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Abstract

Autoethnographies are an effective methodology for investigating mothering in the academy as they can allow researchers to explore their individual experiences of work/life balance struggles to shed light into wider social issues, such as academia's accelerated time. This autoethnography includes five vignettes that describe the challenges of mothering in the academy. These vignettes depict some of the issues faced by mothers working on insecure academic contracts, the impact of accelerated academic time on mothering and the value of finding a supportive community of women to find new stories about motherhood in academia. Such windows into female academics struggles for work/life balance can offer insight into new ways to imagine academic time, as well as the need to uncover alternative perspectives to academic work that enables expansive, relational and creative knowledge making approaches. Stories of motherhood can illustrate the equanimity cultivated through balancing mothering with academic work and can reveal the richness of play, flexibility and fluidity acquired as mothers occupy the liminal spaces between their caregiving and academic work. Finally, greater exposure to the stories of mothers in academia can help the broader academic community to imagine alternative temporal orders that accommodate more pleasurable and meaningful work.

Keywords

Motherhood, Autoethnography, Work/Life Balance, Temporality, Relationality

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An Autoethnography of Mothering in the Academy

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Autoethnographies are an effective methodology for investigating mothering in the academy as they can allow researchers to explore their individual experiences of work/life balance struggles to shed light into wider social issues, such as academia's accelerated time. This autoethnography includes five vignettes that describe the challenges of mothering in the academy. These vignettes depict some of the issues faced by mothers working on insecure academic contracts, the impact of accelerated academic time on mothering and the value of finding a supportive community of women to find new stories about motherhood in academia. Such windows into female academics struggles for work/life balance can offer insight into new ways to imagine academic time, as well as the need to uncover alternative perspectives to academic work that enables expansive, relational and creative knowledge making approaches. Stories of motherhood can illustrate the equanimity cultivated through balancing mothering with academic work and can reveal the richness of play, flexibility and fluidity acquired as mothers occupy the liminal spaces between their caregiving and academic work. Finally, greater exposure to the stories of mothers in academia can help the broader academic community to imagine alternative temporal orders that accommodate more pleasurable and meaningful work. Keywords: Motherhood, Autoethnography, Work/Life Balance, Temporality, Relationality

Introduction

Perfection is seductive, but as Sylvia Plath astutely pointed out, it cannot have children” (Cooley & Kasdorf, 2008, p. 202).

Despite more and more women entering into the academy, many female academics continue to express feeling overwhelmed as they navigate their academic careers (Acker & Armenti, 2004). This paper addresses the question of why motherhood continues to be riddled with angst for many female academics. Motherhood in the academy has often been characterised by “fear and tension” as traditional and *old norms* of gender expectations continue to govern the higher education space (Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006). Coser (1974) describes the intersection between academia and motherhood as the clash of two very “greedy institutions,” which often leaves female academics working all hours of the clock to fulfill their responsibilities. Mothers may struggle to divide their time equally as they are torn between the opposing forces of being the *competent academic* and the *good mother* (Raddon, 2002), and they may feel debilitated by guilt and shame due to these conflicting responsibilities (Townsend & Turner, 2001). Acker and Armenti (2004) argue that achieving work-life balance is increasingly difficult as academic workloads have exploded out of control. Tensions have been further exacerbated as women may feel pressured to prove that they are equally competent to their male counterparts (Acker & Armenti, 2004). The literature documents this uniquely

intense situation of mothers in academia who forgo their own needs for self-care and nourishing relationships to manage their multiple demanding responsibilities (Amsler & Motto, 2017).

