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## The Skits, Sketches, and Stories of MotherScholars

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## The Skits, Sketches, and Stories of MotherScholars

### Abstract

“MotherScholars” are those who creatively weave their maternal identities into their scholarly spaces. With this article we invite readers along a collaborative friendship study of our own participatory arts-based journey to understand, reclaim, and identify personal and professional benefits only realized once we acknowledged and embraced the blended reality of Mother Scholarhood. Our work is presented as a curation of individual skits, sketches, and short stories that were created during a collective 8-week time span in a shared virtual space. We open our story to interpretation and interaction through the lenses of our readers.

### Keywords

MotherScholar, Friendship Methodology, Narrative, Arts-Based

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## The Skits, Sketches, and Stories of MotherScholars

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*“MotherScholars” are those who creatively weave their maternal identities into their scholarly spaces. With this article we invite readers along a collaborative friendship study of our own participatory arts-based journey to understand, reclaim, and identify personal and professional benefits only realized once we acknowledged and embraced the blended reality of Mother Scholarship. Our work is presented as a curation of individual skits, sketches, and short stories that were created during a collective 8-week time span in a shared virtual space. We open our story to interpretation and interaction through the lenses of our readers. Keywords: MotherScholar, Friendship Methodology, Narrative, Arts-Based*

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### Introduction

Perceived and real professional inequities and stigmas faced by females in higher education continue to be well-documented in research studies (Acker & Armenti, 2004; Armenti, 2004; AAUP Council, 2001 Hirakata & Daniluk, 2009) and public commentaries (Chenoweth, Fortna, Mitchell, Savun, Weeks, & Cunningham, 2016; Gray, 2015; Waxman & Ispa-Landa, 2016; White, 2016). Additionally, self-inflicted and institutionally imposed woes of “motherhood” in higher education add a specific sub-category of identity-specific burdens to females in academia. We conducted this study in order to create a space and time in which, we, as four female academicians, could collectively support and influence each other’s individual explorations into the “[M]other[S]cholar” (Lapayese, 2012a; Matias, 2011) identity with the hope that it would result in personal and professional benefits that we each needed to realize, for reasons both known and discovered. We came together to recall and retell the stories of our MotherScholar selves and now present a collaborative collage of skits, sketches, and short stories to explain a deeply complicated identity that we encourage other, especially those mothers who scholar, to explore for themselves.

Through this study, we initially sought to explore: *What impact does embracing the term “MotherScholar” have on our personal and professional lives?* And later came to include a secondary research question: *“To what degree do designated spaces and times to be with other “MotherScholars” improve our professional and personal identities?* In this study, we act as both researchers and participants, collectively creating, crafting, and collaborating from beginning to end. Arts-based creative writing prompts were used to guide our truth-seeking reflections and as a means to document personal recall and initial understandings of our MotherScholar identities. Digital spaces (i.e., a private, shared Google Drive and a secret Facebook group) provided space for us to document and share our arts-based responses with one another over an 8-week time period. While we do not address a secondary task of “me time” commitments in this paper, they served as background context which facilitated space through which we became aware of our developing “MotherScholar” identities throughout the

study. We used a structured version of “friendship as methodology” (Tillman-Healey, 2003) to promote the trust and safety necessary to encourage our participation and later to guide the raw reporting of our truth telling in a way that most honestly captures our storied lives.

As mothers, we acknowledge our life-long propensity for storytelling -- at bedtimes, around dinner tables, on social media, during carpools, and over glasses of wine. As qualitative researchers, we claim our adeptness for storytelling – in front of peers at conferences, on the pages of our publications, and as an instructional delivery method in our classrooms. As natural and practiced storytellers it was clear, therefore, that story-making would be the most appropriate and authentic way to prompt and document our self-reflection during this study. Our continued commitment to storytelling takes on a higher purpose when chosen as the vehicle by which to disseminate our research because it honors our individual MotherScholar voices in what is typically a patriarchal space (i.e., preferred and valued research methodology and dissemination in traditional formats). This dissemination choice and our frequent use of our personal pronouns and given names all work together to fight against the traditional over-emphasis on analysis and interpretation so as to not “[re-marginalize] the very voices that we are supposedly giving voice to” (Hendry, 2007, p. 490). Finally, this publication format makes space for other MotherScholars to potentially join us on a path of self-preservation, self-love, and self-acknowledged accomplishment. Through our story-sharing we hope to give readers a transformative experience (Jackson, 1995, p. 9 in Lewis, 2006), while also providing ourselves yet another opportunity to re-live and reflect upon the ongoing stories of our lives in an attempt to make more sense of our individual and intersecting MotherScholar journeys.

### **Intentional Mechanical Formatting of our Identity Explained**

As mothers in academia, we found the narrative that others were telling for and about “us” to be a dismal depiction of our multi-faceted roles as mothers, female faculty, and scholars. The unearthing of the “MotherScholar” identity, both in the literature and as shared with us at education research conferences (e.g., International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry and the American Educational Research Association’s Research on Women in Education SIG), presented us with a way to counter these narratives by reclaiming an identity that we may have inherently encompassed, but had not previously consciously named or considered. First coined by Matias (2011) and further explored as “mother-scholar” by Lapayese (2012a, p. 1), “mother-scholars drive the feminist impulse to dismantle patriarchal binaries – namely, the sharp divide between the intellect and the maternal, the public and the private” while also “[finding] creative ways to insert [the] maternal identity, specifically in academic spaces and [into] scholarship” (Lapayese, 2012b, p. 17; 2012c, p. 23). The ever-changing mechanical formatting of the term when written by various authors implies that the term, like the identity it seeks to label, need not be static nor narrowly-defined, but rather can be complex, chaotic, messy, and open to revision by the individual(s) claiming it. Throughout this study, readers will see the term in various formats when used for various purposes. For example, when sharing our data, we have elected to retain the formatting that we individually defaulted to so as to convey our evolving understanding of the term as it related to our individual identities; but when reporting as researchers, we opt to format as *MotherScholar* because it best conveys how we now see ourselves and wish for others to see us, too. Our collective choice for the formatting of the term in our research studies includes capitalization of both “Mother” and “Scholar” to mark the respect and importance each term plays in our lives. We also opt, like Matias, to forego the “hyphen” and blend the two identities as a means of reminding ourselves and conveying to others that we are striving to forego the inherent guilt that accompanies balance-seeking (implied by the use of a hyphen) and replace it with a more fluid pursuit of “harmony.” We concede and embrace that 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. With respect, we do not wish our alterations to the aesthetic presentation of the term to challenge or disrupt any other MotherScholars’ different and intentional formatting, but rather join CohenMiller (2018) in appreciating that, like “motherhood” and “academia,” the identity must constantly be re-examined and re-worked so that it may shift and grow along with the individual claiming it in order to best support and not suppress the identity-holder.

### **Authentic Research Approach**

This study is steeped in Feminist perspective—a lens through which we inherently and intentionally approach our personal lives and professional work by virtue of us all being Feminists. Harding (1987) identifies three characteristics of Feminist research: (1) the generation of problems “from the perspectives of women’s experiences”; (2) the motivation of scholarship *for* females so as to provide females with explanations they actually “want and need”; and (3) locating “the researcher in the same critical plane as the overt subject matter” (pp. 7-8). Like Harding (1987), this study does not subscribe to Feminism as methodology, but rather as a historical approach born of the reality that we four researcher-participants *are* Feminists; subsequently, our research needed to be “conducted at the margins of traditional disciplines” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007, p. 5) and celebrated as a study born of creativity in both topic and method (Fonow & Cook, 1991). In order to maintain the integral role that we, as participants, hold in this study we intentionally choose to employ personal pronouns and forego the assumption of pseudonyms so as to maintain the focus on us, the researchers, as much as the research.

