

Journal of the Motherhood Initiative

25th Anniversary Issue on Mothering and Motherhood

Spring / Fall 2025

Vol. 15



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Balancing Multiple Roles: The Experiences of Deaf Female Doctoral Students

This article presents an autoethnographic study featuring the narratives of four Deaf mothers who embarked on the challenging journey of pursuing doctoral degrees while fulfilling their responsibilities as parents, maintaining full-time employment, managing household duties, and carrying additional burdens associated with higher education. What initially began as conversations among these four mothers, sharing their personal experiences and struggles throughout their doctoral studies, evolved into the undertaking of this autoethnography. This study's objective was to examine whether the absence of a support system, motivation, and family attitudes towards higher education had any discernible impact on their determination to attain a doctoral degree. Through a comprehensive analysis encompassing both formative and summative approaches, four common themes emerged: support, motivation, family attitude, and balancing roles. These themes align with existing ethnographic literature in this domain. Furthermore, the authors provide valuable insights and tools derived from these themes, facilitating the successful completion of a doctoral degree while fulfilling the multifaceted roles of being a mother.

Receiving a doctoral degree is a monumental achievement, often requiring immense dedication, perseverance, and sacrifice. For Deaf female doctoral students who are also mothers, this journey entails balancing the multifaceted roles of parenthood, professional responsibilities, and academic pursuits. This autoethnographic study explores the narratives of four Deaf mothers who navigated these challenges while earning their doctoral degrees. Through their experiences, the study sheds light on the interplay between support systems, motivation, and family attitudes towards higher education, highlighting the unique barriers and triumphs encountered by this group. The article's primary objective is to provide insights into the strategies these women

employed to achieve success and to contribute to the growing discourse on intersectionality within academia.

The four authors—Heidi MacGlaughlin, Kimberly Pudans-Smith, Ashley Greene, and Beverly Buchanan—serve as the focal points of this study. Their distinct backgrounds and shared determination offer a compelling framework for examining the intersection of gender, disability, and parental status in academia. Introducing these individuals early allows readers to understand better the context and significance of their experiences, setting the stage for the thematic analysis that follows.

Heidi MacGlaughlin, the primary author, is the first in her family to earn a graduate degree. She was adopted into a hearing family and introduced to sign language at eight. As a Deaf woman, she navigated both Deaf and hearing institutions, earning her doctorate within a decade while becoming a mother. She completed her degree when her son was eight. Her experiences as an educator, doctoral student, and mother inform her understanding and support for Deaf women balancing advanced studies with multiple responsibilities.

Kimberly “Kim” Pudans-Smith, a first-generation college graduate from a third-generation Deaf family, defied societal norms in the Midwest. A mother of two and grandmother of three, she earned her EdD when her youngest child was nine. Her child documented her journey, including her sacrifices and determination. Pudans-Smith’s experiences as a Deaf mother in higher education shaped her understanding of the challenges facing women.

Ashley Greene, a first-generation college graduate and assistant professor, is the only Deaf member of her family. As a divorced mother of two children of deaf adults (CODAs), she completed all three of her degrees while raising her children. Her experiences provide valuable insights to support students facing similar challenges.

Dr. Beverly Buchanan, a Canadian-born Deaf academic, earned degrees in biology, Deaf education, and sign language education while balancing single motherhood. Her dissertation in 2021 focusses on preserving Maritime Sign Language. She is an advocate for Deaf education and sign language and leads American Sign Language (ASL) programs in Canada.

Literature Review

Academic Identity and Motherhood

Female doctoral students often face significant obstacles when cultivating their academic identity. Amanda Rockinson-Szapkiw et al. note that the process of establishing a scholarly persona frequently leads to tension, particularly when compounded by societal expectations (59). Michelle Maher et al. also highlight that gendered caregiving responsibilities often deter women from persisting in doctoral programs (400). These challenges are

reflected in the “motherhood penalty” in the United States, where societal perceptions and treatment of mothers adversely affect their academic pursuits (McCutcheon and Morrison 92). Our participants’ narratives also reveal how their roles as caregivers and academics often clashed, influencing their academic trajectories.

