined motherhood and academia. Amen to this quote (actually taken from another paper, Drago & Williams, 2000): "We should stop measuring commitment by the ability of an academic to have a spouse ready, willing, and able to shoulder the bulk of the child-caring during the most time-consuming years of child-rearing—when the children are young. The current system is bad for women and it is inconsistent with our ideals for gender equality." Although I felt that most of the book contained negative impressions of juggling motherhood and academia, there were a few essays that I particularly enjoyed: "Living (!) A Life I Never Planned" by Rosemarie Emanuele; "One Mama's Dispensable Myths and Indispensable Machines" by Angelica Duran; "Infinite Calculations" by Della Fenster; "The Orange Kangaroo" by Nicole Cooley and Julia Spicher Kasdorf; "Ideal Mama, Ideal Worker: Negotiating Guilt and Shame in Academe" by Jean-Anne Sutherland; and "Momifesto: Affirmations for the Academic Mother" by Cynthia Kohn, Josie Mills, Christy Rowe and Erin Webster Garrett.

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## **Elizabeth says**

This is a thought-provoking and highly readable collection of essays on a topic that has been, to date, woefully under-represented. I'm guilty of this myself, having gotten my BA and departed the academic world never to look back. Though I had friends negotiating the tenuous road through dissertations and job applications, I never realized the myriad of obstacles, from emotional to financial to prejudicial, that faced women on this road, most particularly women thinking about having children. Until *Mama PHD*, everything I knew about this subject came from the character Susannah on *Thirty Something!* I'd highly recommend this collection to people in the academic world, to mothers and potential mothers, to writers with children, and to those who might want to look back at their college experiences, count the number of female professors with children that they had, and wonder why the number is so alarmingly low.

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## **Palones says**

I was recommended this book while at a conference in the US with my then 5-month old. Now that I've finished it, I am very thankful that I chose to take my PhD in the UK. Sure, it's not easy trying to get it finished, while looking after a 9 month old - quel surprise! - but the amount of support available here is so much better than what is described for the US in this book. I had plenty of (unpaid) leave, my college will pay half the childcare costs should I want it, my library rights continued while I was on leave etc. (That some US universities revoke the library rights of students/staff on maternity leave is unbelievably nasty.) And I have encountered nothing but kindness and support from my supervisor, advisors, department chair, peers and students. I don't think this is just luck. It's still far from ideal here, but the laws, institutional policies and social attitudes are starting to head in the right direction. It made me sad and angry to think of all these talented women and their families making such ridiculous sacrifices and often putting up with nasty attitudes and practices in order to do two fundamentally important things: work and raise a family. These two things are meant to be hard, but they shouldn't be this difficult. Give the women their library cards back, dammit!

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## **Kristen says**

Maybe I wasn't in the mood for this book since kids aren't in the near future and I've been a bit down on my dissertation. But, honestly, this book seemed like a bunch of whining.

Writing a dissertation is hard. Getting a tenure is hard. Trying to succeed in a world filled with men is hard. And while these things are most definitely made harder when you choose to have children, I still have a bit of "get over it" going on.

But the book was worthwhile to alert me to some of the tips and strategies to deal with administration and co-workers who do not respect one's right to be a mother and an academic. It also reminds me what older academics had to go through and how much I owe to them for my opportunities today.

Yet I still can't say that I needed the book...mostly, it just stressed me out!

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## **Emily says**

Highly recommend. The essays are a little uneven and even sometimes discouraging, but this is a must-read for every woman in academia. I feel confirmed in who I am and what I do through reading the stories of my peers.

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## **Dayspring says**

This collection of short essays from women attempting to balance family and academic life is simultaneously affirming, infuriating, inspiring, and depressing. Although colleges and universities tout the growth in numbers of female faculty over the years, little seems to have changed in the culture of academia to bridge connections between the mind and body, and to support faculty as holistic beings.

If you're looking for an inspiring book that will leave you feeling like "yes, I can do this - I can be a superstar mom and professor!" this is not the book for you. Most of the essays are well-written, honest, and very interesting, but the book may leave you feeling a bit disheartened at the lack of progress we have made within higher education.

Ultimately, a quick and easy read that is worth your time, particularly if you work within academia.

