

Beyond Blame

Challenging the Myths and Inequities that Compromise Academic Mothers' Success

The hardships encountered by mothers in academe are compounded by certain cultural myths that define the social perception of women's roles in the realms of both maternal practice and academic work. Such myths enable inequity and allow institutions to remain ignorant regarding their responsibility for the reproduction of such inequities. Indeed, prejudice regarding mothers' perceived level of professional dedication and productivity is particularly difficult to eradicate, as are misconceptions surrounding issues of freedom and responsibility related to women's reproductive choices. As a result, a culture of mother blame has flourished that encourages women to admonish themselves for inadequacies related to both maternal practice and academic work. Through personal narrative and recourse to Anne-Marie Slaughter's controversial essay, "Why Women Still Can't Have it All," this article examines the myths informing social understandings of academic motherhood; challenges the meanings that are made and perpetuated by these misconceptions, which ultimately define academic mothers' experiences; and, strategizes possible solutions to women's struggle to reconcile their lives as mothers with their work as academics by positing, in particular, the value and applicability of maternal intelligences, such as empathy and innovation, beyond the domestic sphere. Ultimately, this article considers maternal ways of knowing as a site of wisdom and experiential knowledge that transcends prescriptive notions of academic productivity and attempts to heal the disjunction between women's maternal and academic labours by affirming the connection between who they are and what they do. Finally, by sharing the story of my own journey to a sustainable and expanded definition of academic motherhood, I hope to inspire others to share their stories and, thereby, encourage constructive dialogue as well as social and institutional reform.

In "The Dialectics of Reproduction" Mary O'Brien comments, "when we ask

questions about the suppression of women and its causes, the answers which are given usually relate the social condition of women to female reproductive function” (49). In the case of academic mothers, the realities of their lives as parents regularly conflict with the constant pressure to prove their professional worth. By supporting an arbitrary division between maternal and academic pursuits, perpetuating a culture of mother blame, and reproducing disadvantage based on reproductive choice, the social context mediating mothers’ perilous foothold in academe intensifies the burden of this conflict. Through recourse to personal narrative and Anne-Marie Slaughter’s controversial opinion essay “Why Women Still Can’t Have it All,” this paper will examine the cultural myths, and their underlying assumptions, that cultivate mother blame and enable social inequities that present genuine obstacles to academic mothers’ success. Most importantly, however, such myths divide academic mothers from themselves by supporting normative expectations regarding maternal identity and academic proficiency. Meaningful social and institutional reform, therefore, demands that mothers break the silence regarding their oppression and share personal narratives of the difficulties of parenting while pursuing a career in academe. Such dialogue potentially catalyzes social reform by challenging cultural misconceptions that have been both reproduced and reinforced by institutions that have been slow to acknowledge and accommodate academic mothers’ rights. This article, then, intends to challenge and change the status quo through four main objectives: to explore the myths underlying the cultural perception of academic motherhood that contribute to mother blame and institutional apathy; to consider the impact of these meanings on academic and maternal practices; to explore strategies that will facilitate and potentially harmonize the lives of women—especially the validation of maternal intelligences as powerful academic and professional resources—labouring in these arbitrarily divided spheres of influence; and, finally, to incite social and institutional reform through a reconsideration of normative definitions of maternal practice and academic productivity.

The birth of my first child impelled me to leave academe in my early twenties. When I returned to graduate studies in my forties, I was determined to ensure that the intensity of my renewed academic dedication would offset any perceived inadequacies stemming from maternal obligation. I soon realized that my previous willingness to absorb the burden of responsibility for not burning up the academic fast track was in keeping with my conditioned maternal tendency to engage in self-blame for what was actually systemic failure. Ultimately, it was reading Anne-Marie Slaughter’s controversial opinion essay, “Why Women Still Can’t Have it All,” that liberated my attitude towards my own academic journey and enabled my realization that many of the impediments to mothers’ academic success are not a function of compromised commitment and personal

choice but reflect a fundamental lack of cultural and institutional sensitivity. Additionally, I became acutely aware of the irony that the choices women have fought so hard to attain are regularly manipulated to release institutions of social responsibility and alleviate them of the burden to initiate essential reform.