We are conscious of and acknowledge the privileges embedded in our cisgender whiteness and the accompanying power that we hold based purely in our identities. Olson Beal and Burrow continue to pursue research in this area in order to better understand, appreciate, recognize, support, and fight for the unique issues MotherScholars of diverse identities face. Thus, against the historical backdrop of Feminist research and with an acknowledgement of the privilege of our white, cisgender female identities, we employed structured “friendship” methodology (Tillmann-Healy, 2003), facilitated by arts-based data creation and collection (Leavy, 2015) as the driving methodological framework for the study.

### **Friendship as Methodological Framework**

We consider ourselves, first and foremost, “friends.” As MotherScholars, we define that friendship as new and old relationships that give us safety, support, understanding, acceptance, laughter, fellowship, trust, and commitment to one another in both personal and professional spaces.

The friendship between Burrow and Smith began in graduate school in 2010, where we shared the bond of mothering young children while taking similar graduate courses. After graduation, we have maintained both friendly and scholarly relationships through shared research interests, frequent co-authorships and collaborative presentations, and ongoing text messaging and Facebook-enabled communications.

Cross and Olson Beal’s friendship began in 2014, when Cross was hired in Olson Beal’s university department. The small size of their department resulted in frequent professional connections which allowed for the development of a personal friendship based on shared interests and progressive political views.

The friendship between Burrow and Olson Beal began in 2015, when Burrow participated in a semester-long new faculty orientation co-taught by Olson Beal. Burrow later

began a friendship with Cross, in 2016, when Olson Beal invited Burrow to join them as a writing advisor for a summer creative writing camp for underserved youth in our local community.

The friendship between Burrow, Olson Beal, and Cross has continued due to shared convictions and activism on social injustice issues, collaborative authorships and presentations, common departmental responsibilities, continued team-teaching of the summer creative writing camp, and frequent group text and Facebook messaging for personal and professional communications. Burrow introduced Smith to Cross and Olson Beal during a virtual overview of the research project presented to all three friends. The depth of the friendships between Burrow and each of the other research-participants is the commonality that ties all four of us together and appears to have been strong enough to quickly forge relationships of trust and vulnerability needed for this research.

Tillmann-Healy (2003) proposed that these created relationship-driven spaces can provide foundation for “friendship as method” (p. 732) as a qualitative approach to research. At the core of friendship methodology are principles of interpretivism (Denzin, 1997) and interactive interviewing (Ellis, Kiesinger, & Tillmann-Healy, 1997). We did not seek to capture “the totality of social life but to interpret reflectively slices and glimpses of localized interaction in order to understand more fully both others and ourselves” (Tillmann-Healy, 2003, p. 732) through collaborative sharing of personal, social, and professional experiences.

We realized collective and individual benefits of friendship methodology because engagement in the research resulted in connections and conversations that sparked new ways of thinking, feeling, and relating to one another and facilitated self-understanding and self-acceptance (Tillmann-Healy, 2003, pp. 738-739). To not burden ourselves with additional undue emotional labor nor extra work-based demands, we modified integral components of pure friendship methodology, including “conversation, everyday involvement, compassion, giving, and vulnerability” (p. 734) to be more structured in order to fit within the confines of the 8-week project timeline. However, in line with Tillmann-Healy’s (2003) advisement that friendship methodology move at a natural pace, we did not exclude communications (digital or otherwise) pertaining to the subject matter prior to and after the focused research time from data analysis as they were seen as part of our ongoing friendships.

We all consented to participate in eight weeks of data collection and to collaboratively share and analyze our arts-based reflections. We considered issues related to vulnerability and exposure to be minimal since we had already informally shared the study’s subject matter many times between one another over the lifetimes of our friendships, prior to the formalization of the research study. To ensure ethical research practice, we obtained approval for this research study from the Institutional Review Board at Burrow, Cross, and Olson Beal’s university. Given the personal nature of the subject matter we chose to research, we prioritized personal choice and comfort regarding what and how much we chose to share in response to the research study prompts. To allow for collaborative access, while also protecting our safety, privacy, and confidentiality as voluntary participant-investigators in the study, we stored all data digitally in a secured shared Google drive and secret Facebook group.

### **Arts-Based Data Collection**

For eight weeks, we all committed to an interactive interviewing method achieved by responding to weekly arts-based creative writing prompts crafted by Burrow to document deep self-reflection. We incorporated the arts as a logical and effective means of data collection and, to some degree, as a way of presenting findings (Leavy, 2015) since creation of arts-based reflections provided a means of communication multifaceted enough to capture and express the complex thoughts, feelings, and experiences of our MotherScholarhood.

Burrow designed the following prompts to elicit analyzable visual documentation of “MotherScholarhood” as we individually perceived and manifested it. The prompts assisted us in comparing and contrasting the duality and singleness of our identities (i.e., mother, scholar, and eventually MotherScholar) by breaking down the unique characteristics of each self and then building back together a whole self (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

*Weekly prompts for participatory arts-based research data collection by authors*

<p><b>Week 1:</b> Define both the look and feel of MotherScholar for yourself using photovoice (Wang &amp; Burris, 1997).</p>	<p><b>Week 5:</b> “If good girls seldom make history...” then consider the “bad women” in your life (past and present, known and known of) that have inspired you as a MotherScholar and write an ode to her. This prompt is a re-purposing of Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich’s (1976) lamentation that so many women who made positive impacts on society are overlooked by history.</p>
<p><b>Week 2:</b> Complete a poem(s) about how your mother and scholar selves or MotherScholar self was formed using George Ella Lyon’s (1993) “Where I’m From” poem as a template.</p>	<p><b>Week 6:</b> Create a map of your MotherScholar self that depicts the threads that run through both your mother and scholar lives; read <i>My Map Book</i> by Sara Fanelli for inspiration.</p>
<p><b>Week 3:</b> Write a short story casting your MotherScholar self as a common Native American character-type as explained by Lewis, Wallace, and Naytowhow, 2016.</p>	<p><b>Week 7:</b> Smash the stereotypes of “MotherScholarhood” by writing an “I am...I am not...” poem.</p>
<p><b>Week 4:</b> Draw a picture representing how you see yourself as a MotherScholar, have at least one of your children draw a picture representing how they see you as a MotherScholar, and have one colleague draw a picture representing how they see you as a MotherScholar. Write a short paragraph explaining the similarities/differences you see between the three drawings.</p>	<p><b>Week 8:</b> Write a short journal reflection about times that being a mother has made you a better scholar and times when being a scholar has made you a better mother. Follow the “story → poem method” by Lewis et al. (2016) to create a poem that highlights the collision of your two selves.</p>

We also made a secondary commitment to share photographic evidence of at least 15 minutes of daily “me time” as a means of prompting us to be more conscious of the identities we hold and wish to further develop, but the thematic analysis of that task is not explicitly shared in this study. Posting to the secret Facebook group was an optional but encouraged activity.

