

Feminist Parenthood Column  
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### **I Am a Mama-Scholar**

By Jennifer N. Bacon

As a Core Doctoral Faculty in the Department of Human and Organizational Development, my research for over three years has been on “Motherhood in the Academy.” This research began when I returned to the United States and higher education full-time after living abroad in Costa Rica, where my daughter was born. One of the conversations that stands out for me the most, when I think of this topic, is with a student who declared that we, as working mothers, experienced a *triple burden*. That burden being, in most cases, as primary caregivers, the caretakers of the physical household, and earners (many times as the primary earner).

I’ve always viewed my work and roles as responsibilities - yes - but burdens - no. That is until recently when I began to look at things on a larger scale which extended beyond my circumstances or my own family to a larger system that thrives on and perpetuates structural imbalances usually at the expense of women, especially women of color who are negotiating both race and gender (along with other identities such as class, sexual orientation, gender expression, ability/disability, etc.). When I think of working mothers’ *triple burden*, I think of class discussions in human development on feminism. Particularly conversations on unpacking these roles as a society rather than accepting our situations simply as our fate. This brings me to our feminist foremothers such as Sojourner Truth, Margaret Walker, and Patricia Hill Collins who resisted, pushed against, recreated, expanded and imagined new systems and supports. On a more personal level, how do these insights apply to my daily awareness and the quest to define who I am as a *mama-scholar* and feminist parent?

Much of my research interests inform and explain my role as a *mama-scholar*. As a full-time working mother and feminist parent, I have been grounded in *Black feminism* with an intellectual, artistic, philosophical, and activist scholarship and practice rooted in Black women’s lived experiences (Bacon, 2023; Collins, 1990; Collins, 2022; *Third wave feminism* which embraced diversity and individualism in women, redefining feminism and emphasizing intersectionality as a critical and influential component and focal point of third wave feminism (Crenshaw, 1989; Zack, 2005). As well as *matricentric feminism*, through a culturally responsive lens, that names the concerns and identity of motherhood as a distinct identity from that as an identity and category solely as women, and seeks to address inequities in pay, work, promotion, leadership, and family roles while emphasizing the empowerment of mothers (O’Reilly, 2019). This all shows up for me not just intellectually in the classroom or in my research but in my real life as a working mother. I now reflect on the more personal and who I am in my daily life.

I am a married mother, every day, all day. I am also a full-time professor, a mentor, a researcher, a writer, committee member of multiple and diverse committees, an active mother’s group member, a volunteer, and interfaith minister, among many other roles. When I wake up in the morning my day generally begins with hugs and kisses for my daughter still nestled in bed, making breakfast and school lunch, responding to work emails and tasks, putting out clothes, packing her school backpack, feeding the dog, blasting Dolly Parton’s ‘9 to 5’ or Kirk Franklin’s

“Declaration: This Is It.” Getting showered and dressed and ready for the outside world, driving an hour round trip to drop off my daughter at school, walking the dog (if there’s still time), then rushing back home for Zoom meetings, and/or teaching, lesson planning, reading dissertations, student papers, writing, and attempting to work on my research, etc. These tasks are often completed as my husband sleeps soundly or is just beginning his day. This is part of the daily routine that I have become accustomed to over the years.

I made a conscious decision to move into a position as a remote faculty member at a primarily online university. Remote positions afford many luxuries such as travel and living almost anywhere. There is also the time saved in not commuting to work. It doesn’t require time to do a “full classroom dress up,” or prepare meals to take to the office, etc. It allows creating my own office space, being able to be with my child when she is sick or doing other domestic tasks. And as a full-time mother, one of the greatest gifts is being afforded the option and opportunity to homeschool (even if it is only used temporarily, part-time, or under special circumstances).

Yet I have learned there are as many challenges as rewards as a full-time remote working mother which include being the parent who is almost always expected to change her schedule since I am “home,” Expected to do the home care or days of homeschooling, since “I’m already home,” “lunch breaks” spent doing dishes, or cleaning. The feeling sometimes expressed by my family that if I’m home, I’m not working or the sentiment often implied, expressed, or demanded by my profession about what seems to be all and non-stop access. Not to mention my office is forever present in our lives and beckons me to work whether it is late at night, the wee hours of the morning, or weekends.

When I take off my professor hat, and even my multi-layered feminist hat, I am a human. As a human being, I simply admit, there are times when I am spilt between multiple tasks, one of which is straightening up X, Y, and Z, wrangling laundry, or cleaning up the kitchen for the umpteenth time that day on my “work break,” that I simply throw up my hands and declare, “I didn’t sign up for this (fill in the blank:!)” “Not for any of it!”

There is genuinely nothing that I love more than being a full-time mother and find deep meaning in being a mama-scholar who shows up every day in every way for her daughter *and* models what it looks like to be a scholar and woman, includes her daughter sometimes in classes, and presentation activities, and does not hide motherhood for the sake of career advancement and does not hide my career for other mothers. Like many other mothers, I am still searching, striving for balance and equity in my own life, and in the expression of my many passionate identities. I assert that my love and devotion to being a mother and a mama-scholar should not be forcibly tied to domestic labor or the notion that working full-time from home is akin to being a housewife (and there is absolutely nothing wrong with being a housewife if you choose to!).

I ask myself as I ask my research interviewees, students, and mentees, “What is the balance?” Not just a work-life balance but a work-family-life-passion balance? How do we live in and out of our classrooms and offices? Maybe it is so deeply interwoven we cannot really separate it/them. But maybe that shouldn’t stop us as feminist parents, working mothers, and *mama-scholars* from trying to and demanding it of our communities, institutions, systems, jobs, and workspaces. Through my research on ‘Motherhood in the Academy,’ teaching, learning, and lived experience, I hope to unfold just that for institutional policies and family practices.



## **Bio**

Jennifer N. Bacon, Ph.D. brings with her over two decades of experience in the field of education. Dr. Bacon is Core Doctoral Faculty in Human and Organizational Development at Fielding Graduate University. She has also served as a Core Associate Professor, Department Chair in Education, and Associate Dean. In addition to her in-depth experience in education, she is trained in the use of poetry therapy, spiritual guidance, and yoga.

Deeply committed to addressing racial and gender equity, and writing for social justice, healing, and transformation, she participates in a number of professional associations, mentoring organizations, writing projects, and research work. Dr. Bacon is the author of *Sisters in the Dissertation House: A Dissertation Narrative*, which addresses doctoral completion by women of color in underrepresented fields. Her children's book titled, *I Am an Antiracist Superhero!* was released by Bala Kids in September of 2023. Her book, *These Black Kids: Culturally Responsive Poetry and The Lived Experience of African American Adolescent Girls* debuted with University Professors Press in October of 2023.

<https://universityprofessorspress.com/product/these-black-kids-culturally-responsive-poetry-and-the-lived-experience-of-african-american-adolescent-girls/>

If you would like to submit to the Feminist Parenthood Column please email Lauren Mizock, PhD at [lmizock@fielding.edu](mailto:lmizock@fielding.edu).