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No Margin for Error: A Study of Two Women Balancing Motherhood and Ph.D. Studies

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Abstract

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Keywords

Motherhood, Theory of Margin, Graduate School, and Cogenerative Ethnography

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No Margin for Error: A Study of Two Women Balancing Motherhood and Ph.D. Studies

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This cogenerative ethnography explored the lived experiences of two graduate students balancing Ph.D. studies and motherhood through McClusky's (1963) Theory of Margin. Specifically, we asked ourselves: What impact does pregnancy have on personal and academic selves and how are multiple roles and responsibilities managed? Through an analysis of dialogues, artifacts, conceptual maps, and narratives, examples of internal and external load revealed the dynamic nature of the female experiences in graduate school. Excerpts from the data showed how roles, relationships, and experiences are characterized and how similar or different those examples were, given individual context. Implications of this research for students, faculty, and higher education policy are explored. Key Words: Motherhood, Theory of Margin, Graduate School, and Cogenerative Ethnography

Introduction

"I know I have it here somewhere!" I keep telling myself as I sort through piles of articles, books, and binders that sit in stacks across my dining room floor. A book I need for my research is nowhere to be found. I have searched the car, under the seats, in the trunk. I have checked my backpack, the garage, and on top of the refrigerator. I have accused my husband of throwing it out with the trash, and I have torn the house apart.

With no success, and a deadline looming, I take a break from my hunt for the missing text to put my daughter down for her afternoon nap. As I lay Katie down, I look for her favorite pacifier, and noticed it is not in her crib. Knowing that it always ends up on the floor, I pull the bed out from the wall to discover, there between the bunny wallpaper and the slats of her bed is my missing copy of *Learning in Adulthood* (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). It seems that I am not the only one in this house interested in adult learning. Nestled against a Duplo block and a rubber duck is the book for which I had spent days looking. I retrieve the pacifier and the book and then realize that being a new mom adds a whole new dimension to being a graduate student.

A week later I run into Mo and I share my mommy scavenger hunt story with her. Mo, a woman, who like me has recently had a baby while working on her Ph.D. in adult education, sits with me as I relive the tale. We swap stories of lost books, milk-stained research, and colic that gives a new meaning to "pulling an all-nighter," and we realize that we have a story to share that may help other women faced with the same challenges

or give guidance to those who support Dr. Mom wannabes. After sharing our idea with our mutual major professor, she encouraged us to pursue our experiences as an avenue of research. This study is a result of those events and provides readers a view into the sum of our (Robin's and Mo's) experiences in balancing motherhood with doctoral demands. We are both white women, in our 30s, married (first for Robin and second for Mo), and recently have been, or currently are, Ph.D. students in the Adult Education Program at the University of Georgia. Issues raised in this study focused awareness on the specific needs of one group of students, currently invisible in the literature and often within their own institutions of higher education. This group includes women who are actively pursuing doctoral degrees and by choice or otherwise have become pregnant. Our hope was that by writing this paper we might share our experiences in order to bring a voice to women balancing their roles as mothers and scholars. Moreover, we feel it important to bring attention to the need for enhanced access to appropriate educational provisions and services to women such as ourselves.

To guide us as we explored our experiences, we employed McClusky's (1963) theory of margin. This adult education theory frames two key factors in the lives of adults; the load an adult carries and the power available to him/her to manage that load. All graduate students struggle to manage their load with the power available to them, but what happens when that student is a woman, and that woman becomes a new mother? What is that student's load? What power does she have to attack her load?

Review of the Literature

In the field of adult education, a growing body of literature exists illustrating how the needs of adult learners are different from their younger counterparts, and as a result are often better served by different learning environments, structure, and support. Although women are the fastest growing group enrolling in doctoral programs (Sikes, 1996), they have lower rates of candidacy and graduation (Beeler, 1993; Vezina, 1998). This discrepancy is contributed, at least in part, to the fact that women with family responsibilities have distinctly different needs from the traditional populations universities are designed to serve (Home & Hinds, 2000). Many current higher education practices are ill-adapted to the needs of adult learners (Commission for a Nation of Learners, 1997). For example, barriers to participation, including lack of flexibility in calendar and scheduling, academic content, modes of instruction, and availability of learning services, all contribute to the lack of completion of female graduate students. Beeler (1993) contends that doctoral education must re-examine itself through the experiences, knowledge, and opinions that result in successful completion of students, and in particular, older learners, women, and ethnic minorities. Understanding the excessive burdens of women in higher education is critical to adult educators and university administrators when working to provide appropriate support and guidance that increases learning.

Critical feminist research is one of the theoretical frames employed in adult and higher education to examine the issues of female students. The focus of this perspective is on the contributions of women and approaches that are more equitable for both student and educator in the context of learning and teaching (Gouthro, 2002). Gouthro argues that higher education discriminates against women and more specifically the field of adult

education marginalizes women. According to Burstow (1994), women make up the majority of students within adult education programs, but the field still remains under male leadership. Such findings are important in light of our context as adult education students.

This cogenerative study allows for a source of information about graduate school experience, identity development, and negotiating roles that existing methodologies could not fully capture. Guiding our study are two questions: (a) How did we perceive our experiences of pregnancy and mothering during graduate school and (b) How did we negotiate and define our roles and relationships during our pregnancies and after the birth of our children?

This study examined how we, as two female doctoral students, labored through pregnancy, delivery, and motherhood, while trying to maintain course loads, research agendas, and sanity. We shared memories of issues during each trimester, and the impact of pregnancy and the first year of our children's lives. Second, we shared memories of how we managed roles and responsibilities as mothers and graduate students. The data provided a glimpse into the "totality" of the experiences involved in balancing motherhood with doctoral demands by utilizing McClusky's (1963) theory of margin.