### Data Analysis Curation

In the initial stage of data analysis, we all engaged in individual interpretation, but only to the point that it assisted us in categorizing and arranging the arts-based responses. Burrow then continued on as primary researcher in charge of the data analysis process. In keeping with Feminist research principles and as a way to respect the powerful voices already contained within our own stories, she shifted the remaining data analysis to a curating process that prioritized presenting data so as not to subject our stories (i.e., our lives) to the distortion that can arise through interpretation of data. Using inductive rather than deductive analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), Burrow considered all of our stories alongside each other during a recursive

process in which she continuously read and reflected while considering potential themes (which ultimately became chapter headings) in order to craft a logical story flow that would show readers how the works related to the original research questions. Ultimately, Burrow chose to include or omit our arts-based submissions based on the goal of telling a cohesive story about our understanding of the meanings we gave to ourselves, our lives, and lived experiences within the context of identity discovery and acceptance—both as individuals and as a collective, emergent community.

Burrow manually analyzed data using Miles et al.'s (2014) two-cycle process and maintained a reflective journal throughout the data analysis to document analytical memos. During the first cycle, Burrow independently coded the data using inductive techniques of generic descriptive coding (e.g., Facebook, hand-drawn, poem, essay, digital collage) and topical coding aligned with the themes of the weekly prompts (e.g., duality, re-/defining success, looks and feels of MotherScholarhood, work-life balance). During the first cycle, Burrow decided to exclude the Facebook work in order to focus on a plotline that aligned with the genres of the weekly activities. Second cycle coding involved creating categories for emergent themes, recoding, recategorizing, and comparing the codes to generate pattern codes that highlighted similarities and difference (e.g., acknowledging who contributes to our stories, public perception, coming to "terms," needing other MotherScholars). As Burrow shaped the story out of narrative data, she was conscious of Polkinhorne's (1995) cautions that an inherent problem in the study of narrative meaning is the fact that "meaning appears in various modes of presentation, such as perception, remembrance, and imagination" (p. 7). During this story crafting phase, Burrow trusted friendship methodology to increase her confidence that her narrative analysis was not merely at the mercy of each storyteller's recollection or introspection, but rather intuitively informed by her intersecting friendships with each of the participant-researchers.

At this point, Burrow capitalized on the benefits of arts-based narrative inquiry to guide final choices of works that would promote "empathy, esthetic experience, and epiphanies that [would] enlarge the reader's horizon" (Kim, 2015, p. 215). She then used chapter headings to structure the emerging story and as a means of "qualitative control" to ultimately "determine details to be elicited and included (and those to be ignored and excluded) in the developing story" (Barone, 2007, p. 168 as cited in Kim, 2015). Respectful of the collaborative process, and as an additional measure of qualitative control, she engaged in member checking with the other co-author participants to negotiate focus, omission, and ultimately choice of inclusion of pieces as a means of increasing trustworthiness and validating the interpretations and findings throughout the second cycle coding.

### **Explaining Storytelling as Research Dissemination Format**

We chose interpretivist story narrative to disseminate our research based on the belief that all human life is a story. Stories "constantly transform places into spaces or spaces into places," which in turn suggests that stories become spaces of resistance by resisting the dominant narratives of instituted power (de Certeau, 1984, p. 23). Our work is positioned within the growing history of narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2007; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Craig, 2011; Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2004) wherein "such narrative discoveries do not lead to some object TRUTH about the human experience; rather, they open up a multitude of human *truths* that are, albeit messy, far richer and more informative in both their complexity and simplicity" (Lewis, 2010, n.p.).

As mothers, teacher educators, and even scholars we have been storytellers all of our lives. We have told stories that console, caution, comfort, and embarrass our children; we have told our pre-service teachers stories of our classroom experiences, of students they have not



yet met but must be prepared to know and advocate for, of societal oppression through inequitable educational environments, of lessons learned, and of humor and humanity; and we have presented and published stories of numbers, of theory, and of practice in peer-reviewed journals and as conference presentations. Ultimately, we contend that we can only make sense of our lived experiences— as humans, as mothers, as teacher educators, as scholars— through storytelling as it offers an understanding of our work that cannot be achieved or would otherwise be obscured through the restrictive lens of interpretation that traditional research methods might demand.

### The Storytellers

Before we begin our story, we must make sure our readers know whose story is being told. We all identify as white females in our 30s-40s and, at the time of data collection, were all either tenure-track or tenured employees of public, southern universities within colleges of education. *Figure 2* presents a confirmation of the demographic details that make up our publicly presented identities.

**Figure 2**

*Comparative demographic details of Burrow, Cross, Smith, and Olson Beal, at the time of the study (2017)*

	Gender	Race	Age	Marital status	Demographics of children	University employment
<b>Burrow</b>	female	white	36	married	female, age 8 male, age 7 male, age 5	Assistant Professor of Elementary Education (tenured and promoted to Associate Professor, spring 2018), Stephen F. Austin State University
<b>Cross</b>	female	white	38	married	male, age 11 female, age 9 female, age 8 female, age 6	Assistant Professor of Secondary Education (tenure and promotion, anticipated spring 2020), Stephen F. Austin State University
<b>Smith</b>	female	white	38	married	female, age 9	Assistant Professor of Technology Education (tenured and promoted to Associate Professor, spring 2018), Texas State University

Olson Beal	female	white	44	married	female, age 20 female, age 17 male, age 14	Tenured Associate Professor of Secondary Education (promoted to full professor, spring 2019), Stephen F. Austin State University
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While the identities we present to the world play a significant factor in our MotherScholar realities, the subsequent sections share the deeply personal and vulnerable ways we **choose** to present when prompted to introduce ourselves to each other as “mothers” and as “scholars” using Week 2’s “Where I’m From” Poem Prompt.

### Burrow: A MotherScholar Duality ... by Default

<p>I am the reason for “<i>shake your boooooo-teeeee!</i>”</p>	<p>I am a scholar who has to balance so many worlds --- made from mommy guilt and mommy strength and fabulous feminism and frustrated feminism</p>
<p>The recipient of “<i>i love you, mommy</i>” and “<i>charge my Kindle.</i>”</p>	<p>I am a scholar who stumbles, stops, skips, and soars --- made from self-critique and peer jealousy and peer support</p>
<p>I hear “<i>George E. Snowflake comes on my birthday</i>” and I make them say, “<i>Are you, okay?</i>” ... “<i>What can I do to help?</i>”</p>	<p>I am a scholar who tries to match her scholarship to her soul --- made from “setting up families as first teachers” and actually accepting families as first teachers</p> <p>I am a scholar who beats herself up --- made from “<i>that’s not research</i>” and “<i>that’s never gonna be good enough</i>” and “<i>my research will never change the world...</i>” --- like yours and yours and yours ...</p>
<p>I know what they mean when they say, “<i>He’s definitely a Stafford</i>” and “<i>Go to your home!!!</i>” “<i>Why</i> <i>won’t they go to their home?!</i>”</p>	<p>I am a teacher who smiles (<i>A LOT!</i>) and wears bright yellow-and-black stripey bumblebee tights and superhero shirts --- made from “<i>I think she must be fake --- no one can be that happy all the time</i>” and “<i>why can’t all my professors be like her</i>” and “<i>that’s the teacher I want to be</i>”</p> <p>I am a teacher who cares deeply about how her students see her --- made from soul-crushing and soul-soaring semesterly student evaluations</p>
<p>I was there for “<i>I can’t feel my legs</i>” and “<i>Wait! Wait! Tell me what you’re about to do!</i>”</p>	<p>I am a teacher who has convictions that inspire and intimidate her --- made from meeting them where <u>they</u> are at, even as I continue to <i>grow</i>...</p>
<p>I listen to the <i>Troll Song</i> and dance to <i>GoNoodle</i>.</p>	<p>I am a scholar who can’t afford to not take a stand over and over again --- made from #45 made me an activist to how you can not see it’s Black Lives Matter...too?!</p>
<p>I am the reason for “<i>Well, then I’m a feminist, too.</i>”</p>	<p>I am a scholar who keeps moving forward and does well --- made from awards, recognitions, and publications ... some earned, some just given</p> <p>I am a straight-A, 4.0, charismatic, cute-little-white-girl scholar --- made of self-doubt, imposter syndrome, stories, metaphors, poetry, and inspirational quotes</p> <p>I am a penguin who balances her strength, her sensitivity, her students, her scholarship with the support of her sister academicians</p> <p>I am a scholar who needs to give herself a break --- made from the bravery of stories and songs shared by others scholars</p>