Due to its heavy workload demands, academia has not surprisingly been defined as a “male and childless” space (Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006, p. 489). The *ideal* academic worker is conceived as someone who is *married* to the job, and who has the extra hours to devote to “accumulat[ing] grants, publications, and patents, as well as to improv[ing] teaching evaluations, and structure service commitments: these are the marks of a ‘good academic citizen’” (Shahjahan, 2015, p. 492). These expectations for productivity within a neoliberalist university has made academia into an increasingly inhospitable space, in which workers are made to comply to a “hyped up productivity schedule” (Shahjahan, 2015, p. 491). Such hectic schedules can accelerate time structures as individuals need to work faster and to multi-task to manage their intensifying workloads (Menzies & Newson, 2007). This focus on productive time is argued to devalue the creative, interpersonal and subjective facets of academic work that require a more expansive, caring and flexible mindset. As temporal overload becomes normalised, individuals may adopt the rhythms of an accelerated timescale and become socialised into the norms of a neoliberalist academy (De Walt, 2009, p. 202). Academic workers in the neoliberalist academy may accordingly prioritise efficiency and productivity over rich interpersonal relationships and personal well-being, as they become, “infinitely flexible, always on call, de-gendered, de-raced, declassed and careless of themselves and others” (Amsler & Motto, 2017, p. 11). Mothers are made particularly vulnerable in this context as their care-giving responsibilities exclude them from the pragmatic and workaholic demands of the academy, as “The ideal-type mother cannot be an ideal-type neoliberal subject (careless, disembodied and disengaged from the messiness of non-economic life) or an autonomous, flexible “entrepreneur” of the self” (Amsler & Motto, 2017, p. 5). The *ideal* mother is duly considered to be incompatible with academia’s market-orientated approaches; as a result, they are seen to fall behind their male counterparts.

Even amongst higher education institutes in Australia, women continue to experience greater work/life balance stress and issues of time-poverty (Australian Council of Trade Unions [ACTU], 2016). The division of domestic workload and care responsibilities is problematic as women spend twice as much time doing unpaid household work than men (ACTU, 2016, p. 6). Due to compounding demands both inside and outside the home, the experience of motherhood in the academy can shine a bright light into the stark pressures of academia’s limited, accelerated and fractured time. This paper is a response to the impact of academic time, which can make female academics consider themselves as being incompetent, unreliable and ill-suited to academic work as they fail to effectively juggle their personal and professional life (Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006). I find myself in a similar circumstance as my narrative of motherhood revolves around the anxiety, exhaustion and the inadequacy of trying to live up to the image of a *good* mother and the *competent* academic. Such feelings may be common amongst mothers, as they internalise external performance pressures that hold them accountable to a workaholic existence (Davis & Bansel, 2005).

Why talk about motherhood?

During my most time-poor moments, I question whether I can be both a mother and an academic. Such instances motivate me to write about my experiences of motherhood to see if I can effectively reconcile myself to the tensions of straddling both worlds (Sutherland, 2008). This paper attempts to provide one insider perspective into Ward and Wolf-Wendel’s (2004) question of what may emerge when two very demanding worlds collide. What follows are five snapshots of my struggles to integrate my identity as an academic and a mother. These short vignettes depict the ways that neoliberal discourses of linear and chronological time can impact

both the professional and personal lives of mothers. They further highlight how alternative temporal states and supportive communities of practice can help to envision a pleasurable and meaningful academic life.

Autoethnography as a methodology for navigating motherhood

Autoethnography is an effective methodology for investigating mothering in the academy as it allows individual researchers to present vivid accounts of their personal experiences. Through their authentic insider accounts, female academics can shed light into broader cultural phenomena of mothering in the academy, demonstrating autoethnography's principles of studying (graphy) personal experience (auto) to make sense of one's cultural experiences (ethno; Adams, Holman Jones, & Ellis, 2014; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Autoethnography allows female academics to embrace their vulnerabilities as they share an intimate glimpse of their struggles with work/life balance. Through reflexively exploring their experiences, they may be better able to critique the cultural norms of a neoliberalist academic institution and to suggest ways to improve academic life by slowing down its accelerated pace (Adams, Holman Jones, & Ellis, 2014). Female academics can write autoethnographically to interrogate the pragmatic and market-orientated norms of a neoliberalist academy that do not cater to the slower-paced rhythms of their care-giving work. This autoethnography is presented as five short vignettes or snapshots of mothering encounters in academia to provide an impression or how this landscape may look like during different moments in time. It draws on more literary forms of representation, such as thick descriptions and evocative and aesthetic use of language, to generate greater impact through forming deep emotional connections with readers (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). Such vignettes aim to depict the textures of lived experience by replicating the multi-faceted, fragmented, and affective rhythms of mothering in academia.

