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Abstract

In this autoethnography I share my lived experiences of merging motherhood and doctoral studies and reveal the journey of imperfectly weaving the identities of mother, wife, doctoral student, and academic. I present seven vignettes to provide glimpses of experience and a window into not only the challenges and tensions of intersecting motherhood and doctoral studies, but to also share the joys, strengths, and benefits of embracing these multiple identities. The literature and autoethnographic accounts offer insights into the contradiction that is mothering during doctoral studies, as academic mothers simultaneously carry guilt and gratitude, and acknowledge the sacrifice and privilege that is motherhood and researching. In this paper I seek to provide nuanced insights into the meanings I made as I negotiated the identities/roles/positions, of mother, wife, doctoral student, and academic.

Keywords

mother, motherhood, doctoral student, academia, autoethnography, identities

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Merging Motherhood and Doctoral Studies: An Autoethnography of Imperfectly Weaving Identities

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In this autoethnography I share my lived experiences of merging motherhood and doctoral studies and reveal the journey of imperfectly weaving the identities of mother, wife, doctoral student, and academic. I present seven vignettes to provide glimpses of experience and a window into not only the challenges and tensions of intersecting motherhood and doctoral studies, but to also share the joys, strengths, and benefits of embracing these multiple identities. The literature and autoethnographic accounts offer insights into the contradiction that is mothering during doctoral studies, as academic mothers simultaneously carry guilt and gratitude, and acknowledge the sacrifice and privilege that is motherhood and researching. In this paper I seek to provide nuanced insights into the meanings I made as I negotiated the identities/roles/positions, of mother, wife, doctoral student, and academic.

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Introduction

This is an autoethnographic article written to share my lived experiences as a mother, wife, doctoral student, and academic working in Australian academia. It is acknowledged that the experiences of academic mothers are not monolithic and there is no assumption made that everyone is experiencing the same things (Guy & Arthur, 2020). Janzen (2016) reminds us, “no two experiences are exactly alike, but within the sharing of experiences, others may benefit” (p. 1508). In this article, I seek to share my experience of how I merged, managed, and experienced the spheres of motherhood and academia, as I journeyed through my Ph.D. Yoo (2020) poses the question, “I am a mother, a wife and a scholar, but what does it mean?” (p. 3178). This paper seeks to provide insights into the meanings I made as I negotiated the identities/roles/positions, of mother, wife, doctoral student, and academic.

Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, and Lunde (2017) call for the need to better understand the personal struggles and victories women experience as they intersect their identities during their doctoral studies. It is acknowledged that sharing the lesser-known stories of motherhood can provide glimpses into the hidden benefits of mothering in the academy (Yoo, 2020). Eisenbach (2013) claims that there are few studies that seek to reveal the areas of tension that exist for mothers within doctoral programs, while Huopalainen and Satama (2019) declare, “we know less about how early career researchers perform maternal and professional tensions in their ‘earthy’ everyday lives” (p. 101). This paper endeavours to reveal not only the tensions that exist, but also the joys and benefits of intertwining motherhood and doctoral studies.

Forming and Maintaining Identities: Mother, Wife, Doctoral Student, Academic

My experience of undertaking a Ph.D., is inextricably interwoven with my experiences of pregnancy and motherhood. Charon (2010) claims identity formation is a process and an ongoing development; identities are the names we call ourselves and our identities are important because they guide our actions. My merged, intersecting, and at times competing identities as mother, wife, doctoral student, and academic evolved throughout the Ph.D. journey and guided my decision making and actions within the spheres of both mothering and researching. As Burrow, Cross, Olson Beal, and Smith (2020) state, “we can never be just *one* or *the other* but must constantly search out ways in which we can capitalize on the reality (wanted or not) that our ‘mother’ identity impacts our ‘scholar’ identity and vice versa” (p. 4247).