Meaningful social change demands that mothers pursuing graduate studies reclaim agency by disavowing particular myths that reinscribe inequities and, thereby, encourage mothers to blame themselves for the conditions of their own oppression. Slaughter identifies three myths that are potentially damaging to mothers' professional and/or academic pursuits: the perception that a mother can only succeed if she is committed enough, if she marries the right partner, or if she can sequence her reproduction to coincide with her ambition. Such specious notions assume that if women fail to balance their work as mothers with the demands of a graduate program, they should be blamed for not working hard enough. Such myths must be routinely critiqued to liberate individual perception and to facilitate institutional change. Women must continue to advocate for their own needs by refusing role expectations that force inauthenticity and contribute to ideological definitions of the maternal that promote sacrifice and heroism; women must also continue to support and mentor their counterparts by sharing personal stories of frustration and success that represent the diversity of mothers' academic experiences and, thereby, challenge the status quo; and academe must formally acknowledge past prejudice and prove its commitment to innovation and creativity by redefining productivity and the nature of meaningful contributions, in light of the particular wisdom that women's experience as mothers brings to their work as academics.

In many ways, the myth that personal dedication is directly proportional to achievement has the potential to do the most damage to women's self-conception by validating a culture of mother blame. Indeed, the prejudicial subtext underlying assessments of any mother's dedication to academe is the socially conditioned supposition that the demands of motherhood represent a formidable obligation that will undoubtedly compromise her commitment to graduate school. By contrast, however, individuals give little consideration to how much time their male academic counterpart is willing to divert from family responsibilities and/or recreational interests to pursue graduate work. The management of his private life is presumed to be his responsibility; he is trusted to organize his time. Therefore, the implicit belief that childcare work and domestic management are solely a mother's responsibility must be challenged if the prejudices of academe are to be discarded. As well, culturally constructed definitions of motherhood that compel women to undertake an oppressive litany of maternal labours—in addition to completing coursework and working on a thesis or dissertation—must also be disputed. The reality of the academic mother's workload is relevant because only in exposing the

inequity of the institutional imperatives of both motherhood and graduate studies will it be possible for universities, upper-level administrators, program coordinators, and supervisors to understand the unique circumstances of academic mothers and to accommodate their needs by instituting measures to enable their success. Increased online course offerings, video-recorded lectures, absence without penalty, and course offerings that do not conflict with daycare or school pick-up/drop-off times are all easily instituted, cost-neutral solutions to some of the daily struggles mothers encounter in their efforts to meet the practical obligations of both parenthood and graduate studies.

Meaningful reform, however, begins with a change in perception. Katharine Zaleski argues that women who shame other women and make assumptions about dedication based on arbitrary measures like hours logged are “hurting their future selves” (“Female Company President”). Rather than trying to gauge the level of an academic mother’s commitment by recourse to culturally informed biases, universities and the academic community must address the hardship of mothers in academe as a human rights issue that requires not only increasing social awareness and implementing institutional reform but also accommodating the changing reality of family situations. For many mothers, the minutia of prescribed maternal responsibility is an impediment to sustained intellectual rigour and academic production. Holding women accountable, however, for failing to reconcile a culturally derived dichotomy—between the demands of motherhood and the rigid expectations of academe—blames the victim for institutional inequities rooted in cultural bias relating to the role of women in society.

