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President of Everything: Mothering during COVID

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Abstract

This roundtable explores narrative data collected from seven women in the U.S. Midsouth about their mothering experiences during COVID-19. The focus will be on their socio-emotional and informal learning.

Keywords: Mothering during COVID, mothering and informal learning, mothering and socio-emotional learning, mothering and adult learning.

The purpose of this roundtable is to explore narrative data collected from seven heterosexual married cis-women in the U.S. Midsouth about their shifting ideas and experiences of mothering, work, and family life during COVID-19. We hope to center the voices that have been ignored, gaslit, and/or further silenced during the pandemic—women juggling working from home while their children were also home, while engaging in the emotional and physical labor needed to literally keep their families and communities alive during an ongoing global pandemic.

The research question guiding the data collection was: What are the experiences of mothers who are working full-time jobs from home with children at home during a global pandemic? This research arose from the researchers' own experiences of and struggles with mothering, working, and staying mentally well during the first year of COVID-19 in the U.S. The researchers are five cis-gendered women who were mothering children ranging from 18 to 3 years and younger in the Spring of 2020. Three identify as white, one as African American and one as South Asian American.

Seven working mothers were interviewed. All of the women worked full-time outside the home pre-COVID and shifted to working from home due to the pandemic. Four of the women were Black and three were white; all had two children, and all were middle to middle-upper class. We conducted the first interview in the summer and fall of 2020 and then a follow-up interview in 2022.

The themes that we constructed from the data related to the gendered dynamics of the participants' increased mental load (Dean et al., 2022), racialized understandings and experiences of COVID (Stamps et al., 2021), the double pandemic of COVID and hyper-visibility of white supremacy (Starks, 2021), experiences of the triple shift (Duncombe & Marsden, 1995), and the use of spirituality as a coping mechanism (Roberto et al., 2020).

Furthermore, as we analyzed the data from the interviews, we saw parallels between the informal and socio-emotional learning (Dirkx, 1997; Jagers et al., 2019) of the mothers in the study and us, the researchers like the sheer amount of cognitive and emotional labor mothers were doing to keep their families as healthy and functional as possible and mothers navigating the pandemic as well as the national coverage and conversations about murders of Black folx and increased racial tension stoked by Trump. Hence, in this roundtable, we will focus on the socio-emotional and informal learning during COVID of all the mothers, participants and researchers, and discuss the gendered and racialized implications for adult learning.

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