Vignette 1: Making motherhood visible

Motherhood in the academy is regarded as a “predominantly silent” experience (Leonard & Malina, 1994, p. 30). Women may keep silent about their mothering role as they fear being labelled as incompetent or not “coping” (Acker & Armenti, 2004, p.11). The silence surrounding the challenges of integrating motherhood and academia may be further attributed to the tiredness of, “same old problems-human rights” issues or the fear of losing possible job opportunities, as, “. . . the fear or failing to get a job, to achieve tenure, or to maintain post-tenure security silences us now” (Cooley & Kasdorf 2008, p. 211). Similar concerns about disclosing vulnerability led me to hide the physical transformations of motherhood.

“Can I help you?” My eyelids flutter. I am annoyed at being woken up and attempt to go back to sleep but cannot. Something is odd. My bed is hard, and my pillow feels scratchy. I decide to open my eyes. I am surprised to find myself lying face down on a carpeted floor. A face hovers overhead. “I think I am okay,” I murmur. The passing face moves away as I stumble towards the stairs. The pieces come together as I sit nursing my head. I recall assisting at a lecture for a couple of hundred students at orientation week when nausea hits. I remember desperately excusing myself in mid-sentence and running out of the doors. A wave of relief hits me, as I realise that I must have made it outside, fainting where no one could see me. Instead of going back to the lecture, I spend the next hour in the bathroom expelling the contents of my stomach.

I decide to go out for lunch to replenish myself, but am too weak to walk down street. Instead I sit for an hour at a bus stop, pondering what to do. I make it back to my office where I sit, eyes closed, waiting for the spinning to stop. At two o'clock, I rouse myself for a cross marking meeting. It is a long hour of sitting, smiling and nodding when my bones still feel hollow. I look around our meeting room and notice the empty seats. Not everyone has bothered to turn up; I still go as my academic contract terminates at the end of the year. I do not tell my colleagues that I am ill.

On the train-ride home the faintness returns. I move towards the only vacant seat on my carriage, but a man wearing a suit rushes towards it and sits down. I feel like crying. Nausea overwhelms me; I am going to fall. I move to the stairway and slump down on the bottom two stairs. My breath is heavy, rasping. I put my head between my legs and beads of sweat appear on my head. I know I must look odd, sitting there, breathing oddly and crouched in a ball. But no one asks if I am okay. I am two months pregnant, but my body does not "show." This invisibility is both a relief and hardship.

Both my pregnancies were hidden so as not to draw attention to a tired body, working hard to nourish a small life form. But by keeping silent about its challenges, motherhood, however, became a lonely and alienating experience. Fisher (1988) highlights this plight of mothers who "wander[ing] in the wilderness" (p. 238) in silence to protect their careers. These mothers are bound by the challenges of their circumstances and the inability to find support by disclosing them.

Vignette 2: When choice is not really a choice

The "fear and tension" of combining work and family life may be amplified for non-tenured female staff. Yijoki and Mäntylä (2003) introduce the notion of "contracted time" to depict the plight of non-continuing academic workers, who experience high levels of anxiety over their insecure employment conditions. They assert that uncertainty makes long term planning difficult, and that non-tenured workers undergo constant evaluation and surveillance to attract future work. The following narrative relays such anxieties around securing ongoing academic work as a new mother.

"You haven't done much research and you are not in any leadership role. This means that you need to teach these units." My supervisor squiggles in her notebook, whilst I nod and pretend to understand. One point for this and another for that, but I am still "x" number short. "This looks like a lot of teaching. Is this normal?" She replies. "Yes, I have given you a couple of points for fiddle-diddle-dee and tra-la-la, which is more than generous. You have to take these classes to make up the rest." I nod even though it makes no sense. I decide to go back to work full time with a three-month-old and a two-year-old at home. I am in the final year of a two-year contract, I dare not take any more maternity leave, but still ask, "Will it make a difference if I came back early?" Without skipping a beat, she replies. "Yes, it probably would be better." Out of sight, out of mind. The message is clear. I agree to teach the eight classes, three full days of back to back seven-hour long days. I convince myself that I will be rewarded later. I pump breast milk during every available moment and I hold onto hope.