Theoretical Frame

McClusky (1963) proposed that his theory of margin was relevant to understanding the lives of adults. Specifically, he concentrated on the impact of increasing demands and pressures on their learning over time. McClusky (1974) explained the theory of power-load-margin, as involving the load an adult carries in life and the power available to her or him to carry that load. Margin is the relationship between the "load" (of living) and the "power" (to carry that load). This formula or relationship for margin (M) is illustrated with load (L) in the numerator position and power (P) in the denominator ($M=L/P$). In this form, load is the set of demands required to maintain autonomy, and power includes the resources a person has at his or her disposal to cope with the load. This relationship suggests that the greater the power in relation to the load, the more margin available. When there is a surplus of power, a margin is available to handle the load, and when the margin is increased, there is a reduction in the load or increase in power.

McClusky (1963) clarifies this formula further by dividing load into two interacting elements; internal and external. External load involves requirements of normal life including commitments to family, career, and community. Internal load includes life expectancies developed by people and includes desires, aspirations, and future goals. Power addresses an individual's physical and mental abilities, and includes both internal and external resources. External power includes family support, as well as social and economic abilities, and internal power may include acquired or accumulated skills, and experiences contributing to successful performance such as personality, resiliency, and coping skills.

A central element, according to McClusky (1974) is the ratio between load and power in relation to learning. "It is the margin that confers autonomy on the individual, gives him [sic] an opportunity to examine a range of options, and enables him [sic] to reinvest his [sic] psychological capital in growth and development" (p. 330). In

Weiman's (1984) review of the theory, she notes that when a person has an excess of margin, she or he has the capacity to move individually within his or her field of life space and the opportunity to explore and take part in creative ideas. When a person possesses excess margin she or he is more likely to be able to pursue dreams and address changes and challenges that arise. In other words, the margin an individual possesses may determine if she or he will participate in an educational endeavor. A central component to the life of an individual is the relationship between load and power (Walker, 1997). That relationship, when examined relative to women, is identified as facilitating a woman's ability to initiate change, respond to life situations, and manage with stresses (Mikolaj & Boggs, 1991).

By becoming a mother, a woman enters a new stage of her adult life that involves what Tennant and Pogson (1995) describe as "an adaptation to the changed expectations and circumstances associated with different life phases" (p. 116). Theories of individual life events cite the birth of a child as one of the major events in an adult's life (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). In addition, theories of life transitions point out that there is a normal progression of perplexity (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999) associated with these major life events. Therefore, becoming a mother has a significant impact on the "margin" needed for a woman to manage the many aspects of her life that contribute to load.

It is important to point out that McClusky's (1963) theory is representative of the poorly understood role of gender in adult learning (Brookfield, 1995). Derived from values that privilege a masculine worldview, McClusky's theory assumes the privilege of social power, thus neglecting insights into the particular experiences female learners face. The theory does not specifically address how female identity, relationships, and roles influence learning experiences. For example, the multiple roles women take on make them more vulnerable to role strain (Marlow, 1993). Additionally, issues such as the extent and type of family responsibility and the age and number of children (Gerstel & Gallagher, 1993; Mikolaj & Boggs, 1991) a woman has can affect issues of load and power. Even still, the theory has potential in helping us understand the stress and the development of coping skills among female learners (McClary, 1990).

Method

Given that we were interested in sharing our experiences while framing it in a familiar adult education theory, we found that traditional approaches to qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 2006) did not adequately meet our methodological needs. Although our research had components of phenomenology (capturing the essence of our lived experiences) and ethnography (framing our behavior and actions in a socio-political context), we still sought out a more accurate representation of our work. One promising option was autoethnography. Autoethnographic methodology or narratives of self could help us to answer our questions capturing local stories and the associated meanings, understandings, and social criticism (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). We sought to connect, through our research, personal identity, and culture, and wanted to provide a glimpse of our lives and the interplay between political, personal, and partial realms associated with voice and social life (Gubrium & Holstein, 1999). Yet, we understood that autoethnography centered on the self, a singular person. Our approach of constructing

and sharing our own stories independently, and then bringing them together in our analysis and representation of the study did not fit.

Moreover, as novice scholars we found the theoretical dimensions of interpreting our experiences central to our study and knew the more post-positivist approach was contradictory to the characteristics of autoethnography. We were Ph.D. students studying theory and trying to see the relevance of that theory and its ability to demonstrate or contradict our own experiences. Analytic autoethnography (Anderson, 2006) could address this need since it allowed us to examine our personal experiences through an integration of a conceptual frame with analytic self-study and explicit analysis (Vryan, 2006), but again, the study of self was fundamental in the approach.

As we continued to struggle with our methodology, a turn to cogenerative dialogue (Roth, Lawless, & Tobin, 2000), provided a new perspective in our search. This methodology affords an outlet for representatives to talk about shared experience with the purpose of expanding the range of actions in order to bring about change. Thus, cogenerative dialogue addressed the co-constructed nature of our data collection and representation, but the intent in using this methodology is to generate new action in classrooms, which was not our purpose.

The result of our struggle with existing methodologies is an amalgamation of ethnography, autoethnography, analytic autoethnography, and cogenerative dialogue that we have termed cogenerative ethnography. Cogenerative ethnography allows for two or more co-researchers to individually and mutually examine their own experiences within a socio-political context. Cogenerative ethnography enabled us to hold on to many of the basic characteristics of auto/ethnography, while addressing our distinct methodological need of sharing our individual stories as graduate students and mothers, and examining them together in order to challenge existing theory.

Data Collection

Our data collection took place before the births of our children, during our pregnancies, and after. We collected data from multiple sources; ongoing dialogues with each other and with other informants including our spouses, friends, and classmates; personal journals; artifacts such as scrapbooks and photographs, concept maps; and written narratives of our experiences all of which were used to “establish links that eventually create a whole that is supported by the bits of evidence that constitute it” (Eisner, 1979, p. 215). Throughout this process the most significant source of data came from extensive dialogues between the two of us. These could be described as platonic dialogues (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005) since we both posed questions and gave answers in order to create what Kvale (2006) described as statements and counterstatements that “are released and played out against each other, so the respondents may reach an agreement about the topic of the conversation” (p. 486). This form of data collection was similar to cogenerative dialogue and used unstructured conversation that allowed each of us to ask and answers questions to direct the dialogue and increase understanding. These opportunities served as the bridge between our experiences and attempted to address specific knowledge we each possessed, the correlations between our experiences, and the possible influences of load and power in relation to those experiences.