A person’s identity arises at the intersection between symbolic behaviour and social organisation (Strauss, 1959). The labels of “mother” and “doctoral student” are therefore an identity construction that is proposed by self and recognised and imposed by others (Strauss, 1959). An individual’s self is a multi-layered phenomenon (Denzin, 1992). Firstly, there is the phenomenological self that describes the inner stream of consciousness of a person in a social situation (Denzin, 1992). Secondly, there is the interactional self that refers to the self that is presented and displayed to another in a concrete sequence of events (Denzin, 1992). Thirdly, there is the linguistic self, conducted as a person fills in the empty personal pronouns of “I” and “Me” with personal, biographical, and emotional meaning (Denzin, 1992). Fourthly, there is the material self which consists of all the material objects a person calls their own at that moment, in time. Finally, there is the ideological self, and this relates to the broader cultural and historical meanings that surround the definition of the individual in a particular group or social situation (Denzin, 1992).

Social interaction at an individual, group, organisational, and structural level impacts how we think about ourselves and how and why we behave as we do (Stern & Porr, 2011). Indeed, other people play a formative role in creating a self-identity because identity is not constructed in isolation; instead, identities are developed, negotiated, and lost within the context of social interactions (Charon, 2010). Within these social interactions, labels are given and received such as “mother,” “doctoral student,” “wife,” “academic,” and each action and word are a statement that represents each person’s view of the identities of all the others (Charon, 2010). Starr (2010) acknowledges that identity demands a process of infinite interpretation, reinterpretation of experiences, circumstances, and conditions emphasising the interconnectedness of past and present, lived and living. It is imperative to recognise other people do not always understand what someone’s identity is, and that identity can be ambiguous and require further interpretation (Charon, 2010). Salerno (2013) extends on this idea and states that people are constantly playing roles and that these performances are based on what the individual perceives their role to be.

Students undertaking doctoral studies are trying to forge a professional identity that is new to them (Kurtz-Costes et al., 2006). Mothers undertaking doctoral studies are challenged to intersect their developing academic identity with one’s core self and other identities such as mother, wife, and professional and this can cause tensions and conflicts to arise (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017). This is because academic mothers are endeavouring to simultaneously meet the expectations of being both an “ideal doctoral student” and a “good mother” (Raddon, 2002). The notion of the ideal, highly productive worker is a workplace norm that pervades the academic environment (Kulp, 2016). So, too, is the notion of being a “good mother,” who willingly sacrifices their own needs for their children (Kulp, 2016). These cultural assumptions about motherhood, intensive parenting, and being a “good mother,” places additional stress and pressure on women who are trying to navigate and fulfil their multiple roles and identities as

mother and doctoral student (Lynch, 2008). One's identity as a mother in the home and as a doctoral student in the academic community can often be at odds with one another (Eisenbach, 2013). However, despite the many challenges that exist when merging motherhood and doctoral studies, there are also opportunities to embrace and intersect each identity, bringing mothering into academic spaces and academia into mothering spaces, as shared in this paper.

Methodological Decision Making

Denzin (2009) makes a claim that, "in the social sciences there is only interpretation. Nothing speaks for itself" (p. 85). I made the choice to use autoethnography to reveal my lived experiences as a doctoral student and mother and to share my interpretation and representation of events regarding undertaking a Ph.D. while being pregnant and child rearing. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) state, "objective reality can never be captured. We can know a thing only through its representations" (p. 5). Autoethnographic writing provides a representation of experience to be presented and an understanding about a particular phenomenon to be revealed (Mendez, 2013). The multiple layers of identity, the meanings associated with them and the contexts in which they occur can be explored using autoethnography (Starr, 2010), making it an appropriate methodological choice for this paper which seeks to explore the merging of identities as mother and doctoral student. Yoo (2020) proposes the use of autoethnography as an effective methodology for investigating mothering in the academy, as it can allow researchers to present vivid accounts of personal experience, authentic insider perspectives, and shed light on the broader cultural phenomena of mothering in the academy.