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## **Joanna says**

This book is fantastic. As a woman who is navigating between a non-traditional academic career and raising small toddlers, I found this book inspiring. I really like the way that many paths are presented in a way that is extremely respectful of women's choices--whether it's staying at home completely, or pursuing a tenure-track careers while raising children. I became teary-eyed more than once reading these beautiful essays, and thinking about the intersections in my own life between scholarship and motherhood.

As well as being an inspiring read, it also honestly presents the realities of life as a scholar-mom, presenting the limitations of academic systems in the U.S., and proposing ways in which academia can become a more mother/family-friendly system.

I constantly recommend this book to friends and professors.

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## **Elevate Difference says**

At the beginning of the second year of my MA program in English, I found out that one of my advisors was pregnant. I'll never forget what she said to me: "You know, you would think that academia would be a supportive place to have a kid. It's so not." She was a then-junior faculty member, and would put off going up for tenure for two years.

When I started reading the individual essays in *Mama PhD*, I realized that my advisor's story was the rule rather than the exception. The collection is divided into four sections, "Part One: The Conversation"; "Part II: That Mommy Thing"; "Part IV: Recovering Academic"; and "Part V: Momifesto."

You can find many of contributors in the online journal *Literary Mama* (especially the editors, Evans and Grant), though for the most part they represent a range of academic fields, from biology to philosophy.

For the most part, the essays in *Mama PhD* are concerned with capturing the deep ambivalence the authors feel in their abilities to balance parenthood and professional demands of teaching, committee work, and research. Indeed, some women, such as Jessica Smartt Guillon, depict experiences of pregnancies met with blatant hostility—even from mentors and colleagues who claim to be feminist. Others stories capture women's hard-won academic success in the midst of raising several children, like Leah Bradshaw's powerful essay "The Facts, The Stories."

But make no mistake: this collection is an unequivocal critique of the infrastructure—or lack thereof—in place for women who want to explore their identities as both mothers and intellectuals. The joint essay "Nontraditional Academics" issues a call for women who leave the academy temporarily or permanently to pursue their interest in full-time motherhood to stop hiding and join forces to build a community and increase visibility. While *Mama PhD* is certainly aimed for women in academia—and the men, women, and children who love them—those readers interested in feminist issues in the world of work will also find this collection a compelling and provocative read.

Review by Heather Brown

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### **Catherine Gillespie says**

*Mama, PhD: Women Write About Motherhood and Academic Life* is a book of essays by women with doctorates who are also mothers. The women, some of whom are still in academia and some of whom left after having children, write about the struggles of women in the profession, particularly mothers, the rewards and trials of the paths they chose, and the lessons they have learned. The writers range from a single mom who got her PhD at Stanford with two elementary aged children, to a woman who got a job as a professor and then had SIX children, to women who enjoyed being professors but found trying to get tenure and get pregnant at the same time overwhelming.

{Read my full review here, including how this book helped me decide to turn down a PhD program, at least for now }

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### **Megan says**

This was an enjoyable collection of stories, especially for a new mom/grad student feeling disillusioned with academia.

The editors did a nice job of cultivating a variety of stories. Some were success stories, while others were extremely discouraging - but that was good, because it felt more real. I read some stories feeling hopeful for the future, some stories worried about my prospects, and others grateful for the hurdles I avoided in my own



journey.

Some of the stories were a drag, and so many of the stories were from women in disciplines and programs completely different from mine. I was heartbroken for the number of mothers who experienced terrible, offensive reactions to their pregnancies and the birth (or even simple existence) of their children. It made me appreciate where I am in ways I never could have anticipated. It also was a bit of a smack in the face of my naivete. The idea that I simply decided to get pregnant without consulting anyone within the system, that I announced it without fear of consequences, that I made my own schedule and modified it as needed to suit my pregnancy and birth and time at home with my child, that I expected to be accommodated! And yet, I'm more firmly convinced that this is how it should be.

I recommend this to any mother in academia, with children of any age, whether or not you feel supported by your program, whether you planned carefully or were surprised. I think you'll find a little something for you here.

[Book picked based entirely on the cover: Popsugar Book Challenge 2015]

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