

## “When I Grow Up”

Tina Murphy

When I was four years old, I wanted to be a "puncher girl" --my name for a boxer. Don't ask me why, I never really expressed interest in anything physical, didn't ask to take karate classes, and I didn't even have a sibling to shove around. There were many different career ideas after that, —kid photographer, dance teacher—before I finally settled on being a lawyer. But no matter what career path I chose, I always knew one thing—I was going to be a mom.

I had a plan. I was going to go to law school, work hard in a corporate law office, become financially stable, and then leave my job indefinitely to start a family. I wanted to have kids, and I wanted to be there for every minute of it.

I remember when I first realized that my plan would have to change. I was standing in the Annenberg servery by the drink machine —the one by the cereal, not the fruit—chatting with a classmate about the Gov 20 reading I failed to do, and in that moment I realized if I couldn't get myself to do a twenty page reading, then I would not survive a day in law school.

Freshman year, long talks raised the question of “what I wanted to be”. Since my law school plans were no longer, I responded with what I knew. “I want to be a mom. When I'm ready to start a family I'm going to stop working and be home to raise my kids.”

The way my peers would react to that response, you'd think I just said my hero was Donald Trump.

After a moment of hesitation, I would be met mostly with judgment and scorn—I was sacrificing my opportunity, they told me, wasting my hard work and abandoning my duty as a woman to fight against patriarchal norms. I owed it to myself and to others to trailblaze my way to the top of a company, or start my own.

But for me, the legacy I wanted to leave behind wouldn't be a new Silicon Valley staple, but my own startup of a family: one with tremendously high growth opportunity and admittedly low return on investment. And its not that I wanted to be a trophy wife or have kids when I was 25, I had a plan, remember? The law school part of that plan would change, but the idea behind it—that I'd have a successful career *before* starting a family still existed. Unfortunately, my intention of having a career, albeit one that I would put to a halt to have children, didn't appease my audience.

I felt a pressure to qualify my desire to be a mom; to tell people what they wanted to hear. So, I started to change my answer. "Oh well I'm not sure exactly what I want to do. I know I want to be a mom but I want a career too". While it might not seem like much of a difference, that answer was me lying to myself and

everyone around me, bending under the unfair critique of my aspirations. That became my new go-to, always clunky and never articulate, most likely because they weren't my words at all and I never got comfortable with them—until more recently.

Today, I can't tell if my "lie" is even a lie anymore. I'm not sure if I want to halt my career while my kids grow up. The one dream I've *always* had is no longer so certain.

Now, I wouldn't be a psych concentrator without psychoanalyzing this behavior change of mine. There are two concepts of socially compliant behavior: public compliance, when you change your action without changing your belief, and private acceptance, where you change what you believe and internalize it. So now I ask myself, has what started as public compliance become private acceptance? To be honest—and don't tell the psych department—I don't know. What I do know is that I still carry the doubt and shame that I felt freshman year. For the past month I have dreaded people asking me about my Lowell speech topic because I *still* feel ashamed about my desire to be a mom.

I'm sure that's something that we've all experienced—altering the way we present our desires, our beliefs, or ourselves, to seem more in fitting with the status quo. Of the many things I've learned here, I hope that's the one thing I forget. I hope we can all forget it.