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### Working towards promotion to full professor: strategies, time management, and habits for academic librarian mothers

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Working towards promotion to full professor: strategies, time management, and habits for academic librarian mothers

### *Introduction*

I got the good news that I was granted tenure sometime during the hazy early months of motherhood. In the midst of postpartum depletion, I was so overwhelmed by the many needs of my infant son that the momentousness of the long awaited tenure decision did not fully register. Even as the tenure decision affirmed and bolstered my career standing, I felt that being a tenured librarian was as much as I would be able to aspire to for years to come. To accept this limit appeared pragmatic. As it was, sleep deprivation made it hard for me to function overall; feeding my son, to say nothing about nursing professional ambitions, was as much as I could handle. There was also the fact that due to some institutional roundabout rules I had actually been promoted to the associate professor rank the year before. Having to lean back was somewhat easier to swallow because I was, admittedly, in a very privileged position already: I had tenure; I was on a fully paid parental leave, and my job was waiting for me when I returned. My library was a good place to work. I knew that the many collective bargaining protections my faculty union fought for and my supervisor's generosity would enable me to have a semblance of work-life balance after my leave was over. Remaining at my current rank and giving up ambitions for promotion to full professor didn't seem like a steep price to pay for becoming a mother. I was ok with not having it all. I just wanted to have both: a family and a job.

But time ~~had~~ passed. My parental leave came to an end. My son started sleeping through longer stretches of the night. I was back in the library, relishing the respite and intellectual stimulation my work days offered. At some point, my colleague and I got invited to present on bibliometric measures of scholarly output at a workshop on promotion to full professor. In line with a worldwide trend, there were many more associate professors than full professors at my college. The Provost wanted to encourage associate professors to work towards promotion. The workshop featuring my colleague and me was a part of that initiative. I can only hope my talk about the caveats of bibliometrics was as transformative for the attending faculty as the rest of the presentation was for me. I walked out of the workshop invigorated: I did not have to win a Nobel Prize to become a full professor! In other words, the promotion was achievable. The criteria were daunting indeed, but the workshop offered a map and even some guideposts. It dawned on me that my associate rank did not have to be a terminal one, as many academics bitterly refer to it. As ready as I was to start working towards full, I knew and understood little about the many gendered obstacles my rekindled academic career ambitions would turn up.

Re-committed to giving it my all, I attempted to go back to the strategies and habits that had served me well pre-tenure. Yet, they didn't work now that my daily job got more demanding and my free time ceased to exist. I couldn't devote full days to thinking about, not to mention researching, my next project. I had less mental and intellectual energy than was necessary to sustain a writing routine. In other words, I was experiencing "the phenomenon of overburdening in midlife," or the overwhelm that results from too many simultaneous responsibilities, tasks, and roles that often exceed the resources and coping abilities of individuals in their middle years.<sup>1</sup> I

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<sup>1</sup> Jutta Heckhausen, "Adaptation and Resilience in Midlife," in *Handbook of Midlife Development*, ed. M. E. Lachman (New York, N Y: John Wiley, 2001), 345-394.

also didn't fully understand that my growing frustration at forever falling short of the institutional benchmarks for full professor wasn't due to a personal failure but to a gendered system that favored the life realities of male faculty.

### *Gender Disparities in the Full Professor Rank*

Insofar as it touches on structural and individual contexts that shape the careers of women faculty, including academic librarians, the brief autobiographical sketch is a fitting introduction to some practical suggestions on how to make the promotion to full professor an achievable goal. The awareness that the hurdles experienced on the path towards promotion cannot be dismissed as merely circumstantial or reflecting personal failings and shortcomings is at once liberating and empowering. It is also necessary. To chart a customized path for oneself, to strategize effectively and to move forward, it helps to know what one is up against. Accordingly, I want to contextualize the unique plight of mid-career women academic librarians, including those who raise children, before moving on to suggestions on how to work against and through these obstacles towards achieving the full professor rank.