Autoethnography was fit for purpose as it enabled the exploration of a specific phenomenon – merging motherhood and doctoral studies – to be examined based on my own subjective experiences (Haynes, 2011). Autoethnography allows for the capturing of highly personal, emotional and in-depth insights that would otherwise remain hidden (Wall, 2008). With the hidden becoming visible, autoethnography "forces researchers to be vulnerable" (Porschitz & Siler, 2017, p. 569). However, it is acknowledged by Emerald and Carpenter (2015) that there are risks involved in declaring your own vulnerability. The hope is that the researcher's vulnerability in telling their story will evoke emotional responses from the readers and bring meaning and understanding to both their lives (Ellingson & Ellis, 2008). Through using autoethnography it allows female academics to embrace their vulnerabilities and to provide an intimate glimpse of their struggles with work/life balance (Yoo, 2020).

In writing and reading autoethnographically we are challenged to question cultural truths and institutional structures (Giorgio, 2013). Autoethnography provides for the critical engagement of the self as socially constructed, reconstructed, and deconstructed (Hickey & Austin, 2007). In writing this autoethnographic paper I have sought to look outward at a world beyond my own, while also gazing inwards and seeking to understand my situated position within it (Schwandt, 2001). There is a common stereotype of academic motherhood as negative, oppressive, and exclusive; however, this is not the only narrative (Huopalainen & Satama, 2019). Huopalainen and Satama (2019) critically ask whether motherhood could be a transformative practice that strengthens and develops mothers as professionals too? I believe that it can. It is not to deny the challenges, guilt and insecurities that exist as an academic mother, but it also seeks to acknowledge the joy, beauty, strength and resilience that can be experienced. Through merging motherhood and doctoral studies there are "silver linings and dark clouds" (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004, p. 241). Brand (2015) writes, "as humans we cast our identity in a narrative form as a way of expressing ourselves and our world to one another" (p. 517). In the following section I (re)present chronologically ordered autoethnographic accounts in the form of vignettes to share my story. Polkinghorne (1995) proposes that we configure the narrative to draw together happenings and integrate them into a temporally

organised whole. While these chronologically structured vignettes share life stories and may appear tidy and slick, they are actually a patchwork of impressions pieced together to present a full text (Barone, 2001). Vignettes have been used to examine my lived experiences to provide a window through which the reader can gain an understanding of the insight (Pitard, 2016). Furthermore, embedding autoethnographic vignettes is used with the intention of creating stories to stimulate an emotional response and provoke understanding from the readers (Humphreys, 2005). Autoethnographic stories have been combined with theoretical insights from the literature to recognise the meaningful interplay that occurs between their constructs (Huopalainen & Satama, 2019).

Vignette 1: Researching Until Birthing

I begin maternity leave from my full-time academic position, five weeks before my first-born baby is due. I embrace the nesting phase of expectant motherhood; preparing for my baby, creating a nursery, purchasing a pram, and getting a capsule installed in my car. I also embark on the next iteration of data collection for my Ph.D. I want to utilise this “free time.” This in-between space, between finishing work and the baby’s arrival. I send emails, make phone calls to prospective research participants and schedule interviews. My heavily pregnant body visits early childhood sites to conduct interviews with kindergarten teachers as I engage in the process of data collection, prepare audio files, and send them in for transcription during these final weeks of pregnancy. I undertake my final interview for this iteration of data collection on the day before my due date.

My academic identity was established prior to the birth of my first child. I was employed fulltime as a Level A: Associate Lecturer in Early Childhood Education. Alongside my academic position, I had been enrolled in my Ph.D. as a part-time student for 2.5 years. I was using symbolic interactionism as my theoretical lens and grounded theory as my methodology, to research how early childhood teachers working in a kindergarten setting manage their changing roles with digital technologies (Schriever, Simon, and Donnison, 2020). Since beginning my Ph.D., I had achieved the milestone of confirmation and had ethical clearance for my study. Low and Damian Martin (2019) write that the common narrative of academic success is founded by a specific form of resilience and a politics of coping which values particular forms of work and recognises certain forms of commitment as valid and valuable. Prior to entering motherhood, I was achieving Ph.D. milestones ahead of schedule and was determined to maintain my pace. I was in the fortunate position to be able to take maternity leave from my paid employment; however, I made the decision to not take maternity leave from my Ph.D. Instead, I wanted to maintain a visible commitment to my studies and maximise the time I had while on maternity leave to progress my doctoral studies.