Forming an academic identity is a multifaceted process that involves cultivating a scholarly persona, defining research interests, and shaping professional aspirations. However, for female doctoral students, this process becomes more complex due to factors like societal expectations, gender biases, and the intersectionality of roles and responsibilities. These factors can create conflicts between personal lives and academic ambitions.

In academia, there is a prevailing bias against motherhood. Mothers often face systemic disadvantages, including reduced career opportunities, lower pay, and limited support, contributing to the perception that motherhood and academic pursuits are incompatible. Research by Jessica M. McCutcheon and Melanie A. Morrison has highlighted that women who become mothers in academic settings dedicate significantly more time to childcare than their male counterparts, despite having fewer children (93). This disparity increases work-family conflict, as these women struggle to balance parental responsibilities with academic goals. Moreover, women in academia often experience gender biases and inequities that contribute to lower research output compared to men (McCutcheon and Morrison 97). These disparities stem from implicit biases, institutional barriers, and limited access to resources, necessitating a reevaluation of societal attitudes and the creation of supportive environments for female doctoral students.

In 2020, women earned the majority of doctoral degrees, outnumbering men in graduate school by a ratio of 148 to 100 (Perry). However, gender imbalances persist, particularly in STEM fields, where women remain underrepresented (Perry). National Science Foundation data also reveal that 9.1 per cent of all doctoral graduates in 2019 reported having a disability. PhD mothers are more affected by parenthood and marriage than married men with children or single women without children. These mothers are often distributed across non-research institutions rather than research universities (Kulp 82). Additionally, deaf individuals earning doctorate degrees are underrepresented, with only 1.2 per cent of PhDs issued to deaf individuals (National Science Foundation). This underrepresentation contributes to the isolation many deaf students experience within academia (Cooke and Caicedo 1).

Intersectional identities play a crucial role in understanding the experiences of individuals who navigate multiple social identities. While research on women in doctoral studies exists, it often focusses on normative experiences. This article seeks to illuminate the experiences of doctoral students who identify as women, mothers, and individuals with disabilities.

For mothers, their primary sense of identity often revolves around their role as caregivers. The women in the Rockinson-Szapkiw et al. study emphasize that motherhood forms the core of their self-identity (62). They express a strong commitment to this role, stating they would not compromise any other aspect of their lives above their identity as mothers. Women, particularly in academic settings, are more likely to assume greater responsibility for their homes and children than their male counterparts (Maher et al. 400). Notably, the average age of women enrolling in doctoral programs has increased significantly since 1970, with many women now over the age of thirty-five. This shift reflects the growing intersection of academic pursuits with personal and family responsibilities.

Disabilities and Intersectionality

However, society often reduces individuals with disabilities to their disability, thereby overshadowing their multifaceted identities. Students with disabilities, in general, face challenges in higher education, even in the presence of successful litigation and court cases advocating for their rights (Los Santos et al. 16). The transition from high school to college poses particular difficulties for students with disabilities, as they often feel overlooked by institutions, resulting in gaps in their academic experiences. Accessing necessary support services requires these students to navigate through assessment offices and provide documentation of their disability—a process that can be time-consuming and hinder timely access to appropriate resources.

For instance, Deaf doctoral students enrolling in universities often require sign language interpreters to facilitate their participation in hearing classrooms. However, finding interpreters familiar with the higher education context can be a daunting task. It can feel like searching for a needle in a haystack to locate a qualified sign interpreter. In Australia, Deaf university students have shared their challenges in higher education, highlighting the difficulties in finding qualified interpreters that provide them with full access to educational settings (Napier and Barker 236). Although higher education institutions are generally well-prepared to accommodate disabled students, they may lack the necessary familiarity with the specific needs of disabled faculty members. This ill-preparedness can hinder the employment and tenure experiences of individuals with disabilities, including Deaf academics (Smith and Andrews 1528). These challenges and barriers can have a demotivating effect on doctoral students, particularly if they do not have a faculty job lined up after completion. Many higher education institutions are unfamiliar with the specific needs of Deaf academics, leading to obstacles in their employment and tenure processes.

