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Learning from the Pandemic

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The Stories We Tell: Narratives of Mothering and Work During the Dual Pandemics of 2020

Narratives remain powerful in shaping both the cultural stories and personal stories that inform our lives. Specifically, narratives concerning mothering and work are particularly powerful not only for women who are balancing professional life and childrearing responsibilities but also for our larger cultural understanding of what and who society has deemed a "working mother" is or should be. The complexities of these narratives were further complicated due to the simultaneous COVID-19 and racism pandemics of 2020 that exposed fractures in some of our most eminent narratives around mothering and work. Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, the recent pandemics illuminated the fact that many of these narratives are incomplete and often exclude, overlook, or erase women of color and other women who occupy marginalized identities as well as the challenges they face. Our goal is to expose the gaps within these narratives against the backdrop of the dual pandemics and explore the historical and social contexts in which other narratives of mothering and work exist for women of color and other women with marginalized identities. Through centering the individual counterstories that challenge problematic narratives, we aim to use these examples to outline optimistic yet realistic possibilities that explore complexities within mothering and work and support learning and social change for a post-pandemic world.

Introduction

Storytelling is a part of the fabric of American culture. Stories are woven into everything that we are, and they are how we make sense of the world (Maines and Ulmer). We tell small stories to express the mundane, daily experiences of our lives, such as retelling a joke or reminiscing about an important life event. We also tell larger stories to help connect our lives to those around us. These stories are rooted in the set of beliefs, ideas, opinions, and values of the

storyteller, and the broader narratives that shape ideas and give meaning to individuals. People are both the producers and products of the meanings within the stories they tell.

While many narratives create a sense of shared identity and cohesion, they can also promote a sense of isolation and marginalization for those who do not subscribe to and/or resist the larger narratives shared in a community or society. This experience is particularly relevant to master narratives, which have been defined as shared stories that tell us about a given culture and provide guidance on how to be a "'good' member of a culture" (McLean and Syed 320). Those whose personal narratives are aligned with master narratives prove to be relatively trouble-free (McLean and Syed); however, those whose personal stories are not aligned with master narratives, "may need to construct or adopt an alternative or counter narrative, which at minimum differs from, and at maximum resists, the master narrative" (McLean and Syed 332).

In Foucault's articulation of master narrative theory, he describes the connection between a society's master narratives and oppression of certain segments of society, arguing that the master narrative is an intentional and active mechanism that the dominant group utilizes to maintain its power and control over subgroups. In this view, a goal of the master narrative is to preserve the status quo and maintain hegemony. Given this reality, subgroups in society not benefiting from the status quo must reject the master narrative and create a new narrative to survive.

A clear articulation of narratives' ability to maintain the hegemony of a dominant group while oppressing a subgroup can be explored through our understanding of contemporary narratives of mothering and work in the United States (US). The master narratives of mothering and work "provide a framework for new mothers to make sense of their experiences and to develop a coherent maternal identity" (Kerrick and Henry 1) in relation to the work they perform both inside and outside of the home. The extent to which master narratives affect ways that mothers conceptualize their individual experiences and compare them with the prescriptions of the normative experiences of mothering and work reveals the power of the master narrative to advocate a rationale for, grant legitimacy to, and define the value of mothering and work.

However, in taking an intersectional lens, one can begin to see that the experiences included in master narratives suffer the typical limitations of most Western depictions of women. Intersectionality as defined by Kimberlé Crenshaw explores how systems of race, social class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, and age form mutually constructing features of social organization, which shape an individual's experiences of both privilege and oppression ("Mapping the Margins"). When applied to this article's central critique, intersectionality can be used to expose how the narratives are normed towards a homogenized version of a working woman, regardless of identities

or contexts. In the US, these accounts are centered predominantly on the experiences of white, married, relatively affluent, and career-oriented women, and they tend to exclude the experiences of working mothers of color. This phenomenon speaks to Alison Bailey's invoking of Elizabeth Spelman's observations: "Differences among women have been eclipsed by feminist theorists' desires to focus on 'womanness' rather than the diversity among women" (qtd. in Bailey 192) and is aligned with an intersectional tenet that race and gender are not monolithic and that the experience of mothers will vary depending on the characteristics of their identities (Dillard 16). Consequently, women whose experiences do not resonate with the master narrative continue to be marginalized and oppressed. The next section explores how this dynamic was epitomized through the experiences of working mothers during the COVID-19 and racism pandemics of 2020.