For example, we often met before class and talked casually, usually beginning with a story or anecdote, much like the one that began this paper. Although our talks often started with something as simple as heartburn, babysitters, or diaper rash, they inevitably lead to deeper issues such as health care, stress, and our unique circumstances as graduate students. Through these successive dialogues, we built a mutual understanding, including an understanding of our roles as students and mothers, and the factors common to our experiences. Memo writing (Charmaz, 2000) or note-taking was used following these meetings to create a form of field notes. These were combined with our original interpretations of our individual experience, which were recorded in journals and confirmed by other data, such as photos and scrapbooks. By doing so, we were able to triangulate the data, thereby developing confidence and competence about how we analyzed the narratives.

Much like autodiving (Heisley & Levy, 1991) a technique whereby a participant's response to interviews is driven by stimuli including photographs and recordings, we used personal journals, scrapbooks, and photographs as examples of our experiences and for eliciting written narratives about specific situations. For example, Figure 1 provided a catalyst for a dialogue and eventual narrative about Mo's time in the hospital after the birth of her son. Similar to what Angela McRobbie (1991) refers to as "identity ethnography" (p. 730), these self-reflective accounts included our thoughts and feelings, and feature our relationships with others. This provided a way to link our personal stories with the greater contexts of institutions, groups, and cultures (Denzin, 1994). It also placed our experiences within the context of a wider social phenomena (Anderson, 2006) closely aligning with ethnography and autoethnography.

Figure 1. *An example of artifacts as data sources.*

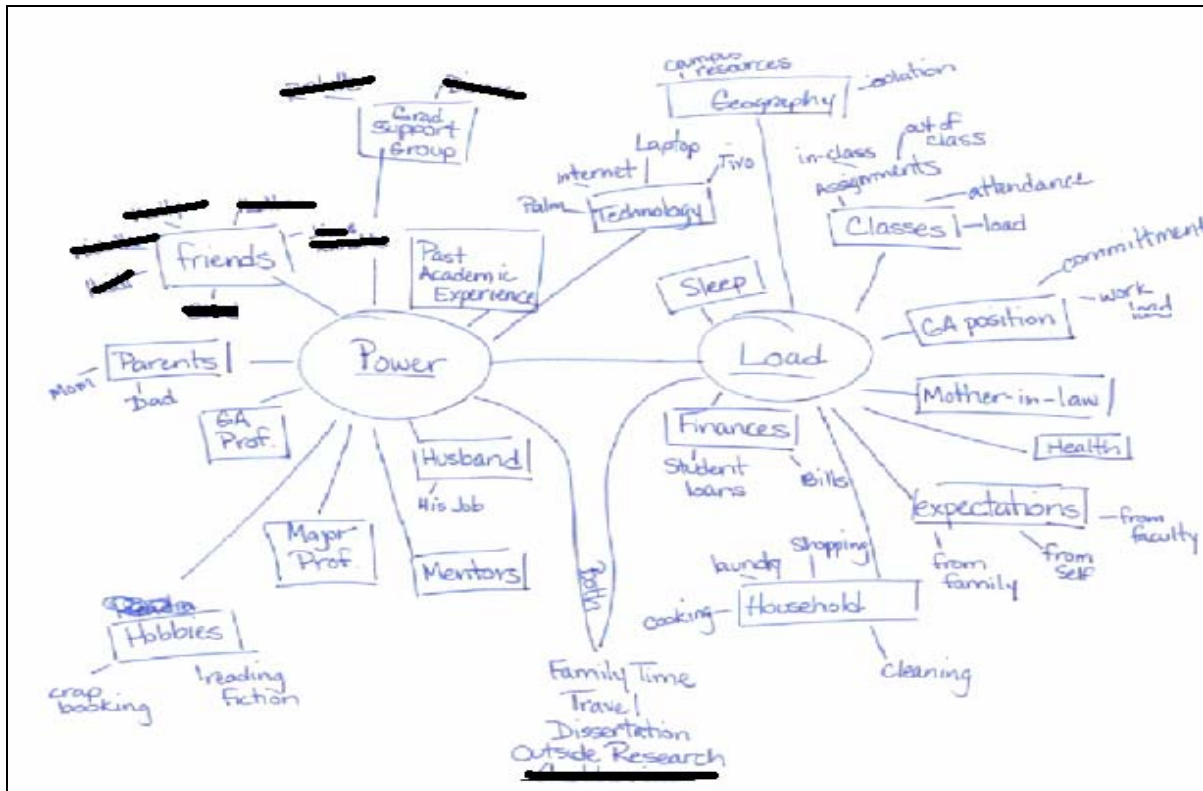


We created another form of data by constructing individual concept maps, which allowed us to each access and express our individual experiences (Visser, Stappers, van der Lugt, & Sanders, 2005). Novak and Gowin (1984), two leading researchers in concept mapping, assert that although not a complete representation of the relevant concepts and propositions that the learner knows, a concept map is a workable approximation from which an individual can consciously and deliberately build upon. Concept maps are most often used with students to determine learning and understanding (Kinchin & Hay, 2000; Santhanam, Leach, & Dawson, 1998; Stoddart, Abrams, Gasper,

& Canaday, 2000), but the method was employed in our situation because it provided a way of representing the relationship between concepts in our own minds (Santhanam et al.).