### **Smith: A MotherScholar by Choice!**

*I am from a dusty record player.*

*From beta videos and flintstone vitamins.*

*I am from the brown cabin on the dead end street and trees to climb up on the roof of the house.*

*It sounded like locusts calling to friends.*

*I am from the wild onion and the morning glorie whose stems spread wildly throughout the yard.*

*I remember as if I can feel the softness of their greenery.*

*I am from dancin in the living room and stubbornness.*

*From Anita and Danny.*

*I am from smile and nod and speak when spoken to.*

*I'm from Sunday Christians and hellions at home.*

*I'm from the German and the Irish and the Native Peoples of Texas, bread, sugar, and sass.*

*From the time Ryon caught the garage on fire, the fire that I put out with a bucket before Danny could see.*

*I'm from cassette tapes and record albums, musical poetry captured on thin film, emotionally charged lyrics to dance the world away.*

*I am from South Houston, humbled by having one foot in the door of discouragement and one foot in the door of possibility.*

### **Cross: A MotherScholar with Two Sides**

#### *Where I'm From*

*(The Mother in Mother Scholar)*

I am from Dust.

From dry and weathered to lush green Pine Trees.

I am from tough as nails and

strict religion.

From "You can't do it" and "What is holding you back?"

I am from Educated Hope and

Uneducated heartbreak.

From 4 happy kids and a research agenda.

I am from leaving a legacy and home sweet home.

#### *Where I'm From*

*(The Scholar in Mother Scholar)*

I am from Tolkien.

From Lewis, Christie, Freire, and Greene.

I am from smart and strong heroines and

Rigid family expectations.

From "You can't do it" and "What is holding you back?"

I am from grateful to be here and

Do I belong here?

From literature, science, art, justice, education,

advocacy, faith, curriculum, and policy.

I am from a quiet office and a fascinating research journal.

## Olson Beal: A MotherScholar ... in Transition ...

<u>Unrepentant Texas hippie mom</u> (title)	<u>Mother-scholar or Scholar-mother</u>
I am from <u>Provo and Anchorage, Bryan and Baton Rouge and gulp, Nacogdoches.</u>	I am from <u>I'm really mostly just a teacher.</u> From <u>Spanish and A &amp; M Consolidated High School.</u>
From <u>Olson and Beal and Olson Beal.</u>	I am from <u>feminism and Mormonism and the deep South.</u>
I am from <u>"Mom, I need . . ." and "Mom, did you . . . yet?"</u>	From <u>BYU and TAMU and LSU.</u>
And <u>"Kids, I need . . ." and "Kids, did you . . . yet?"</u>	I am from <u>SFA and secondary ed. and not from ed leadership.</u>
I am from <u>waffles and pancakes and sausage links and our house is always open (literally and metaphorically).</u>	From <u>Petra and Denise and Michelle and June and Hillary and Miles and Amanda and Chrissy and MC and Lauren and Megan.</u>
I am from <u>worrying and fretting and never enough.</u>	I am from <u>social justice and culturally responsive teaching and the school-to-prison pipeline.</u>
From <u>laughing and smack talk around the dinner table.</u>	From <u>AJE and AEQ and AERA and ACTFL.</u>
I am from <u>reading in the bean bag and Fierce Five.</u>	I am from <u>am I really a writer? and imposter syndrome.</u>
From <u>a crimson red part of a scarlet state and dreaming of an indigo life.</u>	From <u>activism and holy sexist workplace. Batman.</u> I am from <u>"Heather, I need . . ." and "Dr. Olson Beal, did you . . . yet?"</u>
I am from <u>we absolutely don't know what we're doing and Dad and I just try our best to love you.</u>	And <u>"Hey, guys, I need . . ." and "Colleagues, did you . . . yet?"</u>
From <u>the Obama house and always choose action over inaction.</u>	I am from <u>juggling and dropping the balls</u>
I am from <u>family and connections and always come home.</u>	and <u>I'm late to another kid thing.</u>
	I am from <u>rabble-rouser for social justice</u>
	And <u>I hope I don't get in trouble for this.</u>
	I am from <u>my Glona Steinem banner and my pussy hat</u>
	from <u>4th floor and lunch at The Tree.</u>
	I am from <u>searching for the army of the willing</u>
	And <u>choosing action over inaction.</u>
	I am from <u>I don't know what I'm doing and I'll just keep plugging away.</u>
	From <u>connections and good women that I love and admire.</u>

### The Story

This story features a curated collection of our original works that we created in order to document our dramatic, dynamic journeys towards understanding, accepting, and celebrating an identity that we hold as MotherScholars. The story resulting from Burrow's careful and

confident curation chronicles our journey of becoming, finding, and accepting our true selves as MotherScholars. Our interwoven stories capture how embracing the term "MotherScholar" shifted us, to varying degrees, from a dichotomy of personal vs. professional to a synergistic duality where the "mother" and the "scholar" were each integral parts of the other as a single identity within each of us.

This version of our story serves as a snapshot, a time capsule that organizes a story of human experiences "into temporarily meaningful episodes" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 5). It captures the first moments when we were at peace with and felt in control of our choice to self-identify as MotherScholars within a collective, supportive group of like-minded Women. As with all stories, we could have taken the theme of the narrative down many paths, but we have purposefully chosen to present a story that gravitates towards an overall positive and hopeful message for ourselves about our MotherScholar identities. The positivity of this presented narrative is not meant to discount the hardships, pressures, and complexity that will potentially always exist within the MotherScholar identity, but rather we will fill our story with moments of hope so as to provide a counter-narrative to the overwhelming body of research that can lead so many Women in academia to hide, make ourselves small, or ask forgiveness for our roles as mothers in institutes of higher education.

We are fully open to the unpredictable and unique critique and connections that may come when those who read intersect with those who are telling their stories, and we encourage readers to unpack how our stories give clarity and/or present challenges to your own stories. Likewise, we, too, leave room for future versions of this story as the "characters" (i.e., us) grow and develop past our "origin story."

## Chapter 1: The Work Life of a MotherScholar

A skit written by Olson Beal and performed in collaboration with multiple MotherScholars in response to Week 3's Native American Character Story Prompt.

