

# Mary Ann Mason on why moms have such a hard time getting ahead

**M**ary Ann Mason is on her third career and fourth book. A lawyer, professor of social welfare and now dean of the Graduate Division at UC Berkeley, Mason has co-authored, with her daughter Eve Mason Ekman, "Mothers on the Fast Track," to be released at the end of May by Oxford University Press.

## **On background**

I'm from Minnesota. I got my Ph.D. in labor history and came to California. It was pretty much a closed market for women in the academic world at that time.

## **On leaving academia**

I went to USF law school, graduated in '76. I got divorced and was a single mother and I really couldn't handle practicing law. It was more hours than I could put in. I had no support system. I stopped practicing law and went to St. Mary's College and set up a paralegal program.

## **On second acts**

I was able to come to Berkeley in 1989 as an assistant professor, over age 40, which just doesn't happen. I'd been out of the academic pipeline for 10 years. People like that usually get dumped into the circular file.

## **On third acts**

I've been graduate dean now for seven years. We have 10,000 graduate students at Berkeley, and we give out the most Ph.D.s in the world, over 900 in the spring. About half of those graduate students are women.

## **On her target reader**

Everyone and their mothers and

fathers who is looking toward a career, to go to graduate school or professional school. These young women start out with total expectations that they can do anything that they want. The doors are open. They go to college even in larger numbers than men. They go to graduate school.

## **On inspiration**

This comes out of my experience here. When I took this job and looked into this audience of women going into the workplace and thought, "What's going to happen to my graduate students?" At this university only 24 percent of the faculty are women.

## **On the numbers**

It's so low because women drop out of the pipeline. We just surveyed our graduate students and the majority don't see how they can combine work and family. They don't really even try for the next step. Those who do, do pretty well. They do as well as women who don't have children.

## **On ambition**

The decade between 30 and 40 can make or break you in the academic world. If they get tenure, it's at an average age of 39. MBAs also have to make their mark during their 30s. Otherwise they're going to be left in middle management. In law, women who start out as associates are 50 percent less likely than men to become partners.

## **On backlash**

It is certainly true that there is much more pressure on mothers to give up their careers. We've gotten into this new "mom-ism" and an emphasis in spending far more time and involve-

ment in the life of your children than I think ever existed in American history.

## **On the old way**

My mother didn't work at all and she never came to my events.

## **On the new way**

I went to a whole lot more events for my kids than my parents ever did. It's overwhelming for kids and also for parents. I don't know what's driving it. And these are mothers who have J.D.s and Ph.D.s.

## **On her co-author**

My daughter Eve went to Berkeley as a graduate student and she's a medical social worker at the San Francisco General emergency room. Everything you read about the next day, she's seen. ♦

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