At the time of writing this chapter, I have not yet been promoted but have already entered the formal promotion process. My portfolio has been shared with external evaluators and my candidacy will be reviewed by departmental and college-wide personnel committees in just a few months. My intent, then, is not to share fool-proof advice on guaranteed success, but rather to offer ideas, framed by findings about the gendered disparities in the rank of full professor, on how to approach and direct the efforts needed to increase the likelihood of an eventual promotion.

Before I turn to research and statistics, it must be noted that official data sets, as well as studies exploring differences in tenure and rank status along gender lines, rely on the binary division between faculty who self-identify as male or female. As a result, the discussion below refers to male and female faculty and does not capture career experiences of non-binary faculty. There is another caveat: Because to date there is no research and data capturing the specific experiences of women academic librarians who aim for the full professor rank, I have to extrapolate their career trajectories from the well-documented career patterns of women faculty in general. In the rare instances when relevant research is available, I do refer to women academic librarians in particular. Even a brief discussion of women academic librarians' career aspirations would not be complete without accounting for the particulars of library work. Alas, the research on mid-career academic librarians rarely foregrounds gender as a factor shaping librarians' professional ambitions and achievements. As a result, the contextual background I outline below is necessarily an amalgamate. It reflects the career experience of mid-career women academic librarians who straddle multiple professional identities (women faculty, academic mothers, and mid-career librarians) and thus must contend with a predicament all of their own.

As the pinnacle of the academic career, the promotion to full professor rank signals peer recognition and success. Insofar as it codifies status, merit and achievement, the full professor rank highlights “gender disparities within academia [and] says more about the gender and racial disparities of the academy than it does about any one person’s accomplishments.”<sup>2</sup> A recent report from the National Center of Education Statistics illustrates the distorted gender

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<sup>2</sup> Kimberley A. Hamlin, “Why Are There So Few Women Full Professors?” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 30, 2021, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/why-we-need-more-women-full-professors>.

distribution by rank and highlights how gender and racial inequities widen as faculty climb the academic career ladder: in the fall of 2018, 54% of assistant professors, 45% of associate professors, and about 34% of full professors were women.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, racial diversity decreases as one moves up the rank. Whereas at the assistant professor rank there are 39% white women and approximately 16% women of color, at the associate professor rank there are only 35% of white women and 10% women of color. The full professor rank marks another drop in diversity: among full professors, there are 27% of white women and about only 7% women of color.<sup>4</sup> Although the numbers above refer to the U.S. context specifically, they belong to a worldwide trend. Women outnumber men at the assistant rank but become a minority at the full professor rank.<sup>5</sup> Clearly, the low numbers of women promoted to full professor cannot be explained away by pipeline issues. Why then do so few women rise to the full professor rank?

Researchers have pointed to a host of structural as well as individual reasons for the disparity. Women faculty professional choices, commitments, and accomplishments reflect the complex interplay between external and internal factors that determine how their careers unfold. Family-related responsibilities and gendered academic work culture are often cited as factors that explain the lack of gender parity in the full professor rank.

While it has been well known that women faculty delay having children until they receive tenure, it is also worth noting that most academics are in their 40s by the time they aspire to promotion to full professor.<sup>6</sup> The typical promotion to full professor timeline, then, coincides

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<sup>3</sup> National Center for Educational Statistics, “Fast Facts: Race/Ethnicity of College Faculty,” accessed April 24, 2021, <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=61>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Tamar Heijstra, Thoroddur Bjarnason, and Gudbjörg Linda Rafnsdóttir, “Predictors of Gender Inequalities in the Rank of Full Professor,” *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research* 59, no. 2 (2015): 214-230.