Slaughter argues that the remaining myths underlying women’s oppression in academe follow from the first: if the initial presumption that women are ultimately responsible for family management is taken as a given, then a woman can only succeed if she can find a kind-hearted partner that will shoulder some of *her* burden or if she is willing to delay childrearing. In this way, the responsibility to offset the impact of systemic prejudice is considered the mandate of each individual woman; her success is deemed a matter of personal choice. By extension, however, a woman’s academic career is at the mercy of chance, both in terms of partner selection and fertility. Open-mindedness and cooperation should be a public mandate. Academic success should not be a lottery where women only win through the choice of a particular partner; nor should women be forced to limit their reproduction to ensure academic employment or security. Mothers pursuing graduate studies confront a number of very personal decisions; however, the private nature of these choices should not exempt society or its institutions from accountability because the pressures informing women’s decision making are heavily influenced by cultural assumptions regarding maternal obligation.

The notion that timing reproduction to coincide with the demands of academe gives women control over their professional timelines and trajectory creates the illusion of freedom through choice and forces women to internalize the conditions of their own subjugation. In relation to graduate work, this concept of self-regulation is particularly poignant as many women delay family life until they are either hired as instructors or have tenure, which in most cases does not occur until their mid-thirties or early forties. Prior to achieving tenure, academic mothers' labour has most likely been exploited in the form of sessional contracts, if such work is even available. Given the absence of job security and the overwhelming wage disparity between tenure-track hires and contract faculty, the decision to delay family life is, perhaps, no longer a reproductive choice but rather an institutional imperative, as well as an issue of personal economic survival. Mary O'Brien argues that the advent of reproductive technology means that women's freedom to choose birth "creates a transformation in human consciousness of human relations with the natural world which must, as it were, be re-negotiated" (51); however, I would argue that the benefits of this technology are often used to pressure women to schedule reproduction for a time that is less likely to conflict with the demands of professionalization. Because women are "free" to manage and delay their reproduction, any hardship they suffer by attempting to raise a family while pursuing an academic career is understood as willfully chosen and, therefore, not a matter of social responsibility. It is evident, then, that reproductive consciousness is manipulated to support ideological and institutional agendas. Due to the time and energy required to campaign against such insidious forms of reproductive control, many women decide to remain silent and childless rather than lobby for reforms during the formative years of their careers.

Ultimately, cultural misconceptions of reproductive freedom and attendant responsibility must be scanned. Often women "choose" to remain childless because they know that they will encounter discrimination and great odds against their success. Indeed, female academics generally presume their commitment to academe implies a commitment to childlessness for the term of their graduate work and sessional employment. However, there are very real physical and emotional implications of this choice as women who delay childbearing often confront issues of infertility, increased risks in pregnancy, and/or complications in childbirth due to advanced age. These women must independently negotiate the complexities of being present for their growing children and of working desperately to update their resumes. If, on the other hand, a woman chooses to have her family before tenured employment, she faces the scrutiny of department chairs, graduate supervisors, and many of her childless-by-choice colleagues who presume that she is working at a disad-

vantage because she has decided to have children. This perception of personal freedom through reproductive choice is, therefore, less liberating for female academics than it is for institutions that wish to abnegate responsibility for issues of gender inequality related to maternity.

By refusing role expectations that enable oppression, academic mothers have the potential to become powerful agents of social change. Educational theorist and activist Paulo Freire argues that, in terms of agency, the individual is not acting as a subject unless he or she can use powers of critical perception towards the project of social reform. He suggests that individuals are mere objects unless they work to transform the social condition. As objects, humans merely adapt to the circumstances of oppression; but, as agents, individuals exercise the power to challenge cultural misconceptions toward the objectives of change and growth. Freire argues that unless humans consciously enact their freedom, they become ignorant of choice. He argues that individuals are “maneuvered by myths that powerful social forces have created” and the greatest harm to humanity is our domination by these myths such that “without even realizing it, [we] relinquish the power of choice” (5). To reclaim the power of choice and generate an increasing number of choices for women negotiating the balance between family and academic study, mothers must challenge the aforementioned myths and redefine the meaning of mothering for themselves, their families, and ultimately for society.