### *Atoskew and the Beehive: A Motherscholar Play in one Act*

**Scene:** the fourth floor of the McKibben Beehive

#### **Characters:**

- Marlotta...the Queen
- Atoskew...a female worker bee
- Juwisiw...a female worker bee
- Maryhtam...a female worker bee
- Burrhtam...a female worker bee
- Randollew...a female worker bee
- Lindisiw...a female worker bee
- Bohtam...one of a few male drones
- Tomsiw...one of a few male drones
- Jacktisiw...one of a few male drones

**Atoskew (frantic):** Guys, we have so much work to be done. We have to do 59 course modifications or new course proposals for the curriculum committee, 1 new program proposal request, 2 modifications to existing program requests, 17 SPA reports, and start recycling honey in the office workroom and put together a food basket for Thanksgiving. Marlotta says

she supports us all and always stands behind us. She knows we think she doesn't, but SHE DOES. And she will not talk to us about it again. Who can help?

**Juwisiw:** I can help! What needs to be done first?

**Maryhtam:** I can help, too. I'll start a file in OneDrive and email the link to all of you.

**Randollew:** I can help, even though I'm on sabbatical from hive work.

**Lindisiw:** I can help, as long as it doesn't have anything to do with graduate bees or online courses. I hate those.

**Bohtam:** ...

**Tomsiw:** No one ever listens to me. I only work 15 hours a week anymore, anyway.

**Jacktisiw:**

*Atoskew (less frantic now, based on the offers of support from her fellow female worker bees, but bitter after being dismissed by the male drones):* Okay, guys. We got this.

**Burrhtam:** I have glitter! We need glitter, right??

**Atoskew and Juwisiw:** Sure, Burrhtam. We need glitter. But mostly we need tacos.

And Juwisiw needs coffee.

[Scenes depicting all the female worker bees (except for Lindisiw) scurrying around with this as the soundtrack: Rimsky-Korsakov's "Flight of the Bumblebee" (a publicly accessible version can be accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aYAJopwEYv8>).]

*[Female worker bees shown doing the following—all while literally flying at breakneck speed: computing, printing reports, teaching other mostly female worker bees, cramming food down their tiny mouths, rushing back to the beehive to feed their tiny bees, reading bedtime stories to baby bees, texting their college kid bee, helping one high school worker bee edit college essays, taking baby bees to soccer practice and soccer games, watching their little bees in the HS marching bumblebee band, coaching scads of bees on the basketball court, reading books in their beemobiles while waiting for their bees to finish piano lessons, feeding their bees chicken nuggets and Sonic blue raspberry Nerd slushies, collapsing into their bumblebee beds at night.]*

\*\*\*\*\*

**Atoskew:** Wow, 4<sup>th</sup> floor McKibben worker bees. We got all the work done. That was an amazing collective effort on the part of the female worker bees. Marlotta will praise our good work. We saved the McKibben beehive. Next we will try to save the NISD beehive.

**Juwisiw:** Next we will move on to attacking the Pearson beehive.

**Male drones:** ...

**Marlotta** (*angry voice*), to the female worker bees: You have baby bees? How can you possibly?

**Atoskew:** Oh great and wise Marlotta, we have completed all the work. We have saved the McKibben beehive. We have vanquished all our foes. We have fed and nurtured our baby bees.

**Marlotta:** But your page numbers in your portfolio are off. And you were supposed to submit an electronic portfolio even though policy says you don't have to. And why are you such a micromanager? Where are your SPA reports?

[Female worker bees collapse into bed with baby bees buzzing all around them.]

\*\*\*\*\*

**Burrhtam:** In their words? Are you listening? Now what are you doing?  
[And scene.]

## Chapter 2: The Personal Life of a MotherScholar

Stories told by Smith and Olson Beal in response to Week 8's "Story → Poem" Prompt.

### *I Forget Which Hat I Am Wearing*

She constantly inspires me, with her curiosity and wonderment.  
A wondrous precious creation, I marvel in all that she says and does.  
Always documenting her treasures, my "teacher-atzzi" tendencies to photograph her every movement for fear I might forget the moment.  
A wondrous specimen, I wish I could peek inside her head and see how her amazing brain works.  
Always reflecting, I see the connections between mother and scholar as constantly influencing one another and inspiring new adventures every day.

### *Mother, scholar, mother-scholar*

Choices  
Some things matter more than others.  
Fight, work, advocate.  
Some causes are always worth our blood, sweat, and tears.  
Just like our kids are always worth it.  
All the kids. All "our kids."  
And all mothers.  
Remain fixed? Adapt? Stand up? Remain silent?  
Kids need interesting mothers.  
What's best for me and what's best for the kids.  
Whose needs are primary?  
Mostly theirs, but  
Sometimes I choose mine.  
Before too much longer,  
A new phase: my kids as my peers.



I'll take it.

### Chapter 3: The Public Perception of a MotherScholar.

Sketches of Burrow completed by Burrow's student, Kimberly (2017); a collage-based self-portrait (2017); and her daughter, Nicole (2017) in response to Week 4's Draw a Picture Prompt.







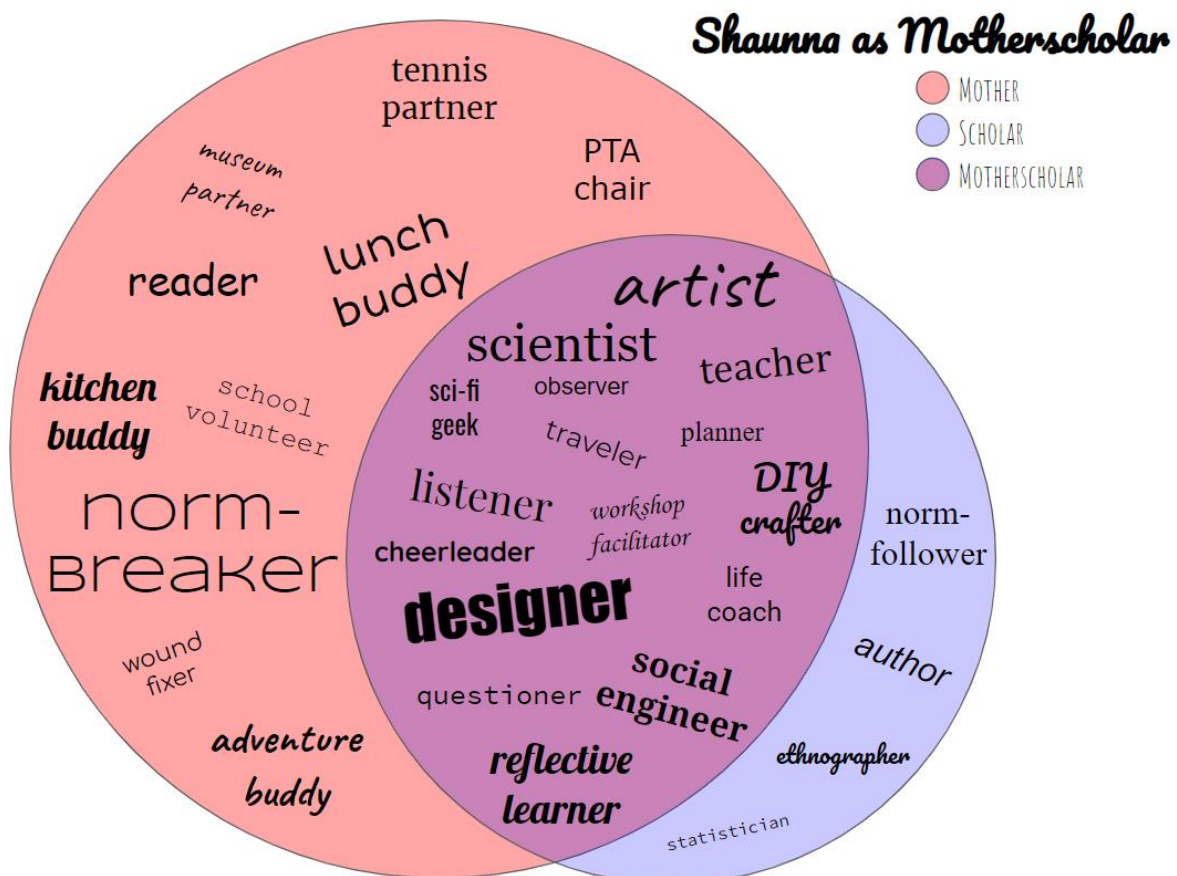
When I look at my drawing of my scholar self, *I* see the pride and success that *others* see in me, too. It validates me that what I do, matters. It strokes my ego to know that others value my work contributions and recognize how hard I am hustling to be Awesome Sauce! I am actually pretty confident in my scholar-self (it may not always earn me the promotion or salary bonus, but I know that what I do ROCKS!)