It is acknowledged by Lund (2012) that the failure to conduct research places academics at a serious disadvantage and the ideal academic performs like a productive, disembodied machine who publishes in A-journals. Disadvantaging myself, taking myself outside the academic arena and taking time away from my Ph.D. did not feel like a viable option. My dual identities as mother and doctoral student lead to experiencing the pressure of constant productivity (Mirick & Wladkowski, 2018) and I sought to push forward with data collection up until the day before my due date. I used semi-structured, in-depth interviews to gain an understanding of the early childhood teacher’s experiences regarding managing their changing roles with digital technologies (Schriever, 2021). However, I was certainly not a disembodied machine, rather I embodied a nine-month pregnant body: heavy, sore, and ready to give birth.

My academic identity as a doctoral student, intersected with my expectant-mother-to-be identity as I undertook data collection, engaged with research participants, conducted interviews and read interview transcripts.

Vignette 2: Bringing Motherhood into Academic Spheres

My newborn baby accompanies me to attend a supervision meeting with my principal Ph.D. supervisor on campus. We are both warmly welcomed into the academic space of my supervisor's office. We speak of babies, data analysis and the next steps forward to progress my Ph.D. When my baby is three months old, I attend a two-day Higher Degree by Research (HDR) Day hosted by my university. My husband cares for our baby on site, while I attend each workshop, and present my own roundtable session focusing on the challenges associated with data collection. During the scheduled morning tea and lunch break I excuse myself from my peers, meet with my husband and nurse my baby. I am appreciative of the university's acceptance of having my husband and baby on site to facilitate my participation in professional learning. It is a mixing and merging of identities and roles, physically bringing my mothering identity into my academic sphere.

Much of my academic work took place in the private, mothering spaces of my home, but there were also numerous occasions where mothering took place in academic spaces. Motherhood can be viewed as a shared caring practice, in a context of shared parenthood that involves partners, other caring agents and support structures crucial to enabling us to live a life on our own terms and to develop our careers (Huopainen & Satama, 2019). My attendance at an HDR day was important in maintaining my connection to my study, peers, and professional learning opportunities. It would not have been possible without the enabling support of my husband and the structural support of the university, which allowed me to fulfil both my mothering and academic roles within the one physical space.

In other instances, my supervisor acted as a caring agent, welcoming my baby and I into his academic space to enable supervision meetings with a plus one. Palmer and Leberman (2009) recognise women who are negotiating multiple identities rely on strong support networks to provide hands on support for childcare and for understanding how important different roles are to an individual's sense of self and achievement. Engaging in the intellectual space of my doctoral studies was an important element of maintaining my self-identity as a researcher and a mother (Dickson, 2018). Women in academia require a conceptualisation of identity that is dynamic, multidimensional, complex, and socially developed (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017). As I sought to embrace the dual roles and intersecting identities of mother and doctoral student, I was fortunate to be supported by individuals and the institution to bring my identity as a mother into my academic sphere in order to progress my doctoral studies.

Vignette 3: The Material Self as Mother and Doctoral Student

Packing the nappy bag: In go the nappies, wipes, change mat, spare outfit, academic journal articles, notebook, highlighter, and pen. It is a physical and material merging of identities and roles. As a mother I am responsible for my child and his wellbeing and pack all of the baby paraphilia that enables me to meet his needs during an outing. As a Ph.D. student I am in a space of knowledge seeking, learning, untangling methodological choices, theories and immersing myself in the literature. In merging doctoral studies and motherhood,

I “pack for all occasions” and always include a couple of journal articles in my nappy bag so that when the opportunity arises and my baby is settled, or asleep, I can take out an article and utilise these precious moments of quiet time to attempt to progress my Ph.D.