<sup>6</sup> Mary Ann Mason, Nicholas H. Wolfinger, and Marc Goulden, *Do Babies Matter? Gender and Family in the Ivory Tower* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2013).

with the period during which academic mothers take care of young children (dedicating more time to childcare than academic fathers do) and must reconcile the simultaneous demands of parenting and working in academia.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, as Williams (2004) puts it, women faculty who care for children encounter a “maternal wall,” a phenomenon referring to the fact that mothers are underrepresented among the most desirable faculty jobs.<sup>8</sup> Women faculty often encounter maternal-wall bias as soon as they get pregnant or take parental leave. As their competence, dedication, and professionalism are questioned in light of their new child-related responsibilities, they get fewer opportunities for advancement, which negatively impacts their promotion trajectory.<sup>9</sup> The ideal worker norms--the assumption that faculty need to be exclusively dedicated to their academic careers, prioritizing work over their personal and family obligations--further disadvantages faculty mothers who are unable to fulfill such expectations.<sup>10</sup> After all, there is a pervasive belief that women academics who harbor career ambitions should not have children.<sup>11</sup>

If family-related responsibilities and maternal bias affect women faculty who raise children, academia has also been shown to be a “just another workplace” where gendered norms shape how women’s and men’s tasks are distributed, recognized and rewarded.<sup>12</sup> Merit has long been the dominant factor in granting the promotion to full professor; the rank tends to be awarded for scholarly productivity and impact, both valued above all other aspects of academic work.<sup>13</sup> And yet, the gendered patterns in the academic workload distribution disadvantage

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Williams, “Hitting the Maternal Wall.”

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ward and Wolf-Wendel, “Academic Motherhood.”

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ashley Whillans, *Time Smart: How to Reclaim Your Time and Live a Happier Life* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press, 2020).

<sup>13</sup> Hejstra, Bjarnason, and Rafnsdóttir, “Predictors of Gender Inequalities.”

women faculty who have been consistently shown to do more service and teaching than their male colleagues who focus their efforts on doing research.<sup>14 15 16 17 18</sup> The phenomenon of women faculty taking on disproportionate amount of undervalued, yet essential, obligations is pervasive and reflective of the same gendered workload distribution in households and is referred to as the “academic housework.”<sup>19</sup> Not surprisingly, it takes women faculty longer to reach the full professor rank than it takes their male colleagues.<sup>20</sup>

### *Mid-Career Academic Librarian Mothers*

Because the gendered patterns described above refer to academia in general, they should not be automatically transposed to academic libraries without considering the unique features of academic librarianship as a profession. Research has shown that women faculty in different disciplines do encounter gender and maternal-wall bias, but their specific forms vary across fields.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, a recent study assessing maternal bias in academic libraries has identified no differences between mothers and non-mothers as far as positions, salaries and overall well-being go.<sup>22</sup> Encouraging as these findings about mother academic librarians are, there has been a persistent gender wage disparity among librarians. Among all full-time librarians overall, the

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Susan A. Gardner, and Amy Blackstone, “‘Putting in your time’: Faculty experiences in the process of promotion to professor,” *Innovative Higher Education* 38, no. 5 (2013): 411-425

<sup>16</sup> Mason, Goulden, and Wolfinger, *Do Babies Matter?*

<sup>17</sup> Anita G. Welch, Jocelyn Bolin, and Daniel Reardon, *Mid-Career Faculty: Trends, Barriers, and Possibilities*. (Boston, MA: Brill, 2019)

<sup>18</sup> Ward and Wolf-Wendel, “Academic Motherhood.”

<sup>19</sup> (Thamar Heijstra, Finnborg S. Steinhorsdóttir, and Thorgerdur Einarsdóttir, “Academic Career Making and the Double-Edged Role of Academic Housework,” *Gender and Education* 29, no. 6 (2017): 764-780.

<sup>20</sup> Sara S. Poor, Rosemarie Scullion, Kathleen Woodward, David Laurence, Kirsten M. Christensen, J. Elizabeth Clark, Katharine Conley et al. “Standing Still: The Associate Professor Survey: MLA Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession,” *Profession* (2009): 313-350.

