Preface

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From 2018 to 2021, the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) offered PRIMA grants, a career-funding scheme designed to support women researchers as they sought to obtain professorships. Women from humanities and social sciences; science, technology, engineering, and mathematics; and life sciences had the opportunity to compete for funds of around 1.5 million Swiss francs to support five-year research projects. The SNSF awarded 94 grants to women during this time period; the objectives of the scheme were then integrated into the SNSF Professorial fellowships and Starting grants.

Women in Science: Experiences of Academics in Switzerland tells the stories of twelve women, each of whom was awarded a PRIMA grant — their dreams and passions, their trials and tribulations, their goals and achievements, and the lessons they have learned throughout their careers. Featuring personal insights from women across Swiss universities and disciplines, this book offers a glimpse into the various and often nonlinear paths within academia. *Women in Science* highlights not only the rich diversity of the Swiss scientific community, but also common challenges, such as persistent structural inequalities, highly competitive — and at times, toxic — work environments, and the difficulties faced by women who bear the brunt of motherhood and care work while facing the demands of pursuing a highly competitive career path. While the book does not shy away from confronting head-on the ever-pervasive inequity that characterizes academic life for the vast majority of women, it also offers guidance and hope for those struggling to find their place in science. *Women in Science* tempers an acknowledgement of

the precarity of academic pursuits with the sheer passion and perseverance of those that continue to aim for the highest university positions, often against great odds.

The heart of this book is the women themselves: tenacious, committed, driven, creative, and acutely aware of both the downsides and the privileges of their careers. The stories in this volume ultimately reflect the best that academia has to offer: individuals who fervently believe in the work they have committed their life to, who endeavor to mentor and inspire other young scientists, and who continue to point the trajectory of both their lives and careers toward a more expansive and inclusive vision of success.

The book is organized in two sections. The first section, "Navigating Adversity and Opportunities: Stories of Perseverance and Triumph," offers reflections on the challenges faced by women academics, many of whom are first-generation college graduates, as they grapple with barriers to education, hostile work environments, non-linear career paths, and the demands and precarity wrought by combining an academic career with motherhood and care work. The second section, "Be(com)ing a Scientist: Key Values and Traits of Academics," contains essays that detail the different character traits or values that the authors believe to be essential in an academic career. Reflecting not only on their own profession but also on what they have witnessed among their peers, these authors outline the key components they see as necessary for academic success and personal fulfillment.

The genre of the collection is mixed, and the chapters are diverse in both tone and style. Some are written as historical narratives, others as letters to one's young self, and some as advice to young scientists who are hopeful for careers in academia. Each essay contains important reflections on the struggles, the rewards, and the pleasures of a scientific career, highlighting passion as a necessary ingredient in pushing the way forward, often against the tide, to reach inspiring heights.