This memory comes rushing back later as I sit in my supervisor's office. "Sorry J, there is nothing I can offer you. We just don't have the funds. The School of doodle-dee-doo will close, and we need to create places for permanent staff. There will always be casual teaching contracts on offer." My request for certainty is answered with more insecure work. Four years of continuing contracts means no safe-guard after a certain date. As a non-tenured staff member, the university has no commitment towards me. I could be terminated at any notice. I close my eyes and think of the past year of swallowing up relentless demands to the body, still going, barely catching a breath, so as not to give them an excuse not to keep me on. I realise that the maxim, "Out of sight, out of mind" is false. There are no promises, just more false hope. Despite the official clause in my contract of "not to expect anything," I can't completely erase the sensation of being "led on."

The literature relates how "teaching only" contracts are mostly occupied by women, who are vulnerable to ongoing career uncertainty due to their teaching focused academic work (White, 2015). The heavy teaching and administrative demands of "teaching only" contracts are believed to isolate female academics from research cultures, which further limits their opportunities for research and makes them uncompetitive for promotion or tenured positions (Devos, 2005). Female academics have accordingly been labelled as the unwilling "foot soldiers" of the academy (White, 2015, p. 49) or "martyr saints," who compromise their well-being and career development as they take on the de-valued work of the institution (Hey, 2004, p. 35).

Vignette 3: Mothers are "mothers," not academics!

Mothers internalise the discourses surrounding gender role and identity and may be socialised into making certain choices, demonstrating how, "early gender socialisation shapes people's ideas about what they can do and where they can do it" (Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006, p. 515). Cultural and social norms strongly impact a female academic's career choices, as child-reading responsibilities and housework are socially constructed as, "a woman's job" (ACTU, 2016). The narrative below provides a snapshot about how the cultural norms of "motherhood" can clash with academic discourses of the "competent' worker."

"Can you print off my research paper at your office? I have emailed it to you." I look nervously at my husband who looks annoyed. "I will do it this time, but don't ever ask me to do it again. Every evening you sit writing your papers our children are deprived of their mother." His tone is clear. No further discussion. Still, I interject, not wanting him to think that I am "wasting" my time. My comments about recent publications inflame him more. "I don't want to hear about your publications. You are robbing our children of your time." Being the "mother" and "wife," my work can never intrude or take centre stage. My world constricts with his lists of "do nots" and I begin questioning what I am even doing in academia. I was never good at research and writing anyway. Life outside of motherhood appears insignificant. I write less. "Don't do anything other than prepare for your teaching. Are you getting paid to write your papers? If not, then don't do it!"

I ask my six-year-old, "Do you want your mother to stay home so I can look after you?" He reasons that two working parents can buy him more things and shakes his head. Later I tell my mother about my loss of interest in writing

and research; she responds angrily, "I thought you were smarter than this. Every time your husband tells you to stop writing, you need to publish ten more papers." I am porous; her words sink. She does not see me as just a woman, who is simply a functional body or a tool for fulfilling someone else's needs, and yet, in the same breath, she tells me to cook, clean and to "look after my husband." She sees me as her child who has endless opportunities for being and becoming, but still casts me in the role of a dutiful mother and a wife, whose needs are secondary to everyone else's. I cannot reconcile these views with my demanding academic career, so I continue to stumble along feeling anxious, uncertain and ill at ease. My demanding "academic" work clashes with the other discourses surrounding me. I am a mother, a wife and a scholar, but what does this mean?

Despite scrounging around for extra hours and digging into personal time, there is rarely time for research. The temptation to "choose" an "easier" teaching focused career track is never far away; it is an attractive alternative to constantly worrying about research output or impact factors. The literature explains this predicament of choice in light of the time poverty by depicting certain "choices" as "non-choices." Hughes (2002) relates that such "choices" may be an illusion, as, "One may feel autonomous and free to choose but the power of regulatory discourses mean that such voice is 'forced' and of 'false appearance'" (p. 101). Women may, for instance, "choose" not to work at a prestigious research university as they feel that they will not be able to commit to a heavy workload (Wilson, 2004). They may "choose" teaching-focused work or to work in a less research-focused institution to manage their workload (Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006). Such "choices" have been labelled as "non-choices" when they are seen as the only viable option for working academic mothers.

Vignette 4: Motherhood to "career mode"

Stories of motherhood in academia highlight the negative effects of neoliberalism, which leaves workers "available" and switched on at all hours (Ylijoki, 2013). Academic time is even perceived to invade areas traditionally regarded as "sacred," such as the relationship between a care-giver and their child. The vignette below depicts the ways in which accelerated forms of academic time has impacted my temporal experiences of "mothering."