When I look at my drawing of my mother self, *I* see the guilt and disappointment that my daughter does NOT see. My daughter took days to complete my request for a drawing of me (like her mom, procrastinating because she wanted to get it “just right,” but in the end, her work was AWESOME and she should’ve just tackled it on Day One), but in one simple stroke of marker, she validated what I do, she unequivocally showed me that I do matter, she captured how much I am doing and assured me that it is valuable, too.

*I know I am a good scholar, so why can't I accept that I am good mother, too?*

### Chapter 4: The Reflective Perception of a MotherScholar

Smith and Olson Beal's visuals created in response to Week 6's Map your MotherScholarhood Prompt.



## A BRIEF HISTORY OF MY MOTHER- SCHOLAR LIFE

**Motherscholar: a woman who embraces her dual identities as mother and scholar**

- 1997**  
Kennedy was born - motherhood identity abruptly began!  
I continued teaching HS and completed my MA in Spanish ('98).
- 2000**  
Marin was born.  
I transitioned to a college instructor position (fewer hours).
- 2003**  
Stuart was born.  
I started a Ph.D. program.
- 2006**  
I began dissertating at the girls' elementary school.
- 2008**  
Defended my dissertation, got a tenure track job, moved to Nac.
- 2009**  
First pub!
- 2011**  
Successful 3rd yr review
- 2012**  
AJE pub (after 3 yrs of work!)
- 2013**  
Co-authored pub with Brent - fun!  
Started working at CTL.
- 2014**  
Tenure & promotion awarded
- 2015**  
Kennedy graduated from HS and left for LSU - my PhD alma mater!
- 2016**  
Themed issue of Peabody JOE
- 2018**  
Marin graduates from HS.  
Apply for promotion?  
Write a book?  
Start CET with Lauren?



*I feel like I need two separate maps.*

1. *Having my kids and completing my Ph.D. and up to tenure*
2. *Post-tenure through the present*

*The way my life is/feels/goes now is SO different from how it did 5 (and 10!) years ago. It's like it's two totally different lives. Really.*

*And when I think about how much different again it will be in 5 more years. That will need Map #3.*

*That's all for now.*

## **Chapter 5: Pausing to Acknowledge Those Who Contribute to our MotherScholar Stories**

Cross, Smith, and Burrow's responses to Week 5's Ode Prompt.

### ***An ode to my grandmother***

Oh Gramma, how I love the sparkle in your eyes.  
 Mischievous joy held in that sparkle.  
 Oh Gramma, how I love your no fear attitude.  
 Technology, people, new places, adventures hold no fear over you.  
 Oh Gramma, how I love your story.  
 Pain, trauma, struggle, and victory all part of your past.  
 Oh Gramma, how I treasure your advice.  
 Wisdom, experience, mistakes, season your words.  
 Oh Gramma how I love riding in your car.  
 Speed, confidence, and ruling the road all make for experiences I'll never forget.  
 Oh Gramma, how I love your empowered voice.  
 Feminism, strong beliefs, and support for social programs shape your ideas.  
 Oh Gramma, how I love your laugh.  
 Spontaneous, infectious, and springing from a life well lived.

### ***An Ode to Aunt Mo***

*Oh Maureen, Maire, Star of the Irish and Welsh Sea, my dearest Aunt Mo,  
 I see you and your knowing lavender-lipped smile, you're awareness of how your  
 subversiveness makes others squirm,  
 I hear your southern belle "all right naaaaw" as you wink and curtsy when someone considers  
 your unexpected answer with a question of your own,  
 Oh Aunt Mo, your love for history and constant wondering if evil is born or made,  
 I feel your heart weigh heavy when you silently ponder why more progress has not been made  
 during your 78 years of life,  
 I taste your silent rage as you see injustices repeat before your very eyes.  
 Oh Aunt Mo, who will I discuss these things with after you are gone?*

***Ode to NOWoman and EVERYwoman***

*Oh mother...no ONE in particular, but ALL those that I'm not*  
 I see you gnashing your teeth, sharpening your claws, raising your voice  
 Brandishing your weapons (pen and paper petition, carefully crafted FB secret groups,  
 activated phone tree) to right the wrongs committed against, to stand up for your cubs, your  
 pups, your babes  
 Thank you for calling, emailing, FB posting, marching  
 Up to the school offices  
 To demand the meeting, to speak your mind, to get it changed  
 Oh mother...no ONE in particular, but ALL those that I'm not, you are who your children need  
 you to be.

*Oh female scholar...no ONE in particular, but ALL those that I'm not*  
 I see you calculating your p values, building upon your theorists, weaving you lit review to  
 highlight the need for your study, explaining your methodology, publishing on time  
 Answering Reviewer #2's comments with boldness, clarity, without doubt or hesitation,  
 smiling because you know a "minor revisions" decision — for you — means your research is  
 one step closer to being published  
 Thank you for conquering the imposter syndrome, tackling the procrastination, pushing away  
 the writer's block  
 To publish my idea before I could find the time, find the words, find the discipline  
 To publish it myself  
 Oh female scholar...no ONE in particular, but ALL those that I'm not, you are the researcher I  
 am supposed to be.

**Chapter 6: Coming to "Terms" with MotherScholarhood**

Burrow, Smith, and Olson Beal's responses to Week 1's Photovoice Prompt. Burrow's chosen image is "Broken Clock" by cacophonyx is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0. Smith and Olson Beal submitted personal photos.