Negotiating motherhood while conducting research required extensive self-regulation and discipline, along with a willingness to live in the moment and be flexible in all situations (Huopalainen & Satama, 2019). Merging motherhood and doctoral studies required adaption across multiple contexts, as I endeavoured to maximise any and all opportunities I had to work on my study, while simultaneously meeting the needs of my child. In alignment with my own experiences, Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, and Lunde’s (2017) research reveals mothers undertaking doctoral studies come up with creative ways to carve out times in their day to progress their research. One measure I took to carve out time for my studies was in preparation for going for a walk: I would put the baby in his stroller, along with the journal articles I was currently working on and if he fell asleep, I would stop under a shady tree and begin to read an article and take notes. Once he awoke or began to fuss, we would continue our walk. Another strategy was when we went to baby rhyme time at the library, I would leave home early, arrive at our destination, and then sit in the car and read, write, and make notes while the baby slept. Once the baby woke up, I would put away the material elements of my academic identity and focus on engaging with my baby at rhyme time, embracing my mothering role. Prikkhidko and Haynes (2018) refer to this strategy as a behavioural approach that enables academic mothers to do two things at the same time by seeking to use every free moment to complete doctoral work while still being around their children.

The flexibility required to alternate between academic work and mothering and the self-regulation required to instantly switch roles and make the most of all opportunities to progress the Ph.D. was not without difficulty. Brown and Watson (2010) identify a female doctoral student’s journey through the Ph.D. program is very much tied to her domestic situation, with motherhood having a profound effect on women at the doctoral level. This is because mothers tend to plan their program of study around their domestic demands and stress over the balance they must maintain between their academic responsibilities and home life as well as their roles of student, wife, and mother (Brown & Watson, 2010). Attaining a balance between home and work life is a dominant theme for mothering in academia (Isgro & Castaneda, 2015). With Grenier and Burke (2008) identifying the greatest burden of managing doctoral studies and motherhood is the time burden that is felt every day. At times I felt I only had “snatched minutes” in which to work on my study, with mothering responsibilities taking precedence, with little uninterrupted time to progress my Ph.D. Moghadam, Khiaban, Esmaeili, and Salsali’s (2017) research revealed that whenever the roles of mother and student overlapped, academic mothers made their families and children a priority over their doctoral studies.

Vignette 4: Shattering Timelines and Ideals

I walk onto campus and head to my supervisor’s office. My first full draft of my Ph.D. had been submitted to my Principal and Co-supervisor and I am looking forward with anticipation to this meeting. I am six months pregnant with my second baby and aim to have my thesis submitted before my baby arrives. I am physically drained from the pregnancy; violently ill for weeks on end, barely able to walk and in constant pain, my legs encased in compression stockings to reduce the swelling. Despite the physical challenges of this pregnancy, I hold on tight to my Ph.D. and focus on making progress, desiring to have it submitted so I can “just enjoy my baby” rather than juggling my Ph.D.

through another maternity leave, this time with a toddler and newborn. I sit down to meet with my supervisors, and hear, “we can see how hard you’ve tried.” With those kindly spoken words any hope of submitting before the arrival of baby number two is shattered. The physical struggle of pregnancy merged with the intellectual disappoint of not being on track for submission and I cascaded into tears of utter disappointment and defeat. I felt physically, intellectually and emotionally broken. It was the single hardest and lowest point on my Ph.D. journey.

Yoo (2020) identifies that the experience of motherhood and the compounding demands that come from within and outside the home can shine a light on the stark pressure of academia’s limited, accelerated, and fractured time. Paksi, Nagy, and Kiraly’s (2016) research revealed that the timing of motherhood is vitally important in female researchers’ careers, and there remains an unanswered question in the academic discourse about the “ideal” or “least bad” timing for having a child. The pressure of caring for a toddler, being pregnant with my second baby, and striving to meet my self-imposed timeline of submitting before the baby arrived was physically, intellectually, and emotionally taxing. I felt utterly broken upon realising that I would not be submitting before the baby was born, and that to have any chance of submission I would need to continue my Ph.D. throughout this maternity leave. In hindsight I could have taken maternity leave from my Ph.D., but at the time it didn’t feel like a viable option when there was still so much of the Ph.D. journey left to venture. The physical demands of my second pregnancy impacted my ideals of productivity (Trussell, 2015), as there were times when I was simply too sick to do anything productive. Mirick and Wladowski’s (2020) research recognised that having a child slowed down women’s progression through their doctoral studies. Slowing down and re-evaluating and re-adjusting my submission timeline was a significant challenge for me, as someone who is driven and pushes myself to get the job done.

