

Discussion Questions for Postdoctoral Fellows and Graduate Students from Breaking Through the Spiral Ceiling.

1. Hoopes' memoir *Breaking Through the Spiral Ceiling* shows Hoopes confronting prejudice against women in science as well as encouragement. How do people deal with a mixture of both? Does one sound "louder" than the other? What ratio of put-downs and encouragement is comfortable to endure?

2. What aspects of the treatment of women in science do you think have changed since the 1960s when Hoopes entered the field? Remember that the Civil Rights Act protects women from some of the things that happened to Laura. Do women still get asked if they plan to have children? If women ask about day care in a job interview, is that likely to work against their being hired?

3. When women talk about "having it all" they often mean balancing career and family. Do women today have an easier time achieving such balance? Does it matter how high your ambition in the field of science is? Can you aspire to win the Nobel prize and be a mother?

4. What resources are usually available in the US to help women in science with issues of motherhood? Are there child care leaves, day care that is affordable? Are these benefits just for faculty or higher executives, or are they open to everyone?

5. In science, the time commitment expected can often work against the possibility of balancing career and family. What are the possible costs of stepping out of the world of science for a half a year or a year for a childbirth leave? Does it vary from subfield to subfield? What kinds of strategies might help women who take off time?

6. It is often said that women don't know how to negotiate and therefore they lose out on benefits men would receive. Laura was hired at Occidental with a salary she accepted with no dickering, but she did work to increase her startup grant. What kind of message would it send to negotiate both? Neither?

7. Another skill that women have focused on developing is networking. A lot of times women who could have been invited to speak or to receive awards are not chosen. It's thought that men first think of men, then sometimes

women come to mind. How to get around that problem is to be in a network with a man who is a decision maker, organizing conferences, inviting speakers, nominating award recipients. What do you think about networking for graduate students and postdoctoral fellows here where you work? Could it be better? What would help to improve it?

8. In looking for a position either in academia or industry, what should a woman examine to make sure that the position will work well to push forward her career? One important variable is how other women are feeling in that setting. For example, if Laura Hoopes had talked with another woman who had taken Marine Ecology in a previous year, she might have found out that no women had ever gone on the research cruise. It seems to work better to chat informally, ask how things are, to get an overview of what the women who are already on that site think and feel. If they look at each other and become nervous about answering, that tells a lot about negative atmosphere. You can ask specific things too, like who was the last woman promoted, how long ago, how long had she been in her job before she was elevated? And do women get easy access to advanced training? Of course, child-related resources are also important, but it's sometimes better to find out from a human resources person or the web site.

9. Should a woman hold back from expressing passion for the subject she's studying scientifically? Probably not. It's likely that her enthusiasm will be contagious. Employers want to hire someone who will communicate excitement to granting agencies, colleagues, and prospective students. But you're also being evaluated as a colleague, so an interest in the other person's project is also helpful. What experiences have you had with talking science during interviews for graduate student and postdoctoral positions? Likely, job interviews will be somewhat similar.

10. What is the most optimal time for a woman to have a child if she plans to be an academic scientist? Laura was lucky because she had her children during her postdoctoral training and after tenure. Studies by the Berger Institute for Work, Family and Children have shown that these two times are the most benign in terms of the effect on her career. However, there's often no support for child birth or child care for postdoctoral fellows. Do you know what policy is in effect here where you are? Is this an issue where some pressure could help develop support for women to have children during the postdoctoral period?