As a graduate student, I was forced to challenge normative assumptions regarding maternal responsibility when I realized that housework had become my lowest priority and that the consequences of this decision were becoming increasingly evident. I then had a discussion with my children about communal responsibility and the need to share labour essential for the functioning of the family. I told them that I would contribute to the home, but they would also be expected to do a portion of the tasks associated with the household. My children were, at first, reluctant until we critically appraised the concept of equity in relation to the social expectations of motherhood. In addition to educating my family, I had to liberate *myself* from prescribed meanings of motherhood. With that realization, I became increasingly comfortable with stepping over stuff, although I still feel pangs of guilt when I walk into a room overtaken by piles of papers, toys, books, or clothing. Ultimately, the dominant ideology deeply invests in oppressive definitions of the maternal; women’s engagement with the ethic of care is encouraged by cultural representations that idealize maternal devotion and is enforced by social institutions that rely heavily on the benefits of unpaid maternal labour. As a result of the reproduction of this cultural construct, the scripted performance of motherhood has become a kind of “mind forged manacle” (Blake), so heavily embedded in women’s concept of maternal self-hood that imagining alternative possibilities has become virtually

impossible. The freedom to imagine diverse modes of being and knowing becomes possible only when mothers challenge these internalized myths and strive to achieve autonomy, authentic Selves, and social change.

In addition to starting dialogue within the family, I encourage mother-scholars to advocate for social change by remaining vocal, within the context of their professional and social groups, about their real life struggles. By necessity, many academic mothers become experts in time management and domestic resiliency; however, displaying a domestic heroism does less to support other women than sharing counternarratives exploring the hardships of juggling academic work with mothering. It is important for women to be honest, in both personal and professional circles, about the demands of their workload as well as the physical and emotional toll it takes on their lives. Such vulnerability is a risk, but authenticity is generally rewarded with returned honesty, support, and community. Ultimately, disclosing the struggles to negotiate academic study with motherhood challenges the culturally invested pretense that mothers are superhuman or saintly beings. Indeed, this pretense fuels the myth of maternal perfection and inevitably fosters self-blame when academic mothers realize that they require social and institutional support to meet the demands of their professional and maternal roles. Sharing stories of their unique challenges creates a space for academic mothers to acknowledge the reality of their oppression, form a community, and strategize methods of improvement. This solidarity will build conditions not only for academic fairness but also for a collegial atmosphere considerate of women at all stages of their academic and family lives.

Personal narratives of success and frustration represent the diversity of the maternal experience, challenge the normative expectations of motherhood, and provide support for women seeking liberation and mentorship. Personal accounts of struggle and accomplishment, in addition to formalized opportunities for further sharing, challenge the myths that inscribe maternal oppression. Journals, such *JMI*, and university conferences that attempt to name “the problem that has no name” (Friedan 15) are essential to promoting a dialogue that inspires women to envision a destiny beyond the “glory [of] their own femininity” (15). The lives and stories of fellow academics provide meaningful insights into reconciling the practical demands of life as a mother with the work as a scholar. In my own experience, I could not fully appreciate the complexity of reconciling these demands until I encountered Heidegger’s concept of *seinsvergessenheit* (35): the disconnect that academics often experience between their lives and the realm of ideas. I realized that as a scholar it was easy to lose touch with life, the living referent, in pursuit of the world of signs and abstraction. For academic mothers, this schism is particularly relevant as children are the living referents and the connection to their lives is often compromised by the

demands of academe. Therefore, the capacity for academic mothers to reconcile maternal practice with their professional endeavours is important not only to ensure a continued connection with children as they grow, but also to ensure an integrated maternal identity.