A Tale of Two Pandemics

The COVID-19 Pandemic

At the start of the global COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, women exited the workforce in significant numbers. Immediately, the pandemic-related recession was unique, as historically women have been typically less affected by recessions as compared to men (Albanesi and Kim). The most striking characteristic that made the COVID-19 pandemic different from other periods of pure economic struggle was the stay-at-home orders that many states and territories implemented (Moreland et al.) to mitigate the spread of the virus. This one shift quickly and emphatically blurred the separation of work and family as well as paid labour vs. unpaid labour by making home an inescapable sphere of work: blending family and domestic duties with professional responsibilities.

Women are gaining some jobs back. However, even after gaining "188,000 jobs in January 2022, they are still short by more than 1.8 million jobs lost since February 2020" (Gonzales). Linda Carli puts it plainly: "More women than men have lost their jobs … and women have had more work disruption than men … because of increases in childcare and other responsibilities." COVID-19 showed us the implications that the intersections of identity have on our workforce issues, specifically, race, class, marital status, and motherhood. These are important dimensions within this larger narrative of "women" and "work" amid the COVID-19 pandemic, as "increases in labor force exits were larger for Black women, Latinas, and women living with children," specifically under the age of six (Lim and Zabek). Mothers also had the added challenge of managing children's e-learning while schools were closed, pointing to another gendered reality of the pandemic: 63 per cent of women said they supervised online schooling for their kids, compared to just

29 per cent of men (Carino). This dynamic was especially troubling for single mothers who account for 80 per cent of single-parent households and faced severe job insecurity as they balanced this increased responsibility of e-learning with work outside of the home (US Census Data). Furthermore, considering that the majority of single-parent households are skewed towards families of colour (The Annie E. Casey Foundation), mothers of colour were significantly affected. Overall, the psychological and physical effects were quickly felt as women responded to "feeling more exhausted, burned out, and under pressure than men" (McKinsey). The pandemic not only exacerbated existing gender inequalities within the formal workforce (Landivar et al.), it also created a "dramatic increase" in the amount of unpaid care work that women were already doing (Power).

The Racism Pandemic

As if COVID-19 were not already enough of a shock to our ways of being, we also experienced an increased awareness of racism in the US. We emphasize increased awareness because we (the authors) know that racism and police brutality are not new occurrences in the US (or globally for that matter). In fact, "despite only being 13% of the population, Black Americans are three times more likely to be killed by police than white people, and five times more likely to be unarmed when killed" (Campbell and Valera 1). And although we agree with these authors' sentiment that "the only thing new is the cameras," we also acknowledge that social media during this racism pandemic has forced society to address and critique longstanding narratives of criminality (Campbell and Valera), police brutality (Clark, Bland, and Livingston) and anti-Black state violence (Battle).

In her book *America, Goddam: Violence, Black Women, and the Struggle for Justice*, Treva Lindsey states that "Frequently, how we talk about pivotal moments in both Black freedom struggles and America's history more broadly, ignores or limitedly acknowledges violence against Black women and girls as powerful catalysts" (Lindsey 6). Both the COVID-19 and racism pandemics were no exception to this practice. In fact, to the point referenced earlier in this article that master narratives centre the experiences of the dominant group, this is not exclusive to whiteness. Master narratives also centre maleness through the patriarchy (Syed et al.). Consequently, many of the narratives that inform Black experiences in the US around criminality, police brutality, and anti-Black state violence also centre men. Black women were so removed from the cries of justice in the Black Lives Matter Movement that a separate movement, #SAYHERNAME, was created to prevent further erasure of the experiences of Black women with state violence (Crenshaw, "Say Her Name"). And although many of the women murdered by the police were mothers, they have largely been excluded from the narratives of the good or ideal mother

(Carter and Anthony). As a result, they were granted no regard to that identity but were instead revictimized through the narratives often negatively ascribed to Black women (e.g., promiscuous, angry, or aggressive). It is also important to note that it is through the continuous dehumanization of the black female body in these narratives that overly sexualize Black women that also led to the erasure of Black women from the #METOO movement, even though it was created by a Black woman (Keys). It is in these cases that negative narratives about a mother's race and gender were more salient than any potential positive narratives about their maternity, thereby placing Black femaleness "as outside the social contract and, by extension, outside the moral order" and creating the conditions in which the violence is allowed to occur (Smith 1).