<sup>21</sup> Ward and Wolf-Wendel, “Academic Motherhood.”

<sup>22</sup> Heather Kelley, Quinn Galbraith, and Jessica Strong, “Working Moms: Motherhood Penalty or Motherhood Return?” *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 46, no. 1 (2020): 102075-.



reported annual earnings by women are 8% lower than men's.<sup>23</sup> In the context of academic libraries specifically, researchers looking at gender gap in ARL libraries found that women academic librarians earn less than their male counterparts do: at private ARL libraries women get paid 1.3% less than men, and at public ARL libraries the gender pay gap is 3.5%.<sup>24</sup> As higher professorial ranks come with higher salaries, the wage gender gap in ARL libraries may very well be related to fewer women librarians in the rank of full professor.

When pondering the context in which women academic librarians rise through the professorial ranks it is wise to note that academic librarianship has long been a predominantly female service profession. In academia, library work continues to be feminized, devalued, and invisible.<sup>25</sup> The centrality of service in academic librarianship means that librarians' workdays are built around it and leave little room for pursuing scholarship.<sup>26</sup> Mid-career librarians face another hurdle: after tenure, they often assume new and increasingly demanding administrative or governance obligations, which further limit their opportunities to engage in research.<sup>27</sup>

#### *Mid-Career Academic Librarian Mother: My Own Case Study*

At mid-career, I find that all the different strands of my professional identity-- a woman faculty, an academic mother raising a young child, a woman librarian, a mid-career academic librarian--intersect in my own daily work and play into my ability to advance in the rank. While not one of the research studies cited above captures exactly the professional experience of

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<sup>23</sup> AFL-CIO, "Library Professionals: Facts & Figures," accessed April 24, 2021, [https://www.dpeaflcio.org/factsheets/library-professionals-facts-and-figures#\\_edn31](https://www.dpeaflcio.org/factsheets/library-professionals-facts-and-figures#_edn31).

<sup>24</sup> Quinn Galbraith, Erin Merrill, and Olivia Outzen, "The Effect of Gender and Minority Status on Salary in Private and Public ARL Libraries," *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 44, no. 1 (2018): 75-80.

<sup>25</sup> Maura Seale, and Rafia Mirza, "Empty Presence: Library Labor, Prestige, and the MLS," *Library Trends* 68, no. 2 (2019): 252-268.

<sup>26</sup> William H. Walters, "The Faculty Subculture, the Librarian Subculture, and Librarians' Scholarly Productivity," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 16, no. 4 (2016): 817-843.

<sup>27</sup> Christopher V. Hollister, "An Exploratory Study on Post-Tenure Research Productivity among Academic Librarians," *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 42, no. 4 (2016): 368-381.

mid-career academic librarians with parenting responsibilities, when considered as a whole, the body of scholarship conveys what I and other mid-career librarian mothers are up against.

In line with the findings on both mid-career faculty and academic librarians, I was assigned more demanding duties after returning from parental leave. In my new role as the public services librarian, I was charged with coordinating library-wide reference initiatives, supervising part-time librarians, and performing a host of administrative tasks. On top of these increased responsibilities inside the library, my service obligations at the college level expanded as well and included work on three major faculty governance committees. I quickly found that there was no chance I could dedicate myself to scholarship in a consistent and meaningful way now that I took on all these new roles. In addition, being the primary caretaker of my son meant that my time outside of the library was fully accounted for as well. “Going for full” was not just beyond my reach. It was impossible.

Or was it? I followed up with the promotion workshop leader to ask for her thoughts. The Provost’s Associate, who was also a former department chair and a full professor, sympathized with my plight. Herself a mother of teenagers, she reassured me that, of course, for the first three years of a child’s life a parent lived in a survival mode, she not only named the phase of life I was currently in, but she also signaled its temporariness. The good mentor that she was, she did not sanction my simply waiting out the challenging period. Instead, she encouraged me to go over the promotion criteria carefully and identify those I was able to work on right then. Even if scholarly work was not possible to tackle at this point in my life, surely there were some promotion elements that I was able to start building on. Again, I was reminded that I cannot have it all at the same time, but I could have some of it.