By choosing distance education and selecting a project that has resonance with my lived experience of mothering, I have made a conscious effort to align my course of academic study with the life of my family. I have reframed success in terms amenable to life with children. To say that my goals as an academic are not about institutional recognition is not a compromise. I have rather redefined accomplishment for myself, sharpened my own critical awareness, and overseen personal growth. While scientific research emphasizes objectivity, quantifiability, and certitude, my research focuses on democratic access to knowledge based on qualitative, subjective, and experience-based findings that, though not generalizable, can initiate critical dialogue, inspire individual freedom, and catalyze social change. In other words, my life and work as a mother have become sources of inspiration for my academic research. Complete synergy may not be possible for all mothers who pursue graduate studies, yet much insight can be gained when academic mothers embrace their living referent and weave embodied experiences of the maternal into other aspects of their lives (Laney et al. 1245). Through this connection, mothers in academe are not divided from the self but are grounded by ways of knowing rooted in personal experience. Moreover, narratives of lived experience help other academics to confidently defy expectations of both motherhood and academe and reconcile personal and professional demands.

Ultimately, intellectual projects that resonate with personal experience have the power to sustain and rejuvenate mothers who do academic work. Carola Conle describes this quest for continuity as “getting on the road we are already on” (200). In the midst of personal and academic pursuits, individuals are often disconnected from the truth of their own experience and fail to see the connection between what they do and who they are. Women and mothers, in particular, are conditioned to disregard particular experiences and expressions of self-hood in favour of more socially acceptable manifestations of accomplishment; and, through this conditioning, women lose sight of the relevance of personal and embodied experiences and their importance to the evolution of identity. If academic mothers are able to appreciate the resonance between their life’s journey and a chosen field of research, they will gain critical perspective on the value of personal ways of knowing and bridge the gap between theory and practice. In this way, mother-scholars will use the practical knowledge gained by mothering to creatively enhance their academic research. To further Conle’s metaphor, enhanced sensitivity to the relationship between an individual’s personal and academic lives will point all roads *home*, defined as a continuity of

being derived from the connection between personal and professional lives. To glimpse this connection and heal the divide, academic mothers must abandon oppressive definitions and categories in favour of a more expansive concept of self-hood that acknowledges diverse expressions of maternal identity and values mothering practice as a valuable academic resource.

Women pursuing graduate work are often encouraged to suppress their maternal self-conception; however, as Sara Ruddick argues, maternal knowledge represents a source of resilience and potentiality that needs to be reclaimed for a renewed definition of professional competency. Ruddick identifies maternal thinking and learning as a conceptual scheme that regularly confronts duality and cognitive dissonance. Mothers learn to adapt to an ever-evolving *other*, and in the practice of mothering “innovation takes precedence over permanence, disclosure and responsiveness over clarity and certainty” (101). Through this imaginative capacity, the mother is responsive to change and otherness, which represents key features of the resiliency required to negotiate the rigours of academic work. Indeed, the maternal bond is thought to be the primary reason that “women are said to value open over closed structure, to eschew the clear-cut and unambiguous, to refuse a sharp division between inner and outer or self and other” (101). Maternal experience, then, offers considerable practice in versatility and flexibility as well as in fostering a well-developed aptitude for innovation and empathy. Of these, empathy is the most valuable as it contributes to effective communication by engaging the powers of perception and intuition. Indeed, Freire argues that there can be no meaningful dialogue without equality rooted in empathy (40). Social change demands dialogue that abandons certitudes in favour of open-ended possibilities. Therefore, rather than eschewing maternal experience as an obstacle to academic accomplishment, mothers, and the institutions that they are affiliated with, must recognize the utility of the particular intelligences and cognitive abilities of which academic mothers, through maternal practice, are already proficient.

This reconsideration of maternal skill and experience in relation to work in academe brings us to the issue of redefining institutional notions of productivity and meaningful contribution. I would like to think that by raising five children I have been incredibly productive over the past twenty years; yet, whenever I am asked to complete an online form or resumé asking for my employment history, qualifications, and publication record, I find myself instantly shamed by my lack of so-called productivity. The shame is compounded by the fact that I am in my forties and have little in the way of documentation to demonstrate my employability. However, because silent discrimination based on age and/or reproductive choice is difficult to confront, I dutifully complete the requisite documents, uncomfortable in the knowledge that my years of mothering experience have been voided by the prejudice inscribed by form-fillable categories.