The Pandemics and Their Implications on Narratives of Mothering and Work

The "Lean In" Narrative

One narrative of mothering and work that gained significant cultural attention and traction in the US is the ubiquitous "lean in." *Lean In* by Sheryl Sandberg and Nell Scovell, published in 2013, was a groundbreaking book upon its release. As of 2018, *Lean In* had sold four million copies and was featured on *The New York Times* bestseller list for over a year (Newman). The book emphasizes the ways in which women must use their ambition and grit in order to "lean into" their careers and ultimately achieve success. Although the book is certainly not the only narrative of mothering and work, in the mid-late 2010's it became both a popular and dominant framework for individuals, both within organizations and culturally. "Lean in" has become a popular colloquial term in both corporate and broader discourse, immediately eliciting a shared understanding of its meaning.

Despite criticism that both the book and Sandberg have faced, this text, and the lessons extracted from it, has taken on its own narrative and legacy in the public discourse around mothering and work. Written by the former chief operating officer of Facebook (now Meta Platforms), the book aims to help women navigate the challenges of personal professional growth and family responsibilities, namely married life with children. The book promises to help women dismantle "the barriers that exist within ourselves" (Sandberg and Scovell 8). Sandberg claims that as women, "We hold ourselves back in ways both big and small, by lacking self-confidence, by not raising our hands, and by pulling back when we should be leaning in" (Sandberg and Scovell 8).

With this text, Sandberg creates a world in which a woman can thrive in her career while also successfully managing her family life, although she does depict the image of this woman as undoubtedly busy, messy, and filled with guilt (Sandberg and Scovell 135). And even though Sandberg seems to argue

that "given life's variables, [she] would never recommend that every woman lean in regardless of circumstances" (Sandberg and Scovell 97), she sends mixed messages by then advocating that it is in fact achievable to become this woman who lets neither work life nor family life slip through her fingers fully. Therefore, as a result, although Sandberg claims that no one can have it all or do it all (Sandberg and Scovell 122), her more salient messaging around leaning in to get it all is the more prevalent public narrative extracted from this book. It is significant to note that Sandberg herself is an affluent, Ivy-League educated public figure who is a mother and was a sitting C-level executive at a major tech company at the time of writing this book. She is undoubtedly an individual who could be seen as having it all from a certain vantage point. This ideal is attained through embracing both career and family life simultaneously, the message being: although it is messy, it can be done (Sandberg and Scovell 138).

The "lean in" narrative, both the text itself and the following it gained, can be understood as a modern narrative of mothering and work that became quite popular yet has been criticized for reproducing some harmful messaging. First Lady Michelle Obama even publicly dismissed "leaning in" on her own book tour when discussing women, marriage, and having it all (Wamsley). Although the Lean In Organization has prioritized race and intersectionality more recently (LeanIn.org), one of the most significant criticisms around Lean In upon its release was a lack of meaningful consideration or nuance around identity and intersectionality related to race or class within the experience of navigating mothering and work, paired with the idea that women need to conform to societal norms and narratives of male standards to succeed. Holding women to a standard created and maintained by patriarchal ways of being, in lieu of turning that standard on its head, is ultimately problematic. bell hooks illustrates this point as she notes how Sandberg's solution grossly underestimates the social norms and expectations women face from existing narratives:

> Sandberg's definition of feminism begins and ends with the notion that it's all about gender equality within the existing social system. From this perspective, the structures of imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy need not be challenged…privileged white men will eagerly choose to extend the benefits of corporate capitalism to white women who have the courage to 'Lean-In.' It almost seems as if Sandberg sees women's lack of perseverance as more the problem than systemic inequality. (hooks)

Further criticism emerged when women were finding out that this advice was simply not working for them, as they circulated their own personal narratives about the realities of Sandberg's assertions as well as the broad

contradictions embedded within her message (Goldstein; Hess). What is left unspoken in the *Lean In text* is that this partially autobiographical archetype of a woman that the author is curating hints at a larger, master narrative of women, work, and motherhood. She is implicitly white, affluent, and working in a white-collar job. Other identities and stories are left out.

While the interior barriers of motherhood and professional life for women are valid, they are not the only barriers that marginalized women, specifically women of colour, navigate; there are significant exterior barriers that exist as well. Although Sandberg correctly identifies some challenges that women face, (i.e., the backlash against ambitious and active women), she misses the mark by focusing on the individual changes women must make to fit in and reinforces master narratives and structural challenges within organizations that make it difficult for women to succeed. Sandberg addresses but ultimately seems to dismiss the importance of systems and institutions within this dilemma. In fact, while she suggests that the battle for women's advancement should be waged both internally and externally, the book almost exclusively addresses these "internal" barriers, such as imposter syndrome, confidence and ambition, pulling back within a job while pregnant, and managing juggling work and children.