Today N, my four-year-old child, was badly hurt. He collided with a big inconsiderate body and was thrown into the air. He landed on his nose and splashed the pavement with his blood. As a medic attended to N, I filled out an accident report form specifying the details of his injuries. We head for home, too shaken to stay. As we near the train station I feel increasingly anxious. Despite having no scheduled appointment, I cannot overcome my life-time of running for trains. I pick up my pace as we enter the station, but N is being "difficult" and will not let me carry him. My well-trained dog ears prick up the shrill sound of a train pulling into the platform. N's small feet collapse as I anxiously tug at his arm. I end up dragging him down the last couple of steps. We get to bottom, and I realise that it is not our train. N is crying hysterically; his body is going into shock with the terror. I have become the monster who makes him relive his traumatic fall. N, who can't yet control his body, needs to keep up with my dictated time frames. If he does not, I will drag him.

Later at home, I find a photo of N as a newborn, in which his sweet-smelling floppy body is held up by his father's hand. He is warm and sleepy; a

mere lump of flesh. My warm and larger body was occupied with nourishing and sheltering his new life form. I existed to nurture his being, and for a moment, I felt free to do so. But today I realised that this sheltered time has passed as I have re-entered the tough, fast-paced and efficient world. My child follows me with footsteps that move too slow. By forcing him to keep up, I have entered him into the race to beat the clock. He tastes the sense of urgency that propels me through life.

Academic time becomes problematic when it accelerates personal time and allows, “the academic-self [to] colonise[s] the spaces and times of the mother-self” (Amsler & Motto, 2017, p. 10). Szollos (2009) likens accelerated academic life to “harried time, which encompasses the combined state of being, ‘rushed’ and ‘hurried,’ and the ‘speeded up’ reality, intertwined with anxiety and worry” (p. 337). Female academics may feel particularly “harried” as they multi-task to complete their professional work on time. In the evenings, when it is time to unwind and relax, they may find themselves on their laptops, answering emails, preparing for teaching or catching up on their research. Such experiences highlight the challenges of academia’s fast-paced academic existence, which may fail to accommodate “something so humane as parenting” (Peskowiz, 2008, p. xiv).

Vignette 5: Seeking shelter in conversations with other mothers

This final narrative reveals the importance of mutually supportive communities of mothers in the academy. It depicts a conversation about motherhood with a supportive group of female academics to illustrate how sharing stories can provide a map for navigating motherhood.

“How old are your children?” a conference delegate asks. “Six and four,” I reply. She nods. “Still young. Must be hard.” I smile. Words cannot explain how hard it feels. We sit around a table, each nursing a glass of red wine. We are women of different ages and ethnicities; meeting together for the first time at a conference dinner. The conversation jumps from one topic to another and rests on the common complaint of time poverty. “In my Faculty they had a short research sabbatical on offer. One prospective candidate was a man and the other was a woman. Both had two young children. The young woman had a good foundation of publications, which she did on top of all the teaching. The man had published very little. The committee was planning to give the young man the leave entitlements because they felt he “deserved” it more. “We had to put forward a case so that they both received leave.”

My mind is like a sponge, rapidly processing these vital pieces of information. Two questions immediately spring to mind. The first is about whether it was possible for a mother of young children to be a successful researcher. I ask one of the attendees who is a professor, “Did you publish when your children were young?” She replies, “Yes, I did. I learnt how to overcome negative feedback. I realised it was more important to do my best and to keep moving forward.” I then ask. “Does it get any easier?” To which she replies, “Yes it does. It is remarkable how much more energy that I have now to do my work as I don’t have young children to look after.” A weight lifts off my shoulder as I feel listened to, as opposed to being criticised for never “being around.” There is a sense of relief, knowing that the acute time pressures I am experiencing will ease one day. I feel grateful at these rarely disclosed glimpses

of vulnerability. These women have revealed that mothering in the academy is challenging but still possible.