## *How to Work Towards Promotion to Full (When You Are an Academic Librarian Mother)*

The suggestions I offer below reflect the good advice I was given. They are also filtered and informed by my own experience of slowly and gradually working up to promotion. In addition, these tips reflect the useful insights I found in research-based self-improvement books I like to read for leisure. There is no guarantee that I will succeed. I trust, however, that the habits and strategies I cultivated, as well as the insights I have glanced through the process, put me on a path that has made promotion achievable. I may not get there next year, but I will eventually. To believe that these recommendations will work for others simply because they have been useful to me is a facile assumption, of course. So instead of exhorting other mother academic librarians to replicate what I have done, I would like to offer the suggestions below as an invitation to think through them, adapt some and drop others.

### Learn about promotion criteria

- Because relatively few faculty members achieve the rank, the full professor rank tends to be shrouded in mystery. Often, at the institutional and department level, the criteria are not clearly conveyed or understood. Still, there are many opportunities to get a good sense of what is required to advance, but you need to be intentional about identifying and following up on them. At my college, I was able to attend workshops for associate professors who plan on promotion. I learned about the institutional patterns such as the average time it takes faculty to move up, the scope of scholarly output considered of value by various disciplines, the available fellowships and leaves, as well as the specific guidelines that outline the requirements.

Once I had this new sense of what was involved, I was able to dig deeper, so to say. Instead of relying on the summary of guidelines, I located and closely read all the relevant

documents spelling out the criteria at the departmental, college, and wider institutional levels. I took notes and wrote them down for reference.

Senior Colleagues With this knowledge, I reached out to full professor colleagues within and beyond the library to ask about their experience. These conversations filled in some of the gaps left in the official documents, while highlighting that each promotion was an individual case. While each successful promotion candidate fulfilled the requirements, they did so in their own unique way. Understanding this was crucial to me as an academic librarian whose portfolio would be evaluated side by side with the portfolios of classroom faculty. Moreover, based on what I was learning, I decided to run for an at-large representative at my college faculty personnel committee. Having served as an elected representative allowed me to learn first-hand what the discussions around promotion to full professor involved, what were the most prized accomplishments, and what a well-rounded portfolio looked like. In addition, participating in these discussions and reviewing the impressive achievements of my colleagues inspired and motivated me to work harder still.

Identify Your Weak Points and Address Them: Once I had a good sense of what I would need to accomplish, I took a hard look at my curriculum vitae to identify areas that would require the most effort to fulfill. When I was talking with full professor colleagues about their success, I requested that they review my C.V. and offer their comments. I also requested feedback from my chair and the provost's associate for faculty. Not surprisingly, the resounding comment was that I was not yet ready and would need to build up my portfolio before going for promotion. At the same time, I got a good sense of where to direct my efforts.

- **Seek Out Institutional Support:** At U.S. universities, research, teaching, and service are the three-legged pillars on which faculty are expected to build their careers. It is an open secret though that at the full professor rank scholarship by far outweighs the other two legs. As key as research was, I knew I would not be able to immerse myself in scholarly pursuits unless I took a research leave. Accordingly, I explored various leave opportunities at my college and have since applied for a year-long sabbatical and a couple of shorter professional reassignment leaves. Coupled with reliable childcare, these paid leaves made it possible for me to dedicate a concentrated amount of time to doing research and writing. Having the privilege of a few uninterrupted hours each workday really helped me to stay on task.
- **Craft a Strategy:** Moreover, knowing that my leave time was limited forced me to think carefully about the kinds of projects I could handle and complete; it also made me think hard about the scholarly outlets where I would submit my work. I found that responding to calls for papers found on academic librarian blogs or professional listservs had many benefits: there was a timeline and the editors provided feedback after a proposal, not after a long article or chapter I had already written. Besides calls for papers, I have looked closely at the scholarly journals that published the kinds of scholarship I found relevant and reflective of my own professional practice. At the same time I was formulating a research project, I was identifying journals that may publish it. When I considered writing a literature review, I would try to determine which journals included them. Once I had identified potential outlets, I would contact the editor to inquire about the fit between my idea and their journal's thematic scope. The feedback was always helpful; even when my proposed paper was rejected, I was offered suggestions on which other publications to try for. Sometimes, the editors would reframe my original idea more in line