Concept mapping is either structured or non-structured. In a structured approach, individuals are given a fixed list of concepts, while in the non-structured approach only the major concept is prescribed (Martin & Kompf, 1996). We chose a non-structured approach, using load and power as guiding categories. We each produced a map reflective of our experiences during pregnancy and motherhood, giving us a way to make sense of our experiences since we often found ourselves visualizing a number of incidents at once, and describing them as interconnected. We produced similar maps, and Robin's map in Figure 2 is indicative of how we each represented our experience. Robin's map demonstrates how we illustrated linkages more precisely and as a result, provided a useful alternative perspective to traditional forms of data collection. We found the advantage of using concept maps in our study was the chance to show our thoughts in no particular order (McLay & Brown, 2003), and being able to constantly add to the maps as ideas occurred to us. It also provided a visual representation of our experience that caused us to reflect and consider ideas that were not at first apparent, such as the notion that something could likely be both a source of power and load.

Figure 2. Concept map of Robin's perceived load and power following the birth of her daughter, with names shielded.



The final form of data came from written narratives that provided rich data for understanding our interpersonal interaction, individual bias, social expectations, and cultural values (Smith & Keyton, 2001). Each of us wrote these after the dialogues and the creation of the concept maps. In the case of narratives written prior to our concept maps, we each decided what to write and we framed our narratives in terms of issues impacted by pregnancy and motherhood in two parts. First, we focused on memories during each trimester and in six month increments during the first year after the birth of our children. Second, we focused on memories related to the management of roles and responsibilities as a mother and graduate student. This was a way for us to express our thoughts on the events leading up to, during, and following our pregnancies as they related to our personal and academic lives. After the creation of the concept maps we continued to explore our experiences in narratives and used the maps as a way to identify specific issues that we wanted to develop through written expression.

The narratives brought together the platonic dialogues, concept maps, and artifacts into a written form that provided an outlet for identifying significant events and players related to the experiences surrounding our pregnancies. Because a dialogue with questions from others can lead and influence one's response, the written narratives provided a complementary alternative that afforded critical and systematic reflections of our personal and academic experiences, and caused us to gain further insight and understanding about who we were as women (Gough, 1999). Although it was not our intention, the writing of the narratives was cathartic, and a means for expressing our frustration and the sense of isolation we experienced as mothers and scholars.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data created challenges and opportunities that were based on a mixed approach. We employed inductive and deductive analysis approaches used by ethnographers, and in particular found our analysis guided by the work of analytic autoethnographers (e.g. Anderson, 2006).

After all the data were gathered we individually open coded the narratives and field notes, and subsequently the artifacts. We then meet to reconcile the open codes. For example, schoolwork, assignments, and papers were combined and represented by the term coursework. In some cases, we also found it necessary to separate initial codes into sub-codes, such as the original code of "school," which fell under load when we described commuting, course load, assistantships, and under power when describing classmates and faculty. By working together on this portion of the analysis, we were able to ensure that the final code was an accurate representation of our individual meanings. Once complete, we arranged the codes into two categories: load and power. This second step used coding that Schwandt (1997) described as content specific scheme. Thus, our codes were sorted based on a thorough study of the topic under investigation and driven by theoretical interests. Table 1 is an example of an initial list generated from data about our first trimesters.

Table 1

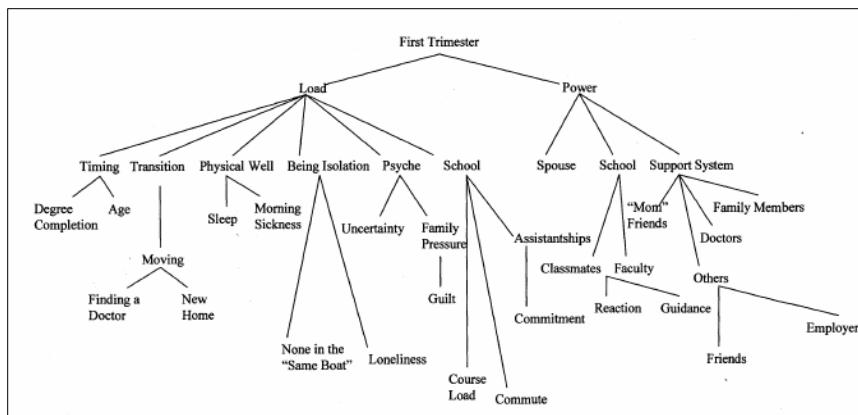
First Trimester Codes

LOAD	POWER
Physical Changes	Information
Lack of Sleep	Support
On-line Learning	Faculty
Stress	Husband
Pressure	Department
Coursework	In-laws
Revealing the News	Mom
Moving	Doctors
Decisions	Experts
Mother-in-law	Classmates
Isolation	Employers
Lonely	Friends
Obsessing	Dad
Assistantship	
Commuting	
Age	

We then shared these codes with a peer writing group of women in our graduate program. They first independently coded sections of the data then recoded for themes of power and load and then we compared the group’s analysis with our own. By doing so, we were able to determine if the inductive and deductive codes were accurate. After returning once again to the data to verify our analysis we were able to find common secondary codes that were generally representative headings of specific stories embedded within the larger narratives.

A final step in the analysis was the creation of a taxonomy (See Figure 3).

Figure 3. *Taxonomy based on data from Robin’s and Mo’s first trimester.*



As LeCompte (2000) points out, data analysis is a process of assembling a jigsaw puzzle. Borrowing from analytic autoethnography, taxonomies provided a logical structure of meaning and a way to organize and summarize information elicited from both of us during the data collection process. Most often taxonomies take the form of a hierarchical diagram containing subsets and further subsets. Although we understood that creating bits of data from larger narratives for coding could be problematic (Mello, 2002), the graphic representations provided, “an alternative to prose not only for conveying information but for dramatizing or emphasizing particular aspects of a study” (Wolcott, 1994, p. 31). The taxonomy was a contrasting companion to our written narratives and allowed for a complete view of data sets that were systematic in answering the research questions (Huberman & Miles, 1994).

Through collaborative efforts, the analysis led to a cogenerative ethnography, written in a “polyphonic text” (Tyler, 1986) in which each of our voices was valued as we developed unique perspectives on pregnancy and motherhood. Below, is a presentation of our experiences as graduate students and women situated within McClusky’s (1963, 1974) theory of margin.

