

## Chapter 26

# Motherhood, the Tenure Track, and Leadership

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The term glass ceiling became widespread with Christine Williams's article in The Wall Street Journal. She used the metaphor to describe barriers that women face in attempting to advance within corporate organizations. In the past, women were unable to reach top positions due to discrimination and gender-specific roles. More than a decade later, Williams reconsidered the glass ceiling metaphor and added the metaphor of a glass escalator to describe the challenges women face in female-dominated professions. She explained that, whether careers are female-dominated, male-dominated, or gender-balanced, men assume leadership positions at faster rates than women do. When men are hired, they are often fast tracked to leadership. Williams explained that, when men are working in female-dominated professions, their ascent into leadership roles is effortless and inevitable, just like riding an escalator. In this chapter, the author discusses challenges faced within academia.*

*To describe my mother would be to write about a hurricane in its perfect power. Or the climbing, falling colors of a rainbow (Angelou, p. 98).*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Just like Maya Angelou's quote above about her mother, as a mother working in higher education administration and as a tenured full professor, I am like a hurricane, at times. I swirl with high-speeds as I move quickly to prioritize tasks and work productively to meet professional and personal goals. As I sit down to revise this chapter, I prioritize reviewers' comments for revision, make a list of administrative tasks that must be done prior to winter break, and I am texting my twin teenagers to ask them to

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complete chores at home for the family. I pace myself to meet the goals of my job, but I also keep track of my teenagers who are home alone for the day. I take great responsibility in serving as the primary parental figure to my twin daughters. I hope that my daughters also view me with the love that Maya Angelou expressed in the metaphor of the climbing, falling colors of a rainbow. My daughters provide me with the inspiration to work hard and to strive for success.

I began my career as an early childhood/elementary school teacher in Texas, neither intending on a doctoral degree nor having any intention of working within higher education. What I did have was a passion for teaching children and finding the research and resources to do a better job of teaching. Because of the encouragement and support of a couple of university professors and my family, as well as the constant internal drive to succeed, my job trajectory changed. For more than 30 years, I kept a note written to me by my undergraduate Education professor, Dr. Sharp. She simply said, “Jan, you have the ability to earn a graduate degree.” Those few words influenced my trajectory, as I considered graduate school. Those few words influence me each semester as I, too, provide words of encouragement to my students.

I want to preface this chapter by noting that I am privileged in many ways, and with that privilege, my experiences are different from my peers from historically underrepresented backgrounds in academia. I am a White female, and I was raised in a middle-class home in rural east Texas. I grew up on a farm. I was the first in my family to have the opportunity to leave our small town to go off to college. As a mother in academia, I have faced some difficult experiences, but through those challenges, I have grown to be a stronger professional and mother. I hope these experiences will help readers find strategies for confronting any challenge they may also face. I cannot think of a more rewarding career than serving as a college professor and teacher educator in higher education.

In this chapter, I discuss challenges I faced within academia, and I provide an overview of the literature of motherhood in academia. I describe the obstacles women face, according to the research. Then, I discuss challenges I have faced, and the tenacity that enabled me to persevere. Last, I provide an overview of academic leadership and how to position oneself for leadership roles within academia.

## **TRANSITION FROM K-12 TO HIGHER EDUCATION**

While teaching elementary school in the Dallas area, I began searching for a university to earn a master’s degree. I sought to find a program that would provide me with the research to practice knowledge that I longed for as an ESL teacher, and I sought a program that was within an hour or so of my home in the Dallas area. I was accepted into various graduate programs, but I chose a program at Texas Woman’s University in Denton, Texas because the program offered to fund the master’s degree through a Title VII grant they held, and this grant provided mentorship opportunities to ESL classroom teachers. As I reached the completion of the program, my advisor and Chair of my treatise paper—Dr. Rudy Rodriguez—encouraged me to apply to PhD programs. I found that I loved the research/writing aspect of the graduate program, so, with his encouragement, I applied to the University of Kansas. I also applied for employment, as I needed the financial resources to attend a doctoral program. I first received an opportunity to teach ESL to international students at the Applied English Center at the University of Kansas, a job that would fund the majority of the tuition cost as well as provide me with a stipend for living expenses. Although the job was considered a Teaching Assistantship, I taught five days per week and did not assist a professor; I was the instructor of record for the college level intensive English classes. For me, the transition from K-12 was an easy transition as I continued to teach the ESL students that I

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