Motivation

Motivation is a crucial driver pushing individuals towards their goals and sustains goal-oriented behaviours. For women pursuing doctoral degrees, however, the journey often takes longer than their male counterparts, primarily due to various factors that impact their progress. One significant factor is financial constraints. Many women face difficulties securing sufficient funds to sustain their education, creating a substantial hurdle that may lead some to leave their doctoral programs prematurely. Research has shown that financial resources significantly affect the time it takes for women to complete their terminal degrees (Maher et al. 399). Compared to men, women are more likely to rely on personal earnings, which extends their time to graduation (Bowen and Rudenstine 32).

In addition to financial constraints, women also encounter challenges, such as relationship issues and family responsibilities. Marital conflicts or family obligations, such as caring for children and managing household duties, can take time away from academic pursuits. Health issues may also complicate their journey, necessitating breaks or adjustments (Maher et al. 400).

These factors collectively contribute to the longer completion times for women in doctoral programs. They highlight the unique challenges women face, which can significantly affect their motivation and progress. Addressing these obstacles is crucial for creating a supportive environment that helps women succeed in their doctoral studies.

Efforts to support women in doctoral programs should include strategies to alleviate financial burdens, such as providing more funding options. Mentorship and support networks can also help navigate challenges related to relationships, family responsibilities, and health issues. Additionally, fostering awareness and understanding among faculty and institutions about the unique circumstances of women can create an environment that accommodates their needs.

Mentorship

Mentorship holds immense significance within academia, as highlighted by Francesco E. Marino, who considers it one of the most critical components (750). Engaging in mentorship can be beneficial and demanding for advisors, requiring investment and dedication. When a mentor and doctoral student share common interests, it can pave the way for future research opportunities and foster a meaningful relationship. According to Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., mentorship plays an essential role in transforming the educational experience, enabling doctoral mothers to maintain their journey to the completion of their program by instilling confidence in research skills and fostering a positive research attitude (64). Furthermore, active involvement in mentorship and collaboration with faculty members has been shown to increase significantly

the likelihood of new doctoral candidates completing their terminal degrees (Kluever). Maher et al. have shown that having strong relationships with faculty members and advisors positively affects completion time for female doctoral students (398).

However, mentorship is not something easily found at every institution. For Deaf doctoral students, effective mentorship may face certain barriers (Wolsey et al. 231). These barriers can include limited access to mentors fluent in ASL, difficulties in establishing relationships with mentors who may not fully understand the unique experiences of Deaf individuals, and challenges in collaborating with hearing peers and faculty who may lack familiarity with Deaf culture and communication.

Method

Autoethnography is a qualitative research methodology that connects personal experiences to broader cultural, political, and social contexts. Introduced in the 1970s, it allows researchers to explore the link between individual stories and larger societal norms. Through self-reflection, researchers share the struggles and triumphs they encounter.

A key element of autoethnography is storytelling, using personal narratives to provide insights into the researcher's experiences and perspectives. This approach blends autobiography and ethnography, emphasizing the intersection of personal stories with sociocultural contexts. In our study, we use a narrative approach to share our experiences. By combining autoethnography and narrative methods, we explore the intersections of gender, disability, and parental status, focussing on the doctoral journeys of Deaf mothers from the beginning to the completion of their studies (Clandinin and Rosiek 42; Connelly and Clandinin 2).

Data Collection

Our research began with a thorough review of existing literature, which provided valuable insights to guide our research design and approach. Based on this review, we developed twenty open-ended guiding questions covering various aspects of the participants' doctoral journeys. Some questions focussed on the impact of life events or influential individuals on their decision to pursue doctoral studies, whereas others explored the guilt many doctoral mothers feel regarding their roles as mothers, wives, and students. Participants were encouraged to elaborate and provide examples to offer a deeper understanding of their experiences.