with their journal's scope. Although my queries were always preliminary and the completed work would need to undergo peer review, it helped me to have some sense of the journal and the audience I would be addressing as I was drafting and writing my articles.

- Make Time, Make New Habits: Understanding the promotion requirements and knowing what my portfolio's weak spots were was only the first step in trying for full. I could strategize as much as I wanted, but without solid habits that kept me on track I would not have been able to move towards advancement. At first, I attempted to go back to the strategies and habits that had served me well pre-tenure. Yet, they didn't work now that my daily job got more demanding and my home life left no time for writing. I couldn't devote full days to thinking about, not to mention researching, my next project. I had less mental and intellectual energy than was necessary to sustain a writing routine. I desperately needed a new way of working through this. In need of aspiration, I turned to self-improvement gurus. Out of the many experts, very few had advice for academics. Yet I did find books on time use and forming new habits relevant and useful. Granted, they did not turn my life around and solve all my struggles with managing my time, focus, and energy. Still, I worked to apply a few of their insights and found the small changes I made effective.

In *Time Smart: How to Reclaim Your Time and Live a Happier Life*, professor Ashley Whillans from Harvard Business School makes an argument for creating time affluence for ourselves.<sup>28</sup> Having and using time meaningfully, as Whillans defines time affluence, “involves small decisions that allow you to have more and better time, such as saying no more often and paying your way out of time-consuming, unrewarding tasks.”<sup>29</sup> While Whillans offers many

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<sup>28</sup> Whillans, *Time Smart*.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

different suggestions on how to find more time to devote to pursuits you want to prioritize, I found her concepts of “bad time,” “time confetti” and “pro-time” especially relevant in my own attempts to carve out more time for research and writing.

“Bad time” refers to the time we spend on unavoidably mundane and unlikeable activities, such as commuting, waiting for appointments, and similar activities that add nothing of value to our lives.<sup>30</sup> To reclaim these swatches of wasted time, Whillans recommends filling them with activities that we find joyful and satisfying. My lengthy commute was my own “bad time,” and so I worked with Whillans’ suggestion. I would bring my library-provided iPad on the bus, with scholarly articles already downloaded. Using an annotation software, I was able to read and easily highlight passages. My commute was usually long enough for me to finish one article. Reading on the bus added on and freed up the time I had for taking notes and thinking through what I read.

Another Whillans’ concept I found helpful was “time confetti,” or the awareness that even brief moments of giving in to unproductive disruptions add up and cost us time.<sup>31</sup> When we can afford to dedicate just one hour to writing and then interrupt it by checking and responding to an email or by posting updates on social media, we lose both our focus and the precious minutes. To counter time slipping away in little increments, I started using a timer. Initially, I aimed to write with no interruption for 30 minutes. It was not as easy as it may sound. In addition to timing myself, I installed website blocking software on my computer and started putting my phone on mute. After a while of that regimen, I was able to write for an hour at a time. Again, as with reading on the bus, the hour-by-hour work added on.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 16.