**Expressing the feeling of MotherScholarhood:**

*Being a motherscholar feels like this clock. There is never enough time. You are never "off the clock," because when you finish scholar work, mother work is waiting for you; and when you walk away from mother work, scholar work is waiting for you. Also because I have trouble segmenting my time so that my motherscholar time is balanced between my two overlapping yet at-odds worlds; my competing yet complementing worlds. When I am in my scholar mode, I am still thinking about my mother in mother world, my brain is still "on the clock" world; and when I am just "mother time" and never just "scholar time," thinking of my scholar work. To me, it is never*





*because the two are intertwined within me and around me and can't be separated/compartimentalized ... or can they be?*

### **Capturing the meaning of MotherScholarhood:**

*Motherscholar means embedding motherhood within my scholarship. This approach is at times at odds with others around me, including fellow mothers who are scholars. But I feel the need to honor her voice as a piece of my motherscholar identity more than I value their preconceived opinions that the two should be separate. I'm in education because I love learning and I love seeing others discover their love for learning. And if I can't bring my daughter into my scholarship efforts, I don't see the point of it...I would not feel a whole-hearted connection to the task without her. My time is already divided between mother and scholar in that I teach evening graduate-level courses from 6:30pm-9:30pm so I miss many evening storytimes and loving goodnight tuck-ins. That forced division inspires me to embed my two identities whenever I can...not just because I want to spend as much time as I can with her but because she inspires me. Her love of learning and her perspective on meaningful experiences are the center of my universe. She is my number one teaching assistant (I bring her to help each class once a semester), my co-facilitator of hands-on workshops in the local community, my co-presenter at national conferences, my co-curriculum designer, and my tester of new activities and tools. If she isn't interested in the activity/tool or if she can't articulate what she has learned afterward, then I engage in deep reflection about why I am choosing to implement it.*



### **What "Motherscholar" looks like to me:**

*A creative, chaotic, messy hodgepodge of stuff. This is the back of my office door. It's covered with 5-7-9 year old drawings the kids made for me. The top one is a pencil drawing Stuart made of our family when he was probably 5 (he is now 14). I love the very similar stick figures, stair-stepped to indicate height and age. I also keep my CTL (Center for Teaching and Learning) shirt here for when I'm supposed to be wearing it. And I hang old conference badges here. Recent additions are my pussy hat (crocheted for me by a former SFA colleague who mailed it to me, unsolicited, when she found out I was going to attend) and the scarf I wore to the women's march with names of friends and relatives and even students who asked me to wear their names on my body while I was there.*



*Motherscholar, then, to me, means activist, fighter, advocate, feminist, organizer, and example. I hope I am modeling the intersections of my scholarly identity with my personal identity and role as a mother to my children, now ages 14, 17, and 20. They've been with me all along the way. Stuart, the youngest, was 3 months when I*

*started my doctoral program. So this is the only mom they know—this professor/activist/scholar/teacher one.*

## **Chapter 7: Realizing Success *Because* We are MotherScholars**

Leaning into our friendship methodology enabled us to reach back and look forward in order to uncover additional authentic examples of our MotherScholarhood-in-action, beyond just the creative works we created during the study. As we actively applied the "MotherScholar" label to each other, we were able to point out where the pursuit of endeavors that matter to us personally have simultaneously earned credit for our professional resumes, thereby creating a surprisingly advantageous blurring of "personal" and "professional" that, if strategically named and consciously capitalized upon, can actually benefit and not burden us as we manage to not just survive academia as mothers who scholar but thrive in it, as MotherScholars.

For all of us, the reality that we are mothers with children often finds its way into the discussions and lessons of our teacher education courses. As our children progress through K-12 schooling and into college, we are able to speak with authenticity, authority, and with a little absurdity on the woes and wonders of the home-school partnership through our eyes as mothers, former teachers, and current teacher educators. For Cross, Burrow, and Smith, the anecdotes and perspectives of young students are often quite literally brought into our classroom spaces as our children frequent our courses (sometimes by necessity and sometimes with intentionality) to provide our pre-service teachers with living, breathing models of what many have only read about in textbooks. Smith often welcomes her daughter Nadia as an official co-teacher to help her college students better appreciate the power of mistakes in the digital maker's process. And for Cross, sharing comics that her son Cooper creates in order to tackle social injustices and increase diverse representation in stories serve as examples to jumpstart her college students' creativity for a graphic novel assignment. The expertise that we have exclusive access to by virtue of being mothers of amazing young human not only make us uniquely effective teacher educators but also often extends to the work we do in our local communities.

As we perused our public Facebook posts and group texts with the intentional lens of the MotherScholar blended identity, we recognized that a significant amount of our professional service commitments are chosen *because of* the responsible and responsive citizen role we wish to personally model for our children. It is evident to Burrow that the "mother" in all of us not only prompts, but in many ways better equips us to continuously challenge our comfort spaces so as to increase our awareness, advocacy, and activism related to injustices experienced due to one's racialized identity, immigration status, gender/sexual orientation, etc. Simultaneously, the "scholar" title we are all employed under equips us with a toolset that enables us to move from social spectator to informed service-giver in order to aid the communities we are learning in, with, and from.

This fluid transition between civically engaged mothering and community responsive scholarship shows up for Burrow, Olson Beal, and Cross in our long-term volunteerism for a summer writing workshop for underserved youths. While we pursue this yearly workshop to make space for under resourced voices in our local community, we are also motivated by our desire to show our children that we take on the responsibility to disrupt our white privilege by entering spaces that prioritize and respect diverse voices so as to inform us of critical cultural and racialized issues that may not be familiar within our white lives. Time after time we have been able to easily transition this valuable personal pursuit into peer-reviewed publications that

inform others of the wealth of knowledge and talent throughout our local community (Olson Beal, Burrow, & Cross, 2019; Olson Beal, Cross, Burrow, & Wagnon, 2018).

Reflecting on the decade-long friendship between Smith and Burrow has revealed to us that we have always, unconsciously, inhabited a MotherScholar identity. Both of us attribute early-career publications to the wonderment of childhood discoveries we were privy to watch



in our home spaces and analyze through a scholarly lens (Burrow, 2012; Burrow & Smith, 2014; Smith & Burrow, 2016). As we approach the next phase of our careers as tenured and promoted associate professors, we choose to embrace an active acceptance of MotherScholarhood and seize opportunities to switch into a research mentor role with our children as we witness their ideas jumping off of our published pages and being presented in their own voices. We have been overjoyed to witness our own collaborative scholarship come full-circle as we have recently acted as

collaborative scholar mentors for our daughters, Nicole and Nadia, who co-presented at the 2018 National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) conference.

We embrace the belief that our scholarly success is often attributable to our choices to be mothers who welcome our children into our scholarly spaces and who often make space to accomplish scholarly achievements with our children. This creative combination of personal and professional duties, which we embrace as a simultaneous duality of identities rather than bemoan as a burdensome balance of separate identities, enables us to actually accomplish more despite limited time. In this way, we help each other more comfortably and confidently claim our MotherScholar identity as an asset, not an add-on, a hurdle, or a burden.

## Chapter 8: Accepting Ourselves as MotherScholars

Cross's response to Week 1's Photovoice Prompt including personal photos, Olson Beal's responses to Week 7's Smashing MotherScholar Stereotypes Prompt, and Burrow's revised response to Week 1's Photovoice Prompt including personal photo.



This is me...  
 Listening to the dryer...  
 Listening to my children in the living  
 room....  
 Reading my research...  
 Reading feedback on my research...  
 Revising my research...  
 In the same room...  
 Where I sleep, where I fold the laundry,  
 where I relax...  
 My kids on the wall...  
 My computer on the desk...  
 My legacy on the wall..  
 My legacy on the desk...  
 My writing on the wall...  
 My writing on the desk...  
 Motherscholar,  
 Equally mother...  
 Equally scholar...  
 Never both, always both...  
 Mostly guilty....  
 Working towards balance.



The feel of a motherscholar...  
 Delicate Balancing.  
 Each load is heavy...and complex  
 Each load must be balanced individually.  
 When one begins to shift...  
 It evolves into a parasite...  
 I feel empty...  
 I need the scholar...  
 In symbiosis with the mother...  
 And the mother...  
 In symbiosis with the scholar...  
 I feel fulfilled.

**I am, an excerpt**

I am a middle-aged mom.

...

I am a scholar.