Vignette 5: Imperfectly Weaving Motherhood with Doctoral Studies

I am comfortably nestled on my couch at home. My second born baby is snuggled in nursing. My laptop sits atop the desk I have wheeled into position to enable me to work on my Ph.D. while I feed and comfort my baby. It is here, in this position of nursing and snuggling a sleeping baby that I make considerable progress on my Ph.D. I have picked myself up and dusted myself off after the shattering disappointment of not being on track for submission, and I resume my studies with renewed determination to “get it done.” I am on maternity leave - from my paid employment, and have once again decided to not take leave from my Ph.D. - and I dedicate myself to my mothering identity/role when my toddler and baby are awake and as soon as the toddler is settled for their day nap, I take up my position on the couch, nestled with my baby, and I read, draw diagrams, make notes and type and type and type to progress my Ph.D., day, after day, after day. This is the rhythm of my day/maternity leave/life, merging motherhood and doctoral studies.

Huopalainen and Satama (2019) reflect that they never really experienced motherhood and professional work as mutually exclusive and never saw a reason to keep these spheres apart. This too was my lived experience, as my doctoral studies were intricately interwoven into the fabric of my home life. The rhythms in everyday life with a baby (and in my case, also a toddler) at home allowed for both academic work and maternal embodiment to exist in a partially mutual, flexible, and empowering experience (Huopalainen & Satama, 2019). After a

busy morning looking after, playing and caring for my toddler and baby I often looked forward to the quiet time when the toddler had a day sleep, the baby nursed and then slept on my lap, and I engaged in the intellectual pursuit of my Ph.D. In this space, two intertwined passions of my life: motherhood and research were able to be present, with both representing meaningful, rich and demanding life spheres (Huopalainen & Satama, 2019). Trussell (2015) states that the multiple roles of being a mother and a scholar have deepened the quality of her scholarship and the quality of her interactions with her children. I, too, believe my merged and interconnected identities as a mother and researcher serve to strengthen both my academic work and mothering relationships. The dual roles of being an academic mother carry expectations, responsibilities, and significance for professional and family life (CohenMiller, 2020). There is no ideal way to balance the multiple priorities that doctoral student mothers carry (Trepal et al., 2013), instead, there is simply doing what worked at that point in time for myself and my family.

Vignette 6: Carrying Guilt and Gratitude

We are at the park. There are excited squeals and lots of “look at my mummy,” there is pushing on the swing and catching them at the bottom of the slippery slide. There is also an important phone call with my Principal Supervisor to discuss key ideas, policies, and literature that I am currently working with/through as I work on “writing up” my thesis. The intersecting of identities—mother and doctoral student - taking place in the park, 2000Km away from my university campus, while I care for my children. There are many times, however, when I do not go to the park, beach, lake or zoo. When the opportunity presents my husband takes the children for a morning or afternoon outing to provide me with time to work on my Ph.D. I feel the guilt of not participating, a sense of missing out on the fun, memory making and time with my family. I also feel incredibly grateful and appreciative for the gift of uninterrupted time, to gather my thoughts and focus on my studies.