I found that establishing “pro-time” is at once the most crucial and the most challenging advice Whillans offers. The concept refers to time that is reserved for important activities and guarded against anything else that can interrupt it.<sup>32</sup> Given my tendency to procrastinate and multitask, to say nothing about the many things I did need to attend to at all times, I desperately needed to set aside pro-time for writing. I am a morning person who thrives in the early hours of the day. And yet, with a young child, my mornings were anything but quiet and contemplative. While on leave, I experimented with waking up before my son did, arriving at 5:15 AM as the time most likely to offer me at least an hour before my son woke up. But on more occasions than I would have wanted, my early pro-time was cut short anyway. I had to give up that idea and found another pro-time later in the day, immediately after dropping off my son to daycare. I attempted to designate some pro-time after returning to work, but I had not been fully successful. Even as library mornings afforded some quiet, I was often interrupted, called to meetings, scheduled for classes, and otherwise taken to tasks that made a dedicated writing practice impossible to sustain. Admittedly, squeezing pro-time in whenever possible rather than making it an integral part of each workday is less than ideal. Still, the very effort reinforces the habit of researching and writing.

In *Good Habits, Bad Habits: The Science of Making Positive Changes That Stick*, professor Wendy Wood from the University of Southern California reviews the science of habit formation.<sup>33</sup> Establishing habits that serve us well and enable us to meet our goals matters for success. Once they become habits, the specific behaviors we want to cultivate do not require motivation or self-control. Wood emphasizes the core elements that determine whether or not we

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>33</sup> Wendy Wood, *Good Habits, Bad Habits: The Science of Making Positive Changes That Stick*, (New York, NY: Pan Macmillan, 2019).



will succeed in our new habits. To stick to them, our context, or surroundings, cannot involve obstacles that make the habit difficult to sustain; instead, our context needs to support the change we want to make.<sup>34</sup> Once specific arrangements have been made and the context adequately supports--or even encourages-- the new habit, repetition is key for the habit to stick.<sup>35</sup> Rewards that celebrate persistence are another way to strengthen habit formation, as is consistency that further automates behaviors we want to keep up.<sup>36</sup>

I did my best to translate the habit formation research Wood sums up in her book. In particular, a consistent writing practice during my sabbatical was the habit I wanted to cultivate. I decided that I wanted to spend 3-4 hours writing, and I would do so each day of the week, leaving afternoons and weekends writing- and research-free. Setting such a limit allowed me to feel productive but not overextended. With the addition of a desk and chair, I transformed the small guest bedroom into my office. I sat down to write each workday, after my son went to daycare. I would either leave my phone in another room or put it on mute, set the timer, and start writing for an hour or so. Once the time was up, I would reward myself with a short break, having coffee or doing some yoga stretches. With the exception of the days my son was staying home sick, I was able to maintain that routine.

Alas, the sabbatical habits were not sustainable after my return to work. As much as I knew about the importance of routines, I struggled with creating one back at work where the time was not entirely mine to shape. Instead of establishing a foolproof writing routine that would hold up through the year, I found that I needed to align my writing and research goals with the rhythm of the academic calendar. In other words, the only times when I could hope to carve

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 116 and 134.

out some time for writing were the winter intersession, spring break, and summer months when my service and teaching obligations were less intense than during the fall and spring semesters.

### *Conclusion*

As much as I was tempted to offer a neat conclusion for this chapter, it occurred to me that an orderly end paragraph would be out of line with my experience of working towards the promotion to full professor. After all, I wanted to capture--through relevant research and data, as well as through more personal vignettes--the very messiness and overwhelm that, I feel, the majority of mid-career academic librarians raising children recognize from their own lives. So I will say this: no matter how much we recognize and press against the systemic hurdles that prevent women faculty from advancing to full professor to the same extent that men faculty do, no matter how much great advice we get from mentors, colleagues, and self-improvement books, and no matter how much we ourselves try to be time smart and form good habits, the work and effort required to get promoted still looms large. But without an easy or sure way for us to climb the top of the academic ladder, we can still be making our way up, in small increments, with breaks or even detours.

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