Findings

Because of the volume of data, we have chosen excerpts from our written narratives and personal journal entries. They are the most illustrative and representative of the overall findings resulting from the analysis. Excerpts from our data are included in the following section to serve as exemplars under the headings of Power, Load, and a combination of both. Introductions to these excerpts are written in third person to maintain consistency and to prevent confusion as to who is speaking.

Sources of Power in Our Lives

In comparing our two experiences as mothers and doctoral students, we found reoccurring issues that though unique to each of us, had underlying similarities. The prominent examples of power in our data include: support from faculty, encouragement from spouses, and the importance of classmates or friends.

In the following excerpt from a narrative describing the weeks following the discovery that she was pregnant, Robin expressed how she was apprehensive about sharing the news of her pregnancy with the female faculty member she worked for as a graduate assistant. Robin had read stories in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* describing how to avoid mentioning your children in a job interview. She knew of studies describing women in academia who postponed childbearing and had heard about unsympathetic female faculty, who as Fisher-Lavell (1997) found, lacked understanding and consideration for students faced with negotiating the demands of family and home with their educations. Knowing that Dr. Tyson was a former provost and experienced university administrator, Robin expected a “greedy institution” response from her in which family and personal interest should take a backseat to academic loyalty and allegiance.

The next stop was Dr. Tyson's office. I was prepared to thank her for giving me the GA position during the winter and wishing her the best, but she surprised me. When I told her I was pregnant she hugged me, congratulated me, and asked me what I needed. I was surprised. She seemed like a hard line career women, an academic in the truest form, but I guess I forgot that she was a woman too. She was fabulous. Her support was my first exhale of the whole beginning to this experience.

The response Robin received from Dr. Tyson went well beyond that first discussion. Throughout her pregnancy Dr. Tyson supported Robin by giving her advice about how to balance school and family, gave her a portable crib for after the baby was born, and was at the hospital the day after Robin delivered. In a narrative written about her relationship with Dr. Tyson after the birth of Katie, Robin wrote,

I had figured she would give me that disapproving look like, "Robin I thought you were serious about your studies," but it wasn't like that at all. She lets me do a lot of my research work from home, is at least outwardly thrilled when I bring Katie to the office with me, and has even offered to baby sit. Whenever she sees Katie she says, "Can you say MaryAnn?"\ I don't even call her by her first name! She has been a constant source of reassurance, a woman to vent to and an individual to model myself after. I am so thankful that we were brought together, because without her I don't know if I would have made it.

For Mo, support from female faculty and faculty in general, was less specific. She does note however one instance where a female faculty member took the initiative to connect Mo with another graduate student in the department who had recently had a baby. In a dialogue between Robin and Mo, Mo described the support of faculty and fellow students.

One particular instance of support from a professor that I remember was when Nancy (professor) made a point of introducing me to Sue, a Ph.D. student who'd had a baby about a year earlier. As far as I remember, she was near the end of the program at that point. We exchanged phone numbers and email addresses and realized that we were both planning to go to an Adult Education conference in North Carolina in about a month's time. I was looking for a roommate to share the hotel room and Sue was still deciding whether to go. In the end we stayed together at the conference and talked a lot about what it was like to have a baby and be in the program. She said that she'd had a really good experience with the professors. Everyone had been supportive and it hadn't been a problem.

Robin too, found support from other graduate students, especially when her husband, Robert was unexpectedly hospitalized on their daughter's first birthday.

I have met a few women who have had babies while getting their Ph.D.s but it's tough to talk with them because our schedules are so full. Where I have really found support academically is with my dissertation support group. Although I am the only mom, they have helped me with everything, from comps to babysitting when Robert was in the hospital...

Another source of power that we found reoccurring throughout our narratives was the support we from our spouses. While we both admitted that there were occasions our husbands added to our load, they overwhelmingly fell on the side of power. In Robin's case, her husband moved with her to Georgia so she could attend graduate school. He negotiated with his employer to telecommute from his office in Tampa, Florida, and left behind a well-established network of colleagues, friends, and family. In a narrative, Robin describes how Robert was instrumental in her academic success.

I joke that it's Robert's fault I am here. When I was finishing my masters he asked me one day why I wasn't getting my Ph.D. Well, I didn't have a good answer, and here I am! Robert is my rock. Where I can doubt my abilities and why I am in this program, he has never questioned my work. He's my cheerleader, spiritual counselor, comic relief, and press secretary. He pushes me to succeed and helps to make it happen. For example, I have dreaded taking statistics since I enrolled, and finally I could no longer avoid it. Robert's the math geek, he can do anything with numbers, so he has tutored me. He walks me through all the examples and sample tests. He explains, re-explains, and explains once more, and makes sure that I am prepared for those tests. He could tell me it's my problem, but he doesn't. I always joke that he should have some graduate credits by the time I'm done.

Mo's narratives also identify her husband, Peter, as a source of power throughout her doctoral studies.

Peter is my single greatest source of support and strength. He is my cheering section and makes it possible for me to be in graduate school. Everything from talking to me about my hopes and fears, to basic logistical support like sharing childcare and making it possible for me to attend night classes which entails a three hour commute. Me being in graduate school is a major part of his load!

The examples from the data exemplify the impact of power in our lives as we work to find a way to manage our roles as graduate students and responsibilities as wives and future mothers. The influence of faculty was significant and the support of fellow students and our spouses was critical to our ability to manage the stress related to pregnancy and motherhood.

Sources of Load in Our Lives

In a narrative describing her thoughts after finding out she was pregnant, Robin illustrates her feelings of uncertainty. She had been trying to get pregnant for 2 years, so when it happened she was happy, but she began to doubt her ability to manage this new role with her role as graduate student.