Low and Damien Martin (2019) acknowledge the entanglements of guilt and shame that academic mothers juggle personally and professionally. Academic mothers may experience these feelings of guilt due to not being fully present as either a mother or a doctoral student (Trepal et al., 2013) and they are therefore trapped in intensive guilt both as school and at home (Prikhidko & Haynes, 2018). Combining motherhood and doctoral studies without comprising the roles of either one is a significant dilemma experienced by academic mothers (Moghadam et al., 2017). Indeed, motherhood continues to be riddled with angst for many female academics (Yoo, 2020). Trussell (2015) shared her experience, recounting that when she was with her child, she felt guilt for not working and when she was working, she felt guilty for not being with her child, and this created significant internal tension and angst. I, too, felt considerable guilt at not attending family outings; however, working in/with/through fragmented pockets of time intensified my focus and maximised my progress. As Lenette (2012) wrote, “the knowledge that I only had limited time to focus on my thesis motivated me to make every minute count” (p. 93). In this respect, having children made me more organised and efficient (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004). This is because if I was missing out on a family trip to the zoo, I was going to ensure I was productive and had progress to show for my time spent at home in front of the computer. In this respect motherhood constituted a strength rather than a burden (Huopalainen & Satama, 2019). Just like motherhood, writing my thesis entailed mixed sensory waves of joy and pride, as well as insecurity, despair, and anxiety (Huopalainen & Satama, 2019). I learned through merging motherhood and doctoral studies I was able to hold multiple, conflicting emotions simultaneously.

Vignette 7: Sacrifice and Privilege

The final month of maternity leave from my paid employment is spent furiously working on my Ph.D., addressing internal reviewer feedback. I spend long hours on campus everyday of that month, including weekends, to meet the submission deadline. I achieve it. On my first day back to my fulltime academic position, I accomplish the milestone of submission. It is a moment of release to press submit and send my thesis off for examination. I am back and I am worthy of being here.

When I reflect on my journey of merging motherhood and doctoral studies, the final month echoes with sacrifice. Yoo (2020) writes about the hidden sacrifices that resonate deeply with her experiences of being an academic mother. While Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, and Lunde's (2017) research acknowledged that for a woman to intersect their academic identity with their other identities requires sacrifice to manage and adjust expectations. This is true of my own experience, as I sacrificed and repeatedly adjusted my expectations regarding my doctoral studies progress, along with how I would experience my maternity leave. There were numerous hidden sacrifices throughout the doctoral study, however returning to campus a month early to spend every day working towards submission was a significant and visible sacrifice. I was on campus, rather than at home. I was in front of a computer, rather than with my baby and toddler. Rather than relishing the final month of maternity leave with my children, I was working long hours to complete my Ph.D. I was driven to submit, to be clear of this study that had claimed so much of me. Both academia and motherhood are consuming endeavours (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004) and there was no time to rest from being a mother or a researcher (Lenette, 2012).

When returning to work, I fought to demonstrate my worthiness of coming back (Low & Damian Martin, 2019). In addition, I sought to navigate the dual transitions of re-entering academia following extended maternity leave and progressing from being a doctoral student, to the next phase of my academic identity, an Early Career Researcher (Schriever & Grainger, 2019). Despite the feelings of guilt and insufficiency that at times accompanied the merged identities of mother and researcher, so too there were embodied experiences of mothering and researching that empowered me and brought joy and happiness (Huopalainen & Satama, 2019). In many ways being a mother and a researcher are complementary (Trussel, 2015) and there are both challenges and joys in undertaking the dual roles of being an academic mother (Dickson, 2018).

Conclusion

This autoethnographic article has illustrated how individuals experience motherhood and doctoral studies and revealed the complexities of negotiating intersecting and at times competing identities as a mother, wife, doctoral student, and academic. The literature has been woven alongside and throughout my autoethnographic accounts to enable connections to be established between my situated position and the world beyond my own (Schwandt, 2001). When reflecting on the vignettes, the contradiction that is mothering during doctoral studies is revealed, as I simultaneously experienced and carried opposing emotions such as sacrifice and privilege, guilt and gratitude, and challenge and triumph. Through sharing and analysing my personal experiences I recognise my responsibility to consider the ways others may experience similar epiphanies (Ellis et al., 2011). I acknowledge and "position readers as owners of their own experiences, who may recognise parts of themselves in my stories, or may not" (Dwyer, Willis, & Call, 2020, p. 573). In sharing my experiences of imperfectly weaving motherhood

with doctoral studies I reveal highly personal and emotional insights that would otherwise have remained hidden (Wall, 2008). In doing so I seek to acknowledge and portray not only the tensions and challenges, but also the strength, joy, and resilience that exists when merging motherhood and doctoral studies.

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