When confronted with paperwork related to employment history, I often find myself wanting to add a box, or to employ the vagueness of “other” to document my almost quarter century of maternal practice and the various attendant skills and knowledge learned in that period; however, there is no legitimate means available to communicate, quantify, or validate that experience. As a result, no union can intervene on my behalf; organized labour protects the rights of the employed and supports the allocation of contract work based on a points system that heavily rewards previous work experience. This system, however, discriminates against mothers by selecting eligible candidates based on measures of productivity that fail to acknowledge qualifications that are classified as neither publications nor proof of previous academic employment. Knowing this, I understand that my resumé and its various temporal holes will invite particular assumptions about my level of commitment; and, under the guise of objectivity, I will be assigned a score that penalizes my many absent years from recognizable forms of academic achievement. If the meaning of productivity is redefined, maternal competencies will come to be formally recognized and acknowledged as valuable assets beyond the private sphere.

However, given the current economic and political realities, it is harder than ever for graduate student mothers’ academic innovation, creativity, and empathy to find recognition. Although universities give incredible lip service to the value of education, community, and democracy, these values have weakened and become closer to corporate models of efficiency and productivity. As a result, research that fails to find economic solutions to social problems, that challenges government policies, or that attempts to raise issues confronting marginalized communities often goes unfunded and unpublished. While educational scholars insist that maternal aptitudes, such as empathy, resilience, and creativity, represent the cornerstone of any education for cultivating personal and social growth and developing a critical consciousness (Freire 35), few admission boards or hiring committees have the foresight to recognize work that demands routine practice of these very skills. Ultimately, institutional definitions of productivity must be reconceptualized to reflect the importance of maternal ways of knowing not only as academic assets, but also as a source of wisdom vital to the preservation of humanitarian ideals in education.

To initiate change, academic mothers must resist the temptation to compartmentalize or suppress their maternal knowledge and consciously explore the connection between domestic labour, knowledge, and the power of resistance. bell hooks comments that while white middle-class women were fighting for their right to work outside the home, women of colour found self-worth and meaning in their home life: “Historically women have identified work in the context of the family as *humanizing labour*, work that affirms their identity as women, as human beings showing love and care” (145). The refiguring of

maternal work as a valuable and humanizing site of knowledge has important implications for women's ability to confidently reconstruct an academic identity through maternal practice. hooks' concept of *homeplace* recalls experience as the grounding force of personal meaning, which fuels critical consciousness rooted in empathy; *homeplace* becomes a foundation where "we can regain lost perspective, give life new meaning. We can make homeplace that space where we return for renewal and self-recovery, where we can heal our wounds and become whole" (389). In other words, rather than a burden obstructing academic success, the *homeplace* must be refigured as a site of invaluable, experiential knowledge. hooks argues that women have "essential wisdom to share" and "practical experience, [which] is the breeding ground for all useful theory" (389). Acknowledgement of the wisdom inherent to embodied ways of knowing centralizes the importance of maternal thinking and learning and challenges dominant cultural narratives regarding the nature of knowledge.

However, for individuals struggling with job security and the economic pressures from living and working to support the needs of a family, exercising the power of resistance can be particularly difficult. It is undeniably easier to play within the rules of an, albeit, unfair game than to expend the energy and incur the risk required to challenge the very objectives of the game or its terms of victory. Many do not have the luxury of time or money to resist the game; instead, many choose to walk away or vow to return when the playing field is more level. The unfortunate reality is that, though the metaphor is apt, this is no game. Women's livelihood and their right to pursue a graduate degree or academic employment option should not be compromised by their choice to have children. It is necessary for graduate students, their colleagues, as well as the institutions that support their research, to expose and dismantle the social and institutional inequities that often prevent academic mothers from realizing their goals of degree completion, academic publication, and employment.