How long would I be unable to take classes? How did this affect my enrollment? How would the faculty in the department respond? I had been in the program one semester and now I was pregnant...would they take me seriously? I worried I had made a terrible mistake in uprooting my life for a crazy idea of getting my doctorate.

Mo offers another example in a narrative describing how stress manifested in her life. For her, the issue of time, as a factor in her decision to become pregnant, was a cause for significant internal stress.

I spent the first fall of the program really agonizing over the “timing” decision. When should I get pregnant? When would be the best, most perfect time? I was obsessing over it! If I waited for another year, I could have my degree almost completed. But then I would have let one whole year go by of my last few remaining years of “child bearing.” That was a gamble I wasn’t comfortable with. After all, I had so many friends and family that had really had problems getting pregnant. I wasn’t naïve enough to think that it would happen just as soon as I wanted it to. Statistically (wow there are those statistics again!) it takes an average of 5-6 months to get pregnant so I should count on it taking at least that length of time – if not longer. The calculations were going on over and over in my head. Being new in Atlanta, I found myself an Ob/Gyn and asked all the timing questions. The bottom line is that the Ob said I should start as soon as possible... I ended up getting pregnant near the beginning of the spring semester, and logically speaking probably at the worst possible time during the program because my course load was so heavy. It was really a huge effort to get through that semester because I didn’t feel well much of the time, and needed to sleep between 11 and 13 hours a night. That doesn’t leave much time for getting work done! I was really exhausted a lot of the time.

After Mason was born, Mo faced new challenges against time. These challenges were described in a dialogue with Robin.

For me the greatest burden is the time crunch that I feel every day. Will I be able to finish my readings during Mason’s naptime? Could I possibly squeeze in a few important emails? If Mason is sick and can’t go to daycare, how will I get to class? How will I get my work done?

External stress also found its way into our lives. In Robin's case, external stress was prominent in her memory, and continued to challenge her as she headed into her last semesters of her program. While her relationship with her mother-in-law had always been respectable, carrying the first grandchild added a lot of pressure to their relationship. The stress of this relationship permeated the choices Robin made regarding her academic career and as Robin discovered, support from family was more important than she had imagined. In a narrative, Robin described her mother-in-law.

...Robert's mom is relentless with her questioning about the baby, delivery, nursery, breastfeeding, school, work hours, childcare, natural childbirth, god parents, religion, baby names, Robert's job, maternity leave-for me and him, the Christening, my mom visiting, my dad visiting, the crib, the shower thank you notes...do I need to go on? She's had three kids, but in her tale, everything went on hold when she had each of her children. She took college courses at night, one at a time, got her undergrad after the second was born and didn't work outside the home until the third one began school.

Even though Robin knew there was love behind her mother-in-law's inquiries, and she had Robin's best interest in mind, it nonetheless was a great source of frustration and feelings of insecurity and defensiveness. Robin's narrative continued,

While I don't doubt she had her hands full, she can't understand my own issues. She said to me throughout this pregnancy that "things will change when the baby gets here and your priorities will change." She was convinced I would quit school and stay home with Katie, because that's what she did. And then I mentioned once that my baby would be two or three when I graduated and she would get to attend graduation. My mother-in-law's response was, "Oh, I'll stay home with her." And I thought, oh no you won't! I was doing this whole thing in part FOR Katie, and hell if she wasn't going to be there. I wanted her to see it and even if she doesn't remember, maybe somehow it will be implanted into her subconscious...my mom went to college (three times no less) and is a doctor. So, my mother-in-law was, for me, always on my shoulder. If I didn't follow through I knew that even if she didn't come right out and say "I told you so" she'd be thinking it, and worse yet, I'd be thinking it. After Katie was born there were a few times I felt like giving up and I'd think of my mother-in-law and I'd be pissed and tired and want to give up, but it kept me motivated to prove to her that it was possible to have this baby, give it a great start and do what I wanted to do – go to school.

For Mo, health issues created a different form of external load and were a significant issue. As she described in a narrative, her health began to dictate her ability to manage her studies as well as influencing her internal load.

The commute back and forth to Athens from Atlanta was becoming very uncomfortable with my big belly nearing the steering wheel as the weeks wore on, but I had no thoughts of slowing down or not finishing the semester. Then one weekend, less than a month into the semester, I started getting premature contractions at midnight on a Saturday night. At first the doctor said I needed to stay on bed rest for a few days and then could return to my normal routine. But as soon as I got back up on my feet again the contractions would start up. I was literally not able to even sit up for more than ten to fifteen minutes at a time without the contractions starting up. Each time the contractions started, off my husband and I went to the hospital so I could be monitored and they could give me some drugs to stop the contractions. Of course many times we were in the hospital overnight. At least I had a bed to lie down in. Poor Peter would be stuck in a wooded chair all night. We pretty quickly wised up and began bringing a pillow for Peter whenever we headed to the hospital. This all started when I was only 30 weeks pregnant, a full 10 weeks early. It could have been a very bad situation if Mason had been born that early. Some babies don't survive.

Even with a high-risk pregnancy, Mo was still optimistic that she could continue with her program and current course load. Mo described her thoughts after being put on bed rest.

At first it looked like I would be returning to school within a week of the first hospital visit, but it quickly became apparent that I wouldn't be going back at all while I was still pregnant. I would be on bed rest for the remainder of the pregnancy. In the beginning of the bed rest, I had the misguided notion that I could continue to participate in the classes via email and WebCT. My husband hooked up a wireless remote on my laptop. Within days this idea also faded into the realm of unrealistic expectations. I couldn't type while lying down, or see the screen very well, nor could I sit up for more than a few minutes without the contractions starting. I spent a week just typing a one-page assignment in bursts of a few minutes at a time. I had to give up.

As reality set in, Mo began to realize that her plan had to change, and she had to rethink her life, and her future. The stress of the pregnancy and now the need to put graduate school on hold caused Mo to realize she could no longer control the situation. She experienced increased demands and time conflicts resulting in depression and increased stress and anxiety.