Through this lens, Sandberg's *Lean In* approach echoes the familiar master narrative of American meritocracy: Women bear all the responsibility for change, even as Sandberg notes, at the expense of their own happiness. In addressing only the interior barriers, an overall takeaway from the book for many women might be that responsibility rests solely on the individual to dictate the trajectory of their career path, financial success, and the health of their family life and not on institutional, organizational, or societal actors.

The pandemic can perhaps be seen as the cultural moment in which this idea of the "messy" working mother archetype that emerged from *Lean In* became a caricature version of itself for many women. Kids, work, family, school, and domestic responsibilities now all existed within the same space, and many families "leaned in" even more onto the mothers and maternal figures of the family to manage it all. The pandemics proved that when women are forced to juggle so much, things are not just "messy," as Sandberg referenced, they are in fact unsustainable. Women were forced to juggle work and family simultaneously, and they very loudly rejected it. There was a public outcry from many women about how impossible their lives seemed to have become (Grose). They had been churning along in the mundane yet maddening drudgery of their everyday lives but then had the metaphorical volume turned up and amplified against the backdrops of both the racism and COVID-19 pandemics. This was especially problematic for Black women, whose maternal practice of protection was heightened as they navigated caring for Black children in the midst of violence against Black bodies, resulting in further

questioning of the "lean in" thesis. Where in the narrative of Leaning In do we consider the ways that racial violence affects how you show up as a mother and at work? What is the organizational and governmental responsibilities in supporting mothers and their children as they navigate trauma from such violence? And perhaps more significantly, what is the legacy (and implication) of Black people who continually are forced to "lean in" and push through such trauma with no support, outlet, compassion, or healing? The fundamental flaw of not centring social identity as well as institutional and political failures are what has gotten women here. But until gender and motherhood were highlighted by white women, these identities largely remained neglected, although these are obstacles that women of colour have been working through for centuries.

The Intensive Mothering Expectation

Another damaging narrative of mothering relevant to both the pandemics of 2020 is the intensive mothering expectation (IME). Sharon Hays describes intensive mothering, as an "expert-guided and child-centered, emotionally absorbing, labor intensive, financially expensive ideology" (qtd. in Vincent 110). Carol Vincent further observes that "mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture and development of the 'sacred' child, and in which children's needs take precedence over the individual needs of their mothers" (110). According to several scholars, IME is the most dominant narrative of mothering in the United States, and it contributes to the cultural backlash against working mothers (Erickson; Aird and Arendell). IME has ideological roots that are linked to both the biographical master narrative, which privileges the nuclear family, and the good mother master narrative, which privileges the full-time, stay-at-home mom. Research shows that "all mothers, regardless of racial/ethnic or social class background … are aware of and feel pressure to conform to intensive mothering standards" (Elliott, Powell, and Brenton 351). However, living up to or attaining some semblance of these intensive mothering standards can potentially be more challenging for women of colour. The IME narrative empowers the backlash against working mothers by emphasizing that "women who put more time and effort into work over children, or who do not have children, are considered deviant" (McLean and Syed 331). The backlash is particularly strong for women of colour, many of whom are financially supporting multigenerational households and do not have resources required for IME. The intersection of race and class is central to the narrative of IME and how it impacts the experiences of working-class women of colour. Evangelina Holvino succinctly describes this circumstance in her intersectional analysis of gender and organizations: "Because of the prevalence of people of colour in lower echelon jobs, which restricts their economic opportunities and status, it is difficult to clearly separate the racial

story from the class story in the lives of women of colour. The experience of class for women of colour is not separate, but an integral part of their experience of race and gender and vice versa" (253). Here, Holvino shows the distinction of experiences within this master narrative of mothering and work, or in this case, nonwork, as traditional employment in the IME sense is seen as inferior to the glorified work of dedicated, full-time motherhood.