The creative innovation that institutions argue is at the heart of their educational programs and research portfolios must also be employed to address the issue of women's struggle to balance the demands of graduate work and family life. Distance education may not permit women to be as engaged with university culture, but it does allow mothers to participate in coursework without the burden of regular attendance; and, when attendance is mandatory, the provision of affordable, on-site daycare enables graduate student mothers to sync their parental and academic lives. Also, within the university admissions process, accommodations have already been made for first generation postsecondary students; there are special scholarships and information seminars available as well as support groups and mentoring intended to reduce culture shock and smooth the transition. The same might be done for mothers in graduate programs. Mothers often feel alone in academe, particularly when they are

alienated from the university community by family responsibilities. It would be comforting to see—through various initiatives introduced to encourage success and prevent attrition—genuine institutional consideration for mothers pursuing graduate work. Moreover, beyond improving sensitivity, universities have an obligation to reevaluate hiring procedures and traditional categories of productivity to recognize women’s labour outside the normative expectations of academe. To facilitate this process, unions would have to support special consideration scoring for academic mothers seeking employment, as equity often means examining an individual based on her unique circumstances. In the case of graduate student mothers, standard assessments fail to take into account their wealth of experiential knowledge and the interconnectivity of their personal and academic lives. Ultimately, only reform through social awareness and institutional change can liberate academic mothers to pursue a vision of themselves as successful scholars that accommodates maternal practice.

To advance this vision, mothers must remain vocal about their experience of oppression and the silence-enabling prejudice must also be openly addressed. Although an apology is not a sufficient solution, it is an acknowledgement that initiates constructive dialogue. In an open letter of apology to working mothers, PowerToFly president, Katharine Zaleski, expressed regret for a number of instances throughout her career in which she questioned the commitment and productivity of her female counterparts who had children. Although her letter addresses mothers outside of academe, it has resonance for academic mothers as well: “For mothers ... it’s death by a thousand cuts—and sometimes it’s other women holding the knives. I didn’t realize this—or how horrible I’d been—until five years later, when I gave birth to a daughter of my own” (“Female Company President”). Ironically, the experience of having a child gave Zaleski the empathy required to understand the circumstances of other mothers and their struggle to reconcile the demands of their private and professional lives. Her maternal intelligence is now the creative inspiration behind PowertoFly, an innovative and lucrative business venture where professional women worldwide are enabled to work from their home. This example of reconciliation through growing awareness suggests that when individuals and institutions are willing to acknowledge and rectify discrimination, mothers are liberated from the blame that they have shouldered for systemic inequality and are freed to imagine success beyond the cultural dictates of their maternal role.

Indeed, such imaginative freedom depends on social change rooted in both women and institutions’ growing awareness of the transferability of the experiential knowledge acquired through the practice of mothering. As noted, empathy, creativity, innovation, and resiliency are just a few of the competencies women acquire in the practice of mothering vital to sustainable professional

and educational modalities of the future. Through advocacy and by necessity, we hope to move in academe toward an age when a mother's experiential knowledge will be accepted as a meaningful contribution to professionalization; when the sheer list of publications and courses taught will not be considered complete picture of a woman's expertise, her level of commitment, her potential for productivity, or her eligibility for academic employment.

How many promising scholars, feeling forced to choose between family and academic life, have quietly abandoned their program of study? How many have internalized the myths that enable oppression and blamed themselves for failing to meet the expectations of both motherhood and academe? How many have felt like imposters—their real lives beckoning with all the intensity that the immediacy of their children's needs implies—as they worked to build a resumé and construct a life on paper? Only when maternal thinking and learning are respected as ways of knowing will the schism between the lived experience and utility of mothering find reconciliation with a mother's dedication to a life of research. The two need not be mutually exclusive. Through awareness and advocacy, academic mothers are liberated to explore the continuity between who they are and what they do. By engaging a life of the mind, informed by the lived experience of mothering, academic mothers have the potential to bridge the divide between the realm of domestic responsibility, or *homeplace*, and a life of academic study. In this way, caring for children and pursuing graduate work need not be competing interests but potentialities that enrich and inform each other in ways that have meaningful implications for personal and professional growth and sustainability.

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