Realizing that I would have to leave three classes was difficult to accept. My professors kindly agreed to leave my grades as "incomplete" so that I could actually finish the courses after Mason was born. This was a very difficult adjustment to make in my expectations of my program plan. I had started the program with a clear idea of when I would need to take each

course in order to complete the degree in a time-efficient manner. Now the plan was really up in the air, especially since some courses are only offered once per year and other courses must be taken in a certain sequence. For some reason I really felt emotional about it and cried a few times about it. I had to let go of something important to me. I had to let go of the idea that I was in control.

Power and Load...Can It Be Both?

Our study also revealed that power and load were not always discrete entities. We found that often times a code could be found under both simultaneously, or at different points in our experiences. For example, while friends were viewed as support by each of us, they were also identified as load when supporting friends demonstrated a lack of understanding about our situations or demanded too much of our time. While course work is a demand placed upon all students, in our case the expectations regarding out-of-class work resulted in load compounded by issues with childcare.

In Robin's case, juggling a tight class schedule with her demands as a mother were overwhelming at times.

I used to volunteer for everything, had no problem coming early or staying late, but now with Katie, and Robert and I sharing kid duties, it's different. A major out of class assignment like a group project involving outside agencies, interviews, analysis, writing, and presentation is almost overwhelming. I know that our department schedules classes in the evening to meet the needs of its "adult learners," but that schedule isn't best for everyone. Robert works nights, and so we have to arrange a split shift on my class nights. I have about 20 minutes, from the time class ends, and when Robert has to be back on the clock. I feel like a slacker when I say, I have to leave because I have to go home to the baby.

The feelings Robin experienced were often mediated by faculty who understood her ability to cope with increasing personal and academic demands, as well as her ability to recognize school as a source of personal pride, and an outlet for temporarily escaping the demands of her child. Robin related those feelings in her narrative.

When I went to school those first few months, I really looked forward to it. I kind of felt bad about the selfish feeling of I am going and I want to, and I want to leave Katie with her dad for a few hours. When I got to school I wasn't seen as a mom, I didn't have to nurse, burp, or clean up after anyone and I could lose myself in my work.

The influences we found in the narratives and highlighted in the taxonomy that were both load and power were a surprise to us. Our reflections revealed that while we originally placed an influence exclusively in one camp or another, our narratives exposed the fine line between load and power. All of the excerpts in this paper are only a fraction of the total story of our experiences as graduate students and mothers. From our data, we

have been able to provide exemplars of our experiences that illustrate the power and load we maintain in our dual roles.

Discussion

As we wrote and exchanged various drafts of our narratives, and discussed the stories in great detail, we acknowledged that these narratives not only revealed our individual voices, they also exposed more general senses of self evoked by our reflections of our pregnancies, labor, delivery, and child rearing. The reflections revealed how the actions, perceptions, and words of others in our lives helped to define our identities as women, students, and mothers. Furthermore, the use of the theory of margin (McClusky, 1963) provided a way to organize our experiences, although we found it insufficient for explaining the duality of load and power.

Our data revealed some of the barriers that exist for women moving along an academic path. The physical and psychological demands of our pregnancy, social and self-expectations, and policies with certain standards of practice were, for us, specific barriers we faced in our own experience. Based on this study it is clear that although individuals within our university supported our choices, the institution often times expects family responsibilities to be taken care of without interrupting studies and with very little need for institutional adaptation (Home & Hinds, 2000). Mo's medical needs and the scheduling demands faced by both Robin and Mo caused concerns about meeting university requirements. The findings support the work of Carney-Crompton and Tan (2002), who found that such increases in roles, demands, and time conflicts have been associated with high stress, anxiety, and depression for adult female students and help to explain why female doctoral students are more likely than their male classmates to drop out before finishing their degree and take longer to complete their dissertations (Scroeder & Mynatt, 1993).

Hodgson and Simoni (1995) note that female graduate students experience more stress and distress than their male counterparts do. The idea of stress was a strand that ran throughout the narratives, and as a result, it is a major theme in our findings. These stresses were not isolated in one period of time; instead, we found that stress factors were identified throughout our pregnancies and after the birth of our children. Like McClusky (1963) suggests, we found stress factors naturally separated into internal and external dimensions. Internally generated stress was a result of anxiety, in-decision, self-imposed pressure, and even fear, which manifested out of our multiple roles. Examples of internal stress included the uncertainty of timing around our decisions to have children, the pressure we put on ourselves to manage our responsibilities, and the sense of uncertainty about our futures. This guilt is similar to the experiences reported by female faculty. These women feel guilty about spending too little time with their children, while simultaneously experiencing guilt for their inability to maintain pre-baby work habits (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004).

To combat the stress and load of academic and family responsibilities, women might choose to seek out and welcome networks of support, both in and out of the academy. In our case, we found each other, as well as female faculty who experienced similar feelings as mothers and scholars. Support from academic advisors is essential to the continued success of the women they advise. Through resources and training, faculty

may be better able to anticipate the load of female students who become mothers and suggest better ways to manage the needs of these women. Hagedorn (1999) suggests a need for developing a more gender friendly environment. Our study found that the role of female faculty was critical to maintaining margin in our lives, and for providing support and direction in a male dominated environment. Seeing these successful women as mothers and scholars was reassuring and went against the war stories we had heard of female academics getting squeezed out of universities. This notion is supported by Thagaard (1994) and Maher, Ford, and Thompson (2004) who found that female supervisors in mentoring roles were particularly important to female students. The significance of these women, according to Reskin (1978) and Davis and Austin (1990) may be a result of female faculty's understanding of concerns important to female students and the knowledge that these students benefit from female role models.

Likewise, we found that the academic department makes a difference in the support provided by faculty members. The adult education faculty practiced what they preached and provided a supportive and welcoming environment for our new additions and us, but we know that this is more likely the exception than the rule. This support was sheer circumstance and not a direct result of something the university did to prepare advisors and faculty. The support we found was the luck of the draw and being in a department where adult experience is honored and valued as foundational to their work. Had this not been the case, our experience might have been vastly different. It is critical for faculty to understand the graduate student's capacity for coping with increasing personal and academic demands (Polson, 2003).