...

In some ways my mother-life and my scholar-life are  
 the same.

I take care of a lot of minutiae.

In both lives, I am an advocate.

In both lives, I am an organizer.

In both lives, I am a teacher.

In both lives, I am a cheerleader.

In both lives, I am a people-connector.

In both lives, I feel—at times—taken for granted.

In both lives, I feel appreciated.

In both lives, I am surrounded by fierce and smart  
 women.

Sometimes my scholar-hood bleeds into motherhood.

I read a lot—in one case, books. In another case,  
 student work and emails.

In both lives, I am an activist.

In both lives, I am a feminist.

And my motherhood constantly bleeds into my  
 scholar-hood.

In both lives, I am harried and pulled in countless  
 directions.

I am not selfish when I go in some of those  
 directions and not others.

I do things for myself and pursue my own interests

I am not singularly focused on motherhood.

I am not singularly focused on scholar-hood.

Mother

Scholar

MotherScholar

### **This is what MotherScholarhood looks like to me, an excerpt**



I look at this picture, now, and laugh at my embarrassment, shake my head at my apologies, and smile at my co-presenter pictured here. I hold this picture up to remind me being a MotherScholar is not a burden, inconvenience, or shameful identity to hold. I pick this picture to remind myself that being a MotherScholar is a reality.

This is my reality. I am a mother and I am a scholar. I can't just be one or the other, and so I must always be both. I should not apologize for that; I should acknowledge and appreciate that. Since that picture, I have learned (at least I am trying) to embrace the coming-together of my two worlds and attest that my mother-self makes my scholar-self stronger (though I wonder if the same can always be said about the

other). I look at this picture, now, with

- pride --- my son attended his first international conference by age 3 months (took me 31 years for me to attend my first)
- defense --- I often *choose* to have my children attend my presentations now so they can see mommy-in-action at a job she loves, at a job she is awesome at, at a job that makes a difference and so that they, too, can have a front-row seat to knowledge and questions and lessons
- knowing --- I (and fellow MotherScholar Smith) have intentionally embedded our children in our MotherScholar spaces so much by this point that we plan to have our daughters co-present at a national conference in 2018 (what was on *your* resume at age 10 and 11?!)
- love and gratitude --- I can't be just a mother or just a scholar. I am a MotherScholar. And, I love it. My children/my family are there for me every step of the way --- before, after, and DURING my scholarly success.

This is my reality, I am a mother and I am a scholar. I think I will always have to defend it. I think I will always have to explain it. I think I will always try to embrace it.

### **Epilogue: A Reflection on Why MotherScholars Need *Other* MotherScholars degree do**

Burrow and Olson Beal respond to the query of MotherScholars' need for time with and validation from other Motherscholars by putting forth an invitation for those MotherScholars who are reading our story to reach out to and connect with all of us.

- *When we are together ... we are stronger.*
- *When we are together ... we are more at peace with ourselves, our positions, our roles, our expectations.*
- *When we are together ... we get perspective that allows us to fail without being a failure.*
- *When we are together ... we feed off each others' power, beauty, smarts.*

- *When we are together ... we are a force to be reckoned with.*
- *When we are together ... we are more supported, refreshed, rejuvenated, re-energized, inspired.*
- *When we are together ... we are reminded of our worth, our value, our capabilities, our potential, our power, our successes, our hope.*
- *When we are together ... we make a difference, we disrupt the norms, we challenge the status quo.*
- *When we are together ... we are heard, we can be heard.*
- *When we are together ... we grow, we shine, we sparkle, we laugh, we press on.*
- *When we are together ... we persist.*
- *When we are together ... we are not alone.*

I wish I had a real picture of all my badass women staff and faculty friends at SFA. But this one will do. Not all my female friends are moms, but lots of them are. And that's something I love about SFA. It's okay that we're moms (though I do hear horror stories from some departments . . . this is not the case in mine!).

For me, it's critical to my survival and my emotional wellbeing to have times and spaces to be with these women. I spend time with these women in physical spaces at work (writing group, work lunches, SOS meetings at Starbucks or the student center after getting thrown under the bus). I spend time with these women in virtual spaces (Secret Santa, Kickass Nac Women, SFA Valentines group, Writing Accountability group). I spent time with these women off campus as well--at happy hour, dinners, walks on the Nac trails, at conferences, etc. It's a big supportive community that I am blessed to be a part of and over which I feel a personal responsibility to nurture. In my role in the CTL, I feel like it's my responsibility to loop in new folks and let them know that there is/are these multiple communities of motherscholars and also female scholars that they can rely on and lean on for support.

**The End.**  
**(Volume 1 of ... )**

## **Discussion and Implications**

Throughout this study, it became evident to all participants that the process of participation in critical and close examination of MotherScholarhood strengthened the identity and conviction of both roles. Each participant experienced an increased personal acceptance of who they are as a mother and a scholar and how each role is critical in the formation of professional, personal and community goals for their family. This Feminist arts-based research process, which allowed participants to develop critical self-awareness and clarity of identity, is similarly documented in the work of CohenMiller (2018), Leavy (2015), and Tillmann-Healy (2003).

These research findings are significant for MotherScholars as they suggest that deconstruction and arts-based self-study in a group of trusted MotherScholar friends can lead to the creation of a community of MotherScholars. Such groups can serve as critical support in academia where competition and patriarchy often create institutional and personal power

structures that force MotherScholars into rivalry instead of into supportive Feminist communities. Another key implication is that the very act of MotherScholarhood arts-based Feminist research in an academic setting is an act of resistance against the patriarchal power structures of academia. Furthermore, this process created a trusted space for MotherScholars to critically examine the pressures of scholarhood and explore how to effectively balance those pressures with motherhood. We hope that exploring and embracing the MotherScholar identity will empower MotherScholars to collectively challenge the patriarchal structures and power dynamics of institutions of higher education.

### Future Studies

We hope this initial collective story can act as a foundational narrative --- one that both anchors us and allows us the space and permission to outgrow, revise, and/or shift its original messages, themes, and feelings. Laying claim to a MotherScholar identity was a necessary first step for many of us, but we acknowledge that as our "series of stories" grows, we will need to make more room for future individual growth and frustration, successes and disappointments, and professional choices and personal shifts that can acknowledge the hardships and happiness of an ever-evolving identity. As is characteristic of a *Bildungsroman*, a journey to accept one's self should require questioning, dialogue, and doubt. While we gladly accept our MotherScholar identity, there are still more stories to tell --- ones of tension, doubt, complexity, and uncertainty as we continue our transformations (Kim, 2015, p. 210) filled with plot twists, changes in settings, and introductions of antagonists/protagonists that can potentially intersect with, influence, and impact our stories.

We are aware and continue to acknowledge that our story does not represent all MotherScholars and are critically examining how our privileges impact other MotherScholars as we seek ways to amplify the unique struggles and tensions (internal and external) that result for MotherScholars whose layers of racialized, ethnic, and gender non-conforming identities create challenges at those intersections from which we are privileged to be exempt. Currently, various combinations of authors from this study are examining several different angles of the MotherScholar identity: the fluidity of the identity in order to respond to the impacts of time and maturity --- as researchers, as mothers, as Women; the shifting roles of MotherScholars whose children have grown from dependent toddlers to young, independent adults; the effects of university policies and practices that support or penalize the presence of our children on our campuses; and the chaotic uncertainty of a global pandemic that erases the physical separations between "work" and "home."

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