To allow for thoughtful reflection, each participant had several weeks to consider their journey and respond to the questions. After receiving their

responses, the research team carefully analyzed and reviewed them for completeness and depth. Responses were refined and rewritten when necessary to ensure clarity and coherence. This meticulous approach allowed us to capture the participants' perspectives and experiences comprehensively, providing a meaningful exploration of the research topic.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using content analysis, a qualitative research method for systematically categorizing and interpreting textual or visual data. This structured approach helps identify key themes, concepts, and patterns within various data forms, such as interviews or documents.

The process began with the team thoroughly familiarizing themselves with the data through repeated readings. They identified relevant units of analysis, such as words, phrases, or sentences, and developed a coding scheme to organize these units into meaningful categories. This manual coding process ensured that each unit was assigned to appropriate categories, forming the foundation for further analysis.

The team then examined the frequency and relationships between categories, identifying emerging patterns and themes. These findings were synthesized to generate meaningful insights, contextualized within existing literature. This approach provided a comprehensive understanding of the research topic, enabling the team to draw nuanced conclusions and contribute to the broader discourse.

Results

Through the analysis of the collected data, we identified nine axial codes representing recurring patterns and significant aspects within the participants' stories. These axial codes included:

- **Family support:** The importance of support from spouses, partners, or other family members in navigating the demands of doctoral studies while fulfilling family responsibilities.
- **Mentors:** The role of mentors in providing guidance, encouragement, and valuable advice throughout the doctoral journey.
- **Cohort support:** The significance of peer support and camaraderie within a cohort of fellow doctoral students.
- **Financial support:** The impact of financial resources and assistance in facilitating progress and completion of doctoral studies.
- **Anger:** The experience of anger, frustration, or resentment arising from the challenges and obstacles faced as a disabled woman.

- Job mobility: Considerations and adjustments related to employment and career mobility while pursuing doctoral studies.
- Desire for learning: The intrinsic motivation and passion for acquiring knowledge and engaging in scholarly pursuits.
- Prioritization of education: The conscious decision to prioritize education and invest time and effort in pursuing doctoral studies.
- Guilt: The persistent questioning and self-doubt regarding whether enough is being done to meet expectations in various roles and responsibilities.

These axial codes provided valuable insights into the participants' experiences, shedding light on the multifaceted dynamics of support, motivation, and family attitudes in their doctoral journeys as Deaf mothers.

These axial codes were then reduced to three categories: support, motivation, and family attitude. These categories served as key themes to organize and understand the participants' experiences and perspectives. Further reducing the data, we came to the overarching theme of balancing roles. Within this broader theme, the participants' narratives highlighted the intricate and delicate nature of juggling multiple roles and responsibilities as Deaf mothers pursuing doctoral studies. This overarching theme underscored the challenges and complexities inherent in managing various aspects of their lives. Each category will be discussed next, ending with the overarching theme.

Support

Family support is crucial for navigating the demands of doctoral studies while managing family responsibilities. Ashley's then-husband was initially skeptical of her decision to pursue a doctoral program, but her determination to achieve her goals prevailed. Kim credits her father for advocating for her educational rights and encouraging her to aim higher. Clear communication with spouses was vital, as Kim and her husband agreed on a schedule to balance her studies, with him caring for their child during her study sessions. Kim noted that her son's support was challenging and inspiring as they balanced family obligations with academic pursuits, earning mutual respect.

Mentorship also plays a pivotal role in guiding doctoral students. For working mothers like Ashley, mentors were essential in navigating the challenges of academia, especially when the environment felt unaccommodating to her responsibilities as a parent. While managing the additional burden of young children, Ashley often felt pressured to prove herself as a scholar. However, the support of mentors and peers who shared similar experiences helped her overcome feelings of isolation.

