

An Autoethnographic Exploration of the First-Generation College Experience and Motherhood through the Lens of Poetry

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Purpose Statement

- The research aims to explore the intersection of the first-generation college experience and motherhood through the lens of poetry. The study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities I faced, the first in my family to attend college, and also navigate the demands of motherhood. By using autoethnography as a research method and poetry as a means of Arts-based Research (ABR) expression, the study seeks to provide my personal perspective on this topic.

Research Questions

- How does a first-generation college student navigate the demands of motherhood while pursuing her academic goals?
- What are the unique challenges a first-generation college student who is also a mother faces?
- How does the experience of being a first-generation college student impact the way in which a mother navigates her parenting role?

Why Poem?

- Poetry is a way to help you share your feelings and experiences in a way that is easy for your audience to understand (Anderson, 2017; Baron & Eisner, 2011; Strober, 2011).
- Strachan & Terry (2011) state, "Poetry is a cultural form where the placing of the words is driven by their sound as well as their sense or meaning." (p.9)

Methodology

- Adams et al. (2015) define autoethnography as a research approach that delves into an individual's viewpoint on life and culture to present a thorough and authentic representation of their experiences. This method differs from the conventional third-person perspective, which can be alienating and lack relatability, especially when examining factors such as race, gender, and ethnicity.

*I thought I knew myself,
I thought I knew exactly how my life would go.
School, then marriage, then kids, but I was wrong.
Wrong.*

*Life took a turn,
Many turns.*

*A new life was born
As well as a new life for me.*

*Everything changed,
I changed.*

Changed.

*A Newborn, Daycare, School, and a Job,
I was overwhelmed.*

Overwhelmed before managing my time.

Overwhelmed before realizing that my life had just changed for the better.

*I became happier than ever before,
Living a life that I never imagined.*

Me,

A mother.

Me,

A student.

Me,

A worker.

I am happy,

We are happy.

Happy.

My daughter and I.

Findings

- The findings of this study revealed that time was a significant challenge for me. My duties needed to be completed in more time.
- As a first-generation college student, I also faced the additional challenge of needing a support network that understood my unique challenges. However, despite these challenges, I found that my journey had helped them appreciate the quality time spent with my children. I learned to set specific times for my schoolwork and then allowed myself to take a break and spend the rest of the day and night focusing on my children.
- Furthermore, using poetry to express my hardships helped me cope with my challenges. Poetry allowed me to express my emotions and share experiences with others who may be going through similar experiences.

Conclusion

- Time management and lack of support were significant challenges for me as a first-generation college student. However, I overcame these challenges by developing strategies such as setting specific times for schoolwork and prioritizing time with my children. Additionally, using poetry as a creative outlet helped me cope with my emotions and connect with others who may be going through similar experiences.

Resources

- Adams, T. E., Holman Jones, S., & Ellis, C. (2015). Autoethnography. Oxford University Press.
- Anderson, J. J. (2017). Poetry. Essential Library.
- Barone, T., & Eisner, E. W. (2011). Arts-Based Research. SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Strachan, J., & Terry, R. (2011). Poetry (2nd ed.). Edinburgh University Press.
- Strober, M. (2011). Interdisciplinary Conversations: Challenging Habits of Thought. Stanford University Press.