The literature reveals how quiet moments of sharing career advice between women can create a strong sense of solidarity (Acker & Armenti, 2004, p. 18). Older mothers in academia can also provide a tangible example of integrating academia and motherhood, providing hope for younger mothers about the possibility of advancing their career as their care-giving responsibilities lessen. This is illustrated by Harper (2008), who relates, “But my life is full and rewarding, and I know that as my children grow, they will need me less and I will write more” (p. 230). d’Araújo et al. (2016) similarly disclose the “mutual confidence and complicity” and the “inner empowerment” generated when female academics come together and share stories about their experiences (p. 115). Not only do these stories provide exemplars of female academics who have been able to straddle their personal and professional responsibilities, they may shape academia’s culture by presenting alternative possibilities beyond the pragmatic and workaholic academic career.

Making hidden worlds accessible: Resisting and dismantling deficit narratives

After spending the work day advising students, desperately preparing for tutorials and lectures and marking papers, I find the process of stepping back into the mothering role like floating under water. During my son’s evening soccer practice, I stand amongst other parents under the cold evening sky, mute and vacant, feeling unsure and overwhelmed. The academic mask has lifted, and I stand lost in an in-between world, engulfed by a momentary absence before I transform into the character of “mother.”

Travelling in-between the two different worlds of academia and motherhood has made me the master of “switching channels” (Cooley & Kasdorf, 2008, p. 212), until there is a glitch in the wires, such as a sick child, poor physical health or one too many deadlines, and the system comes crashing down. Sutherland (2008) conveys this surrealistic nature of “switching channels” and of trying to work after her caesarean birth, relating, “I sat there in my rocker, on my pillow, wearing my big skirt (the only one that fit), in that strange land where the ecstatic meets the melancholy, holding my guts in, and trying to read something about socialist societies and stratification theory” (p. 219). She expresses the rawness of re-entering academic spaces after the aching tremors of birth.

How do workers bridge this gap without falling into the divide? By sleeping late and working late into the evenings, I manage to keep one step ahead. But working late into the evenings has taken a toll. Once the computer is turned off, I can barely sleep as my mind is still abuzz.

Osell (2008) writes about the costs of achieving academic success as a mother, as she discloses, “By the third year in my new job, I had published in the top journal in my subfield, given invited talks in both Canada and the United States, appeared on panels . . . I was also gravely ill” (p. 235). Cooley and Kasdorf (2008) provide another snapshot by describing the experience of coming back to work two weeks after an emergency caesarean section to grade papers and to write an academic paper. These stories of motherhood reveal the hidden sacrifices that resonate deeply with my own experiences. Despite feeling sorrow at our collective struggles, my yearning for a more positive alternative grows.

I desire to explore the benefits of being both a mother and academic. Wolf-Wendel and Ward (2006) disclose the equanimity of mothers who acquire a balanced perspective by effectively integrating family life, as work-life and motherhood provided respite or acted as a buffer from the demands of the other role. They found that children helped female academics to sustain a well-rounded approach to work, stating, “It is often the birth of a first child that questions these norms calling for individuals to work all the time. . . The entrance of a baby offers a new perspective from which to examine the academic work environment and question its unclear standards and potentially unrealistic expectations” (p. 513) Wolf-Wendel and Ward (2006) additionally explain how mothers manage their heavy workload by, “satisficing,” and of deriving satisfaction from “doing” their best rather than trying to “be” the best. They depict how “satisficing” could enhance well-being and longevity by helping individuals to establish realistic, rather than overly idealistic goals and convey how mothers did not minimise the challenges of their work but accepted them with greater equanimity, demonstrating flexibility and adapting their plans to accommodate their family life and by “rely[ing] on their own wherewithal” (p. 501). Equanimity is subsequently considered to help mothers live according to their priorities by allowing them to organise their life in relation to what they cannot, “live without and granting oneself the time to attend to life’s goals accordingly” (Weaver, 2008, p. 79).