Heidi's then-husband's encouragement enabled her to accept a doctoral program offer despite the distance. Beverly highlighted the sacrifices she made to focus on her studies while ensuring her family's wellbeing. Kim found a

transformative mentor in her doctoral program chair, who helped her publish multiple articles and thrive as a faculty member. Beverly, in turn, inspired another Deaf mother to pursue a doctoral program that provided targeted support for Deaf students.

Cohort support significantly contributes to the doctoral journey, fostering camaraderie among peers. Beverly's cohort included two other mothers with young children, and although their children were older, they bonded over shared experiences. Beverly emphasized the value of a strong mentor and supportive cohort in continuing her studies. Heidi recalled relying on a fellow mother during the dissertation phase, building a bond that provided mutual encouragement during a challenging transitional period.

The connections formed within a cohort can have a lasting impact. Ashley's cohort became like family, supporting each other through the highs and lows of their doctoral journey. Years after graduation, these bonds remain significant. Such support creates a nurturing environment that fosters belonging and understanding among peers facing similar challenges, contributing to a richer and more successful doctoral experience.

Financial support is another key factor in facilitating progress and completing doctoral studies. Kim's university-funded tuition enabled her to pursue her degree and secure tenure. The other researchers benefited from living in a state that offers free tuition to Deaf residents, alleviating financial stress and allowing them to focus on academic goals. Financial assistance not only reduces the burden of tuition expenses but also provides the stability needed to excel in research and academic pursuits, maximizing success in their doctoral journeys.

Motivation

The experience of anger, frustration, and resentment is familiar to individuals facing challenges in their academic pursuits. Kim's journey was far from pleasant, as she frequently felt tested on her teaching abilities, research skills, and capacity to exceed perceived limitations. The barrage of snide comments, doubts, and demanding course planning only fuelled her determination to complete her degree and prove her capabilities. Ashley's anger stemmed from workplace oppression and audism, even as she received praise for her intelligence as a Deaf individual. This anger became a powerful motivator, driving her to graduate in under three years, fuelled by a desire to overcome adversity.

These experiences highlight the emotional toll and resilience required for Deaf mothers navigating academia. Despite challenges, their determination to prove their capabilities and triumph over oppression became a potent force. The resolve to overcome barriers and achieve their goals shines through the frustration.

Job mobility and career considerations significantly influence the decision

to pursue doctoral studies. For Beverly, job offers were contingent on completing her degree within a specific timeframe, directly affecting her career trajectory. Others, like Kim, found their career progression limited without a doctoral degree. Immersed in their professions, they recognized the need for advanced education to reach their full potential.

For some, pursuing a doctorate stems from a desire for increased recognition and respect. Ashley's frustration with being overlooked and unheard in her workplace led her to pursue her studies. Once in the program, she found her voice finally acknowledged as equal to her colleagues, regardless of education levels. Heidi experienced something similar where she felt her expertise and knowledge shared were frowned upon or dismissed due to her lack of credentials. She decided to pursue a doctorate to establish respect and credibility in her field.

For others, the motivation is deeply personal. Some seek to achieve a long-standing goal, proving to themselves or others that they can attain the highest level of education. Others are driven by the desire to contribute meaningfully to their field, create new knowledge, or address gaps in existing research. Regardless of the reason, the journey of pursuing a doctorate results in a personal and professional transformation, redefining how individuals perceive themselves and how they are perceived by others.

Considering doctoral studies requires evaluating its impact on current jobs, career opportunities, and overall job mobility. Adjustments may be necessary to balance work and academic responsibilities, with decisions about job changes or advancements often influenced by doctoral pursuits. The intersection of job mobility and academic goals profoundly shapes professional trajectories.

The desire for learning often springs from intrinsic motivation and a passion for knowledge. For Kim, a lifelong thirst for education drove her to seek opportunities beyond her immediate environment, even in spaces where higher learning was not traditionally encouraged for women. Beverly's motivation extended beyond personal growth. As the first Deaf woman in her family to pursue a doctorate, her journey became a source of pride for her family and an inspiration for future Deaf generations on a global scale.

