

Chapter 5

Wearing All Our Hats at Once: Stories of Women as Mothers, Teachers, and Academics During a Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

Women in academia often wear many hats, mainly those of teacher, academic, and caretaker. Feminist standpoint theory—the use of women’s personal stories as a lens to view unique circumstances of their social group—has guided the authors’ use of personal accounts to highlight the challenges faced by women wearing these hats during the pandemic. The authors’ stories detail struggles in the female experience, creating the learning environment favored during in-person instruction, navigating unprecedented changes to the doctorate program, and addressing feelings of inadequacy as caretakers. The authors hope that women can see themselves in these stories and find a sense of empowerment as part of this unique social group. The authors’ stories should open conversations about supporting women as they teach, research, and create a work-life balance during an unprecedented time.

INTRODUCTION

Sister Joy D. Jones stated that, “Women wear many hats, but it is impossible and unnecessary to wear them all at once” (Church News, 2020).

Within the first three months of 2020, all public-school buildings in the United States—along with the District of Columbia and several U.S. territories—closed their doors as classes moved online (Education Week, 2020). With colleges and universities following suit, teachers at all levels found themselves at

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home teaching their classes from behind a computer screen. Prior to the Pandemic, the transition from teaching an in-person course to teaching a course online could be viewed as difficult and time consuming (Kebritchi et al., 2017)—sometimes taking teachers more than twice as long as in-person courses in terms of planning and preparation (Cavanaugh, 2005). But under the circumstances presented by COVID-19, the transition to online instruction left even experienced teachers feeling like beginners (Cutri et al., 2020).

Further exacerbating the challenges of sudden online instruction, many female teachers were unexpectedly confined to a space shared by children and significant others. In this space, women carried out the duties of teaching online while being unable to separate from their roles as caretakers and mothers. Though the responsibilities during the Pandemic of teaching, remote education for their own children, and childcare have weighed heavily on female teachers of all grade levels, women in academia experienced specific burdens. Burk et al. (2020) captured the pressures of working motherhood during the Pandemic as it was enhanced by being a female academic in the following:

. . . during the COVID-19 pandemic mothers (and fathers who serve as primary childcare providers) find themselves simultaneously creating curriculum, reviewing assignments, collecting data, developing reports, answering emails, mentoring students, printing coloring pages, explaining third-grade science, preparing meals, rocking babies, caring for aging parents, attending virtual meetings, and trying to protect their families from a deadly virus which causes life-altering sickness. (p. 2)

We, the authors, feel that we have always worn many hats as female academics who are also wives, mothers, and teachers. When the Pandemic of 2020 hit, a whirlwind of circumstances blew our hats out of their mental and physical constraints and landed them in a stack on our heads to be worn simultaneously. We will share our personal experiences navigating abrupt changes to our daily lives brought on by the Pandemic and explore some of the challenges that we faced wearing our many hats simultaneously as female academics who are also mothers and teachers.

METHODOLOGY: COLLECTING OUR STORIES

As females in academia, our experiences teaching online while remaining at home offer a glimpse into the challenges faced by other females in similar situations. Feminist standpoint theory—a theory that supports the use of women’s personal stories as a lens to view the unique circumstances of their social group (Allen, 1998; Kruse & Krumm, 2018)—has guided our use of personal accounts as data. Kruse and Krumm (2018) asserted that “literature written from the standpoint of patriarchal privilege often does not accurately describe women’s paths to employment in administration” (p. 30). Similarly, we suggest that our data—written as first-hand accounts of women—accurately sheds light on shared experiences of female teachers and mothers on paths toward doctoral degrees during the Pandemic of 2020.

In the summer of 2020, we, the authors, began to reflect in conversation on our experiences during the first half of the year as the COVID-19 Pandemic took hold in the United States. We wrote our personal accounts of moving our teaching online, pursuing our doctoral degrees in mathematics education, and managing our children’s remote learning while being confined to our homes. We edited and augmented our stories several times as the months of summer 2020 expired and the 2020-2021 school year brought new adventures in online teaching and learning.

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