Similar to the "lean in" narrative, the pitfalls of the intensive mothering narrative were emphatically present within the new pandemic lifestyle. Responsibilities related to childcare and domestic life that fall predominantly upon the shoulders of women were intensified, and in some ways, intensive mothering became an implicit part of sustaining family life during the stay-at-home order. Mothers were not just mothers during this time but also teachers assisting their children during e-learning classes—a burdensome undertaking that was added to the typical responsibilities of motherhood. Working mothers in particular managed professional work, motherhood work, and e-learning for their children. Ideas about how much should financially be invested in children and childrearing were also necessarily challenged, as many families faced, and continue to face, financial struggles due to the pandemic and its economic fallout, with lower-income and Black individuals being hit the hardest (Menasce Horowitz; Parker, Minkin and Bennett.)

Illusion of Choice

Another mothering and work narrative that was problematized by the pandemics was the narrative of choice. Catherine Albiston addresses the choice gap in her work on the work-family dilemma, clearly linking this narrative with the master narrative of the bifurcation and resulting conflict of work (paid) and life (unpaid)—another complex dimension this article will explore later against the backdrop of carework during the pandemic. Albiston further states that the choice gap presents an inaccurate narrative of the options that women have at work, perpetuates the constant duality of work and family, and "frame[s] the work and family conflict as a private dilemma rather than a matter for public policy" (Albitson 44). Joan C. Williams, Jessica Manvell, and Stephanie Bornstein also emphasize the impact that distorted narratives about women and work have on shaping federal and state policy. In interviews with Capitol Hill staffers, they note that congressmen were not interested in shaping work-life policy, as it is a problem of professional women. Considering that women remain the most vulnerable population and have less access to social protections (UN Women), the need for policy protection for mothers is vital, especially during pandemics. Furthermore, from an intersectional perspective, "Women who are poor and marginalized face an even higher risk of Covid-19 transmission and fatalities, loss of livelihood, and increased violence" (UN Women).

If we continue to frame the master narrative of mothering and work as if it is truly about choice, then we do not have to address the real issues of why things are not working for many working mothers, especially mothers of colour, systemically and institutionally. This point becomes heightened when explored within the context of the pandemics because in most cases, many choices related to motherhood and work were being made for women as to when they can work, how they balance career and life, and what types of flexibility are available (Calás and Smircich). Narratives such as "lean in" compounded with the narrative of "choice" contribute to this misrepresentation of who is impacted by inadequate working environments that force women out. The personal narratives of women that emerged during the early days, weeks, and months of the pandemic, of those who were attempting to balance professional responsibilities on top of childcare and other home responsibilities, served as clear evidence that the lived experience of "having it all" under one roof while "leaning in" to both the work and family realms that were simultaneously pushing and pulling women was unsustainable (Grose). However, viewing these issues through the intersectional lens of race and class further clarifies the extent to which society's structural issues and institutional barriers complicate these experiences for women of colour, who have historically been faced with these issues long before the 2020 pandemic, but their experiences remained excluded until white women named them as issues.

The Essential Labour Narrative

Just as the 2010s brought the term and narrative of "leaning in" into both the metaphorical conference room and our colloquial speech, the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 brought the term and idea of "essential labour" into our pandemic narrative and public discourse. The pandemic provided an opportunity for American capitalistic society to recalibrate and become more attuned to those who largely go unrecognized and unthanked in the workforce. Those working in the field of healthcare (nurses, doctors, PAs, etc.) received an outpouring of thanks in many different forms, from donations to the banging of pots and pans (Newman) and yard signs. During this outpouring of support, there was also an attempt to include other roles under this umbrella of essential work—to thank those we see all the time yet pay little attention to, such as postal workers, delivery service workers, sanitation workers, and grocery store workers. "Thank you to our essential workers" suddenly became a new phrase in our dialogue (Das Acevedo). Although their service was undoubtedly important to our economy and our country, the public discourse used specific language ("essential") to further scapegoat some of the nation's already most vulnerable and marginalized workers while giving them a taste of the large-scale thanks and recognition they had always deserved.

