

# How Should a PhD Student Be?



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## But First, Who Am I?

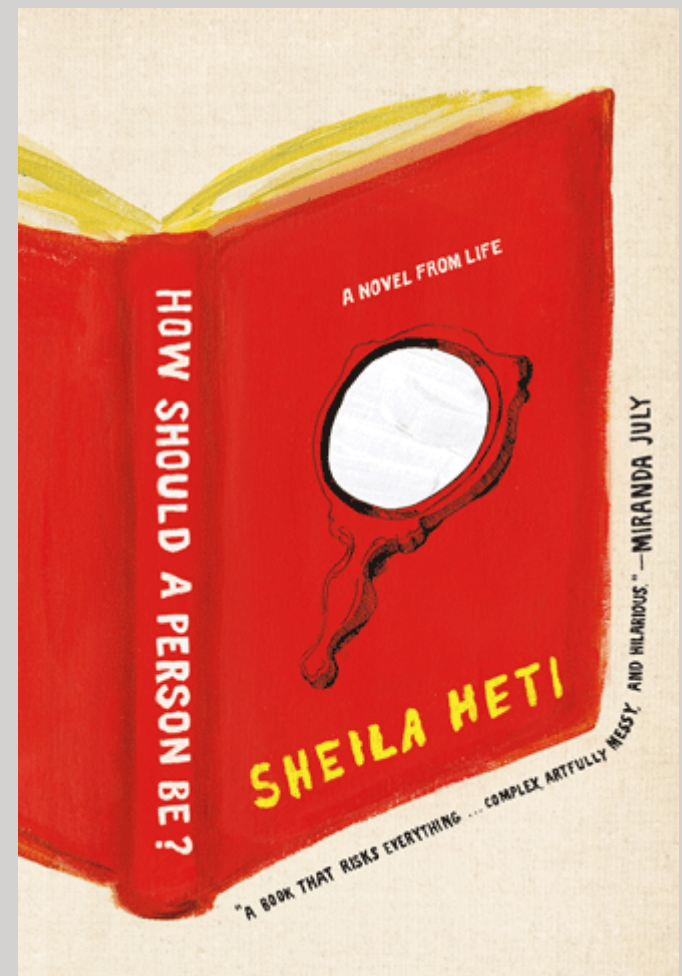


- Assistant professor of Public Policy and Economics.
- PhD in Applied (formerly Agricultural) Economics from Cornell in 2006.
- Joined Duke faculty a few months after defending my dissertation.
- My research is broadly concerned with food security.
- Specifically, I use the tools of applied micro to look at agricultural development and food policy.

# How Should a PhD Student Be?



- What do you need to do, and when? Let's use backward induction.
- Ideally, you will be on the market in the fall of year 5.
- By then, you really, *really* want to have a publication in a peer-reviewed journal. Here, anything conditionally accepted or beyond (accepted, forthcoming, published) works.



# How Should a PhD Student Be?



- But in the best-case scenario, from inception to acceptance, getting a paper published takes about two years.
- This means you need to submit that paper no later than the fall of year 3.
- If this is your first paper, this means you need to think about research ideas at least a year earlier, in the fall of year 2.
- I was lucky to know exactly what topic I wanted to write my dissertation on before I started grad school.

# Year 1: Exposition



- The big hurdle at Cornell was the Micro Q – a four-hour exam on all of Mas-Colell et al. (1995) that had to be taken three weeks after spring finals and had a 50 percent passing rate.
- I had always struggled with micro, so I used fear to motivate myself.
- I had average grades, but I passed the Micro Q the first time around.
- I also kept my eye on the ball, always seeing this as a rite of passage and thinking about my research ideas.

# Intermezzo: First Summer



- To reward myself for passing the Q, I spent about three weeks playing video games, finishing Fallout 1 and 2.
- Then, I started reviewing the literature for my dissertation and jotting down specific research ideas.



## Year 2: Rising Action



- My second year was spent taking every development or econometrics class in sight.
- I also started working on the theoretical part of my dissertation, which was going to become my first essay.
- I submitted a rather embarrassing version of that theory piece for publication, but it was roundly rejected (it deserved it).
- I took this as a signal that I needed to up my game and considerably improve my first essay.

## Intermezzo: Second Summer



- I spent that summer applying for funding for fieldwork.
- Luckily, the SSRC had small grants for people looking at risk and uncertainty, so I got \$5,000 from them.
- More importantly, I spent a month preparing an NSF doctoral dissertation improvement grant proposal, which I eventually got, for a total of \$17,662.
- That allowed me to collect my own data to answer my research question.



## Year 3 and Third Summer: Catharsis



- The first semester of my third year was spent taking that one development class I had not yet taken and getting ready for fieldwork.
- I also RAed for my advisor, working on a dataset about livestock marketing in East Africa – little did I know this was going to lead to my first publication.
- I left for Madagascar in January, and spent eight months collecting data.
- I had a lot of downtime in Antananarivo, so I worked on that paper with my advisor and read on my topic.

## Year 4: Falling Action



- That year, I worked on the second essay in my dissertation, which tested the theoretical models developed in my first essay using my Malagasy data.
- I also worked on the paper with my advisor. By then, I had developed a new estimator to study the problem.
- We submitted the paper to the *Journal of Applied Econometrics* in the fall and got rejected.
- We submitted the paper in March to the *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* – the top journal in my field.

## Intermezzo: Fourth Summer



- We were lucky: we got a revise and resubmit pretty quickly.
- I thus spent most of the summer working on the requested revisions and on my dissertation.
- By late summer, the paper was conditionally accepted for publication.
- By September, it was forthcoming, right in time for the job market.

# Year 5: Dénouement



- I can honestly say that I did not work on research between September and February, except to make marginal tweaks to my job-market paper.
- The job market is a full-time job: I submitted 72 applications. I applied to every faculty position I could find.
- I was always reasonably good at presenting, and my advisor was running a workshop where we had to present once a semester, so I didn't worry about presentation skills.
- In the end, I had 21 interviews, 5 flyouts, and three offers.

## Year 5: Dénouement



- Once I accepted Duke's offer, after the requisite night out, it was time to think of my third essay.
- Luckily, I had been thinking about that one for a few years, and I had a clear vision of what it would look like, so it took me about a month to write it.
- After incorporating comments from my committee, I defended (with a 104-degree fever) in June, and we moved to North Carolina on July 1.

Fin.