Family Attitude

While the prioritization of education was significant, the intersection of family attitudes and Deafness played a pivotal role in shaping participants' experiences. For instance, Kim highlighted how her family's generational Deaf identity fostered resilience and a commitment to education. However, balancing roles as Deaf doctoral student mothers added layers of complexity. Beverly shared how her advocacy for Deaf culture often intersected with her

academic work, requiring her to navigate dual responsibilities as a scholar and community leader.

For some, the decision to prioritize education is influenced deeply by family support and encouragement. Ashley's mother, for instance, helped her prepare for the financial realities of college, even though she was unaware of certain financial aid opportunities. In a family with no previous higher education experience, Ashley's passion for learning stood out as a groundbreaking endeavor. Similarly, Beverly's drive for higher education stemmed from her intrinsic love of learning, despite her family's lack of emphasis on academics due to societal expectations for women during her mother's generation. Heidi appreciated the unwavering support from her then-husband and her young son, who encouraged her to complete her doctoral education, no matter how challenging the journey became.

Overcoming societal pressures to conform to traditional roles, such as starting a family immediately after graduation, can be a powerful motivator. Kim defied these expectations, choosing to continue her education later in life with the steadfast support of her family. This unwavering encouragement was instrumental in her pursuit of advanced degrees.

The decision to prioritize education often intertwines personal determination with the understanding and support of loved ones. Family expectations can catalyze academic aspirations, while for others, the journey is fuelled by an innate passion for knowledge. Regardless of the source, the pursuit of a doctorate reflects a profound commitment to personal growth and academic achievement.

Balancing Roles

The experience of guilt about meeting expectations in various roles is a recurring theme for individuals pursuing doctoral studies. The demanding nature of doctoral programs often leads to a lack of balance between academic pursuits and personal commitments. Kim expressed the challenges of juggling multiple roles as a mother, faculty member, wife, grandmother, and doctoral student, causing self-doubt. Beverly faced the difficult decision of leaving her son behind in one state while she moved to another for her studies. This decision sometimes strained personal relationships. Ashley's marriage suffered, and constant family distractions made it hard to focus on coursework.

The guilt of not dedicating enough time to family, especially children, weighed heavily on these individuals. Ashley's daughter voiced concerns about her mother's continuous work and absence during weekends. Heidi postponed her graduation due to stress, affecting her time with her son. Unexpected challenges, like medical issues or pregnancies, disrupted carefully planned schedules. Despite the support from their families, the guilt of not being fully present for their children persisted.

Discussion

Understanding and addressing the unique experiences and needs of individuals with intersecting identities is crucial to creating inclusive and supportive environments within academia. This study sheds light on the narratives of Deaf mothers pursuing doctoral degrees, emphasizing the intersection of gender, disability, and parenthood. By examining these experiences through an intersectional lens, the findings align with existing literature and offer insights into the systemic barriers and facilitators influencing this group's academic journeys (Crenshaw 140).

The findings highlight the pivotal role of support systems, particularly family, mentors, and cohort networks, in facilitating the participants' academic success. Family support emerged as a foundational element, echoing Maher et al., who found that clear communication and shared responsibilities within families enable women to balance caregiving and academic roles (400). Similarly, mentorship was identified as a critical resource, particularly for navigating challenges unique to Deaf academics. This aligns with Ju-Lee A. Wolsey et al., who emphasize that effective mentorship is instrumental for Deaf doctoral students, helping them overcome systemic barriers and fostering academic persistence (231).

However, the findings also underscore a gap in culturally and linguistically accessible mentorship, a concern highlighted by Jemina Napier and Roz Barker (235). The challenges participants faced in securing mentors fluent in ASL or attuned to Deaf culture demonstrate the need for institutions to accommodate diverse needs better. By addressing these gaps, higher education institutions can create more equitable opportunities for Deaf scholars.