This narrative of "essential labour" existed not just in the formal workforce

but extended into the domestic space as well. In many ways, the pandemic also prompted more public, widespread cultural acknowledgement of motherhood and mothering as essential labour. When much of the world stopped turning for many individuals and families, the domestic space became the site of work, school, and all the other moments and experiences that make up life. In her book *Essential Labor,* Angela Garbes aims to recentre the work of motherhood and caregiving broadly and to emphasize its importance and impact, despite the cultural, political, and economic invisibility of these roles. She describes the experience of losing touch with her identity as a professional working mother and being fully immersed in the work of motherhood during the quarantine period of the pandemic: "Over the last two years, as I've done an unprecedented amount of caregiving, I've spent an equal amount of time considering care work: how it is seen as low wage labor, rather than highly skilled work that is essential, creative and influential" (42). Motherhood and the act of mothering are not seen as real jobs within the broader cultural narratives of capitalism, yet the pandemic proved just how important these roles are. Broadly elevating the value of carework is a crucial piece of the pandemics' impact (Bahn, Cohen, and van der Muelen Rodgers; Thomason and Macias-Alonso). With the inability to send children to daycare or school, mothers who also held jobs outside of the home began to take on their professional work and the work of motherhood in the same space, at the same time. During this overwhelming sociocultural moment, many women were speaking out against the conditions and systems within our country that had allowed this to happen. However, the dizzying logistical obstacles and significant strain of often conflicting responsibilities around work and home life and reproductive labour have been landscapes that marginalized women have navigated long before the pandemic.

Historically, distinctions around what counts as labour have been dictated not necessarily by metrics related to actual work; instead, they mirror many of our country's most deeply held social codes and beliefs related to race, class, gender, and capitalism. Marx and Engels offer language around the distinction between productive and reproductive labour formalizing these two types of work as diametrically opposed. Duffy offers their definitions as "the production of goods in the economy and the reproduction of the labor power necessary to the maintenance of that productive economy" (315). Reproductive labour, which can be also understood as carework, cannot be separated from issues of race and gender. Although carework is something that has largely been gendered as women's work for centuries, intersections of race and class further clarify the social hierarchy that carework has historically held in our country. From enslaved Black women's forced and unpaid care of white families and white children (Hartman), to the exploitative history of enslaved Black women wet nursing white children (West and Knight), to the rape and forced

reproduction of Black and Native women for commodification (Gordon), and to the exploitative working conditions for immigrant women (León-Pérez, Richards, and Non), women of colour's care work has largely been neglected throughout history, especially in the narratives of what counts (and matters) as carework. This neglect remains, even though women of colour still hold the vast majority of paid care roles in the US, such as childcare professionals and domestic workers. In fact, "91.5% of domestic workers are women and just over half (52.4%) are black, Hispanic, or Asian American/Pacific Islander women" (Wolfe et al.). Many of these roles are low wage: "The typical (median) domestic worker is paid $12.01 per hour, much less than other workers (who are paid $19.97 per hour)" (Wolfe et al.). Yet these individuals are crucial to the functioning of a healthy economy and society; their work is essential for future generations. Women of colour also make up a large proportion of essential healthcare workers, including nurses and nursing aids (Frye). Despite the celebration of nurses during the pandemic, they have been largely undervalued, and historically this field has had "a racialized and classed history" (Henry 343).

Learning, Legacy, and Social Change

2020's dual COVID-19 and racism pandemics provided a number of opportunities for learning and social change. Namely, the pandemics reemphasized the role that narratives play in shaping the day-to-day lives that people live. The taken-for-granted nature of narratives oftentimes removes awareness of how individuals actively produce and participate in the development and sustainability of these narratives. Thus, it is imperative to continue to bring attention to the ways in which individual roles and experiences can effectively create social change. Part of this work involves centring counternarratives by highlighting the experiences of those most marginalized in society, namely mothers of colour.

The counternarrative, also referred to as the counterstory, is defined by Daniel Solórzano and Tara Yosso as follows:

> A method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told (i.e., those on the margins of society). The counter-story is also a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege. Counter-stories can shatter complacency, challenge the dominant discourse on race, and further the struggle for racial reform. Yet, counter-stories need not be created only as a direct response to majoritarian stories. As Ikemoto reminds us, "By responding only to the standard story, we let it dominate the discourse" (136). Indeed, within the histories and lives of people of color, there are numerous unheard counter-stories. Storytelling and counter-

> storytelling these experiences can help strengthen traditions of social, political, and cultural survival and resistance. (32)

This definition precisely conveys the importance of counterstories to learning, legacy, and social change. Acknowledging that there is a diversity of experiences of mothering and work by mothers of colour presents an opportunity to learn and create new meaning and practices of mothering and work that can replace but also stand alone from dominant discourses. Additionally, recognizing a group of women whose labour, care, and experiences have largely shaped much of our ways of being in the US, even as they remained unnamed and unrecognized throughout history properly cements their legacy within the larger contexts of mothering and work research, theory, practice, and policy. Finally, as is often quoted, the true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members, and our active choice to learn from and honour the legacy of mothers of colour is a radical step towards social change.

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