As motherhood in the academy continues to be portrayed in a negative light, there is a lack of awareness of what mothers, “might add to [its] culture” (Harper, 2008, p. 225). Exploring the advantages of motherhood in the academy can help us to discern how the “harried” stories of mothers can alert us to the need to envision an alternative to academia’s instrumental, mechanical and linear experience of time. The lesser knowing stories of motherhood can further provide a glimpse into the hidden benefits of mothering in the academy. Summers and Clarke (2015), for instance, consider the transitions between motherhood and academia as a creative and fluid space that embraces multiplicities, as they write:

In-betweenness. . . captures the permeable nature of experience, challenges the concept of bounded roles and rejects the binary of work and home. In-betweenness shines a light on transitional spaces where a multiplicity of roles are negotiated and assimilated. Theorizing in-betweenness provides us with ongoing support for academic research, artistic practice and mothering. (pp. 236-237)

They explain how motherhood is a, “multi-dimensional, networked and connective” experience that equips female academics with the skills to, “integrate and incorporate multiplicities” and to be at ease with liminal spaces that generate innovative and creative work (p. 236). Summers and Clarke (2015) further disclose how children can teach mothers how to play. They consider play to be a vital part of the knowledge building, not only because it is intrinsically motivated, creative and experimental, but because it is iterative process that enables rich opportunities to learn from failure. They assert that embracing multiplicities is pivotal to teaching, which involves developing effective interpersonal relationships that allow boundaries to be crossed and dissolved. And finally, the dissolution of boundaries resonates with the notion of altruistic’ time, which is equally demonstrated in motherhood through care-giving relationships that involve time spent for its own sake, rather than for extrinsic gain. “Altruistic” notions of time can remind academics to find more opportunities to seek the personally meaningful and pleasurable work that enriches the knowledge building work of the academy.

Conclusion

When I talk about the intensity of my life as the mother of two young boys, I often hear comments from older mothers, “That period will soon pass. Just try to enjoy it.” Their voices are tinged with sadness, and a mourning for a fleeting and magical time that can never be retrieved. I try harder to be present to my children and wonder how my existence may change if I wasn’t so harried. How would life change if I did the work I could not live without.

The experience of juggling motherhood with academia is undeniably challenging. Even without additional care-giving responsibilities, the intensification of academic work makes it a highly demanding profession. But on closer examination, the stories of mothers can provide a glimpse into how we can re-envision academic time so that temporal rhythms become expansive to enable creativity and adequate self-care (Amsler & Motto, 2017). Due to their time poverty, mothers may become more reflexive about finding ways to juggle their personal and professional time to “integrate the variety of multiple times to allow [for] more space for timeless time” (Szollos, 2009, p. 335).

Greater self-reflexivity may motivate female academics to envision a timeless academia that embodies a, “balanced coexistence of various temporal orders and, particularly, minimise the negative consequence of the pervasiveness of scheduled time and the insecurity of contracted time” (Ylijoki & Mäntylä, 2003, p. 75). Grosz (2004) relays the value of exploring alternative time frames by asserting that linear and instrumental time can ultimately minimise joy and creative potential by:

. . . freez[ing] [academics] inside knowledges that are regular, predictable and knowable, leaving no room for the joyous, the not yet knowable, the un-useful, the irrational- those new forms of thought not necessarily and not only driven by the anticipated end-point or product, but which can enable life to lift itself beyond itself. (p. 112)

Amsler and Motta (2017) illustrate this view as they relate how writing a paper about motherhood helped them to embrace the “multiple subjectivities” of academia and motherhood and to resist “oppressive logics” and to embrace, “more integrated and unruly selves and knowledge practices” (p. 2). Exploring flexible approaches to academia can ultimately prevent the loss of such talented female workers who have much to contribute to the academy (Peskowitz, 2008).

As academics begin to understand the constraints of instrumental and accelerated time, and its harsh impact on the quality of life, they may begin speaking back to the institution by “identify[ing] and critiqu[e] those totalizing paradigms, and to work for institutional and social change” (Cooley & Kasdorf, 2008, p. 213). Generating spaces for rich possibilities for knowing and being requires creating more flexible, creative and expansive spaces for innovative practice. Motherhood can enable shared spaces of possibilities as its tensions and challenges may force individuals to explore “alternative [temporal] rhythms” that may in turn enhance the rich knowledge building capacities of the academy (Amsler & Motto, 2017, p. 13). More stories need to be told about the inherent benefits that mothers can provide to academic culture, such as their playful, relational and creative knowledge building practices. As these stories become normalised and become a part of the dominant academic discourse, they may be able to shift the broader culture by replacing the *good neoliberalist academic worker* narrative with something that is richer, more expansive and humane.

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