Participants' narratives reflected strong intrinsic motivation and resilience, often fuelled by experiences of frustration and anger at systemic inequities. For instance, Ashley's drive to excel despite workplace audism aligns with McCutcheon and Morrison's findings on the emotional toll of navigating academia as a mother (97). The participants' determination to challenge stereotypes and prove their capabilities illustrates the empowering potential of anger as a motivator, a theme also noted by Rockinson-Szapkiw et al. (59).

The participants' career aspirations further demonstrate the intersection of motivation and job mobility. For instance, Beverly's decision to pursue her degree within a limited timeframe underscores the structural pressures faced by women balancing professional and academic goals. These findings echo Amanda M. Kulp, who highlights the unique challenges faced by academic mothers in career progression and institutional placement (90).

Family attitudes towards education played a dual role in shaping the participants' experiences. Supportive family members, as seen in both Kim's and Heidi's cases, fostered resilience and reinforced the value of education.

This finding is consistent with studies like Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., which underscore the significance of familial encouragement for doctoral mothers (59). However, the participants also faced societal pressures and expectations related to traditional gender roles, which intersected with their identities as Deaf women. For example, Beverly's advocacy for Deaf culture often required navigating dual roles as a scholar and community leader, reflecting the broader challenges of intersectionality in academia (Crenshaw 2).

The findings underscore the importance of tailored institutional support for students with intersecting identities. Addressing barriers, such as inadequate access to qualified interpreters or mentorship opportunities, can significantly enhance the academic experiences of Deaf students (Napier and Barker 236; Wolsey et al. 243). Institutions must also consider systemic changes to reduce gender biases and support work-life balance, as outlined by McCutcheon and Morrison (92).

Creating inclusive academic environments requires addressing structural and cultural barriers. For instance, expanding funding opportunities, offering mentorship training focussed on diversity, and fostering awareness of Deaf culture among faculty and peers are essential steps towards equity. Moreover, recognizing the role of intrinsic motivation and familial support can inform strategies for enhancing resilience and persistence among doctoral students.

Limitations

The cohort of doctoral students comprises four Caucasian women, and all pursued their degrees at Lamar University. This homogeneity in race, gender, and academic trajectory may shape their experiences and interactions within academic and professional contexts. All four students are mentored by the same individual, which provides consistency in guidance and feedback, potentially influencing their research interests and methodologies.

Additionally, each group member holds American citizenship and shares common cultural norms related to motherhood in the country. This shared perspective on societal expectations, gender roles, and familial dynamics likely informs their research, academic pursuits, and professional aspirations. These commonalities may also shape the focus and direction of their doctoral studies, creating a cohesive academic environment within the cohort. An additional limitation is the lack of research available on deaf students in doctoral programs, let alone deaf mothers in doctoral programs.

Conclusion

This study illuminates the narratives of four Deaf mothers, emphasizing the interplay between their identities as scholars, parents, and members of the Deaf community. By framing these experiences through an intersectional lens, we highlight how Deafness and motherhood uniquely shape their academic journeys. The findings underscore the necessity of tailored support systems that address not only gendered expectations but also cultural and linguistic barriers, offering a roadmap for creating more inclusive academic environments.

Moreover, the insights gleaned from these themes offer valuable resources and strategies for navigating the complexities of doctoral studies while fulfilling the multifaceted roles of motherhood. By shedding light on the experiences, challenges, and triumphs of these Deaf mothers, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the intersectionality of parenthood and academic pursuit, particularly within the Deaf community. It underscores the importance of fostering support networks, cultivating intrinsic motivation, and fostering positive familial attitudes towards education to empower individuals in their academic endeavors. Most of all, the narratives shared in this study serve as a testament to the resilience, determination, and resourcefulness of Deaf mothers pursuing advanced education, inspiring future generations, and informing efforts to create more inclusive and supportive academic environments.

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Journal of the Motherhood Initiative
25th Anniversary Issue