

this book as a stepping stone to ideas of global feminism and cultural relativism.

Overall, *Gendered Bodies* will energize students to see just how much of our

everyday lives and cultural notions of gender are played out on the body.

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Evans, Elrina, and Caroline Grant, eds. *Mama PhD: Women Write about Motherhood and Academic Life*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2008. 288 pp.

Feminists know there is no work/life balance in the United States: this country's care for children and those in charge of them is famously pitiful. Weighing in on one aspect of this topic is Rutgers University Press's new *Mama PhD: Women Write about Motherhood and Academic Life*, edited by Elrena Evans and Caroline Grant. Why, we might ask, is academia as a location for working mothers worth heightened scrutiny? What made a university press want to bring out this book when these topics generally belong to journalists and other purveyors of creative non-fiction and to presses like HarperCollins in the mainstream or Seal in the independent/feminist sector? And why, given the amazing number of mother blogs crowding the Internet, should we buy it? Because, it turns out, this is no mere collection of mothering and/or teaching anecdotes (as horribly addictive as such things can be for some of us), but rather a unique and potent mixture of memoir, analysis, and advocacy. And while motherhood throws many women's identities into chaos as it put their bodies in turmoil, the effect on women accustomed to living primarily in their heads can be especially acute. In one final way, too, it seems, academics actually are special: the writers included here—artists, critics, scientists, engineers,

social scientists—are highly trained intellectuals, who combine first-person experience with perspectives and nuances colored by their disciplinary expertise. (Full disclosure: I went to graduate school with one of the contributors.)

Most people inside of or adjacent to the academy know that, despite its depiction by the right-wing press as a bastion of left-wingers, there's nothing especially exalted or liberatory about universities as workplaces. Whatever the "liberal" content purveyed, it coexists with grossly exploited adjunct and clerical labor, homophobia, a half-concealed maze of obstructions to advancement for people of color, and last but not least, deep, deep ambivalence about women in the professoriate: grudging admission of them into the sciences and social sciences, fear of their supposedly imminent dominance in some parts of the humanities. So *Mama PhD* starkly delivers the sadly unsurprising news that academia doesn't make room for moms and is all too able to shame, intimidate, or simply stonewall many graduate students and professors into tying themselves into knots trying to accommodate the enormous, but also enormously different, physical, social, and psychological demands of motherhood and either completing an advanced degree or acquiring tenure. Some of the experiences here are sad, some funny, some simply shocking; the responses to pregnant bodies and small children these women encounter range from horror, to indifference, to sentimental ignorance, to, albeit rarely, sym-

pathetic camaraderie. In this volume are stories of those who succeeded in having it all, those who made assorted compromises, those who made savvy demands (more than one young prof. bargained to turn five or six weeks of personal leave into a one-course reduction for the semester after giving birth, for example), and those who were ground down by the amazing rigidity of chairs and deans (many of them also women), ultimately leaving the tenure track for adjunct or non-academic work. The personal essays also include incisive and specific suggestions about how workplaces in general and academia in particular must change to accommodate motherhood among their members, and they outline the benefits that would ensue, including not wasting the training and potential contributions of the mothers driven out or slowed to a snail's pace by current practices. A more inclusive atmosphere could also potentially change the social and intellectual milieu of academia in deep ways as professor-parents "reattach their heads to their bodies," as Elizabeth Rose Gruner puts it in her essay "I am Not a Head on a Stick."

Although the contributors are disciplinarily and geographically diverse and vary in the kind of academic institution to which they are or were attached, queer voices seem absent, voices of color limited. Nevertheless, *Mama PhD* stands out in its ability to blend testimony, analysis, and advocacy, from a variety of perspectives. It walks the academic-nonacademic line with striking effect, blending vividly rendered physiological detail (frenzied

schedules, leaking bodies) with textual and social analysis. And while practical advice and calls for change are, as noted, included in some essays, the volume as a whole does not imply there are simple or single solutions. There's no consensus among its contributors as to whether the work/life conflict for mothers is worse in academia than outside it, or whether it's resolvable through institutional change or somehow endemic to university life. Finally, thankfully, the writing is good—some poetic, some straightforward, often compelling; this stands in strong contrast to some collections of parental writing, e.g., the dreadful *Blindsided by a Diaper*, filled with banal and repetitive writing from professional writers. This volume could teach interestingly in different contexts. It is, of course, eminently excerptable. Parts or the whole in a course on women and work could bridge the gap between a specialized piece of sociology like Virginia Valian's *Why So Slow?* and a mainstream piece of journalism like Anne Crittenden's *Price of Motherhood*. Alternatively, in contrast with some of the many mom-blogs, in a course on feminism and popular culture, this volume raises striking questions about women's changing roles, and specifically intellectual women's ability sometimes to see and speak with especial clarity about their predicament, and sometimes, like anyone else, to get sucked in to sucking it up, to (at least in my view) their own and society's detriment.

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