Our findings indicate that load and power do, as McClusky (1963) proposes, influence an individual's ability to succeed educationally, but our research also revealed that McClusky's theory fails to consider the effect of an influence that can serve as a source of power as well as load in an individual's life. In relation to this is the stagnant nature of the theory. Our data indicated that not only do the influences have the ability to fluctuate from load to power, but the strength of those influences can vary on a daily or even hourly basis. The weight of each influence or its ability to act upon us differs. For example, not having transportation to school, can be an inconvenience but may not be a significant load on a normal week. The same influence on the day of a final group presentation may be considerable.

The theory also does little to address the weight of each influence in relation to the sum of influences. Although our concept maps and the individual taxonomies indicate that we both faced more load in our lives than power, our outcomes do not reflect failure to achieve, instead the impact and strength of the power had greater significance than the sum of the parts. As a result, McClusky's (1963) formula of $M=L/P$ cannot be converted to a simple mathematical equation. For example, Home and Hind's (2000) study of 453 "multi-role, female students" found, a lack of finances was significantly more demanding on women than other factors such as managing class assignments, job responsibilities, or family needs. Regardless of the amount of perceived power, a woman's financial means made educational success most difficult. Therefore, determining the academic achievement of female graduate students is not simply a process of dividing her total number of load influences by the total number of power influences. By doing so, the lived experiences of female graduate students are inadequately represented in this way. Instead, this theory provides a lens from which to assess in its entirety, the influences that

act upon and on behalf of a woman contemplating and then taking on motherhood during graduate school.

In our situations, we struggled to balance our personal and academic demands, and the stress created had consequences on our physical, psychological, and interpersonal selves. The data suggested that while it may not be possible to “plan” a pregnancy, it is necessary to consider its possibility during graduate school, and its impact on the woman, her education goals, and its effect on the couple and family as a whole. A female graduate student contemplating pregnancy needs to speak with her partner, trusted friends and faculty, her physician, and family members to gain a more complete picture of how pregnancy and motherhood will change her life and the lives of others. Our research confirms Chartrand’s (1992) contention that support from family is critical when adults are making the decision to stay in school or drop out.

Implications

Based on our research, we have identified implications for women, like ourselves, who consider having children while studying at the Ph.D. level. Specifically, this study reveals issues to consider when contemplating motherhood in relation to academic and personal demands. We also address implications for scholars as they examine and add to the dialogue surrounding McClusky’s (1963) theory of margin. Finally, we comment on our role as researcher/participants and our struggle to organize and specify our methodology through existing approaches to qualitative research.

The findings of this study bring to light the need for further research and exploration of the lived experience of women and mothers in graduate school. The increasing number of women in graduate school choosing to have children calls for deeper understanding of the unique experience and needs of this population. This investigation also extends understanding of McClusky’s (1963) theory of margin by revealing that the educational participation of women like us might be unpredictable given multiple variables and the load-specific and power-specific value placed on each.

Women doctoral students, along with their families and peers, the institution, and faculty must create structures that sustain them through stressful situations and devise ways to meet the challenges of graduate studies (Maher et al., 2004). Our hope is that the issues raised in this study will increase awareness of the experiences of one specific group of students in higher education. We are optimistic that by sharing our stories we can open a conversation with a vision of enhancing access to appropriate educational provisions and services and develop creative solutions for women juggling motherhood and scholarship.

This study challenges adult educators and institutions of higher education to re-examine the existing supports for female graduate students, but more than anything, this study challenges the two of us, as students and mothers, to examine our choices, our vices, and our virtues. Through cogenerative ethnography we have been able to see more clearly how we came to be mothers in graduate school, how that has shaped our experiences as scholars, and how our role as mothers has forever changed our scholarship. We found that although McClusky (1963) may be on the right track with the notion that the more load a person has can hinder his/her ability to succeed in education, it is not the whole picture. In our cases, the chips were stacked against us, but our internal

power and support from a significant few resulted in two, proud, but exhausted, soon to be, doctor-moms.

As novice researchers, we began this study unaware of the struggle it would present in terms of finding and naming our methodological approaches. What started as a self-exploration of mutual experiences through a theory found in adult education ended in a realization that we could not rely on existing methods of data collection, analysis, or representation. The reflexive nature of our study (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983), the co-construction of meaning, the integral role of theory, and our approach to analysis and representation resulted in the development of a mixed or integrated approach. One challenge with mixing our methods was in finding the confidence to play with well-established approaches to collecting, analyzing, and representing our data. Moreover, mixing methods requires clear rationales for why an approach is used, and how that approach supports our purposes, and research questions. Although challenges existed, the mixing of methods allowed us to look at our research from many different angles and means, and we think it resulted in a more appropriate approach to the problem (Anaf & Sheppard, 2007).

Drawing from autoethnography served our need to be evocative, self-reflective, and authentic in our narratives (Ellis & Bochner, 2000), while using cogenerative dialogues (Roth, Lawless, & Tobin, 2000) incorporated two voices and gave room for us to build off each other's contributions. Drawing from ethnographic work in education, we incorporated the use of data collection techniques such as concept maps that provided a unique source of visual data derived from reflective processes that occurred over time. When combined with our on-going dialogues, written text, and artifacts, the concept maps offered a way for us to visually represent the interconnectiveness of our experiences and have potential heuristic value for other researchers using a method of inquiry similar to our cogenerative ethnography. Analytic autoethnography guided our application of theory to self-reflective narratives, and validated our use of more traditional analysis methods, such as taxonomies.

This collaboration has been a long journey that started with our children in their infancy, today our children have started school and we continue to grow and develop as scholars. The experience has been one that has expanded our interpretation of adult education theory and our exploration of qualitative inquiry and offers perspectives to others who are looking to mix their qualitative approaches.

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