The COVID Ceiling: Super-Moms are Struggling

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The COVID Ceiling

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Moms are home. Why is it so hard?

- We wanted to be home with our children
- Why do so many moms report feeling depressed?
- What challenges are unique to identity?
- What can and are institutions doing to help?
What is a “Super-mom”?

A cultural representation of femininity in which a mom is able to cope with so many competing demands without help.

A gender performance which can mask true feelings such as depression.
What is a “Positive Front”?

Millennial women also have a performative aspect of their work due to entering the workforce during precarious labor market.

They say yes to everything, remark that all is well, and are hesitant to challenge status quo.

Can result in “toxic positivity”-- the idea that no matter how dire the circumstances you should maintain a positive attitude.
This experience demonstrates the “new gender gap.” The term refers to the declining levels of happiness for women despite (or possibly because of) the growing educational and professional opportunities. Even though the world is opening up to female professionals, women are still required to make sacrifices that men simply do not have to even consider, and those compromises take away from their happiness.

So while women are now allowed to enter the professional and public realms previously reserved for men, despite the huge progress that feminists have made in trying to break the glass ceiling, they are still required to adopt a masculine attitude (“be a man”) and constantly prove their commitment to work above all else in order to be successful, thus completely disavowing the private. …

[There is no way to be successful in both realms, because they are structured in a way that requires different, and often opposing, attitudes, values, attributes, demands and so on; that is, unless one is superhuman.

– Ana Popović, The Good Wife’s Representation of Women in the Political and Legal Realms: Balancing Expectations, 3 EXCENTRIC NARRATIVES: J. ANGLOPHONE LITERATURE, CULTURE & MEDIA
What is the secret to her success?

Deep social networks which includes partners, parents, siblings, grandparents, hired help, and more.

It plays out differently across race, age, and socio-economics.
For Latinas and other ethnic and racial groups across generations regardless of time residing in the U.S., *familismo* is critical to the success of super-moms but also presents its own challenges.
The Balancing Act has Evolved Under COVID-19

**Good Community Member**
- No groups larger than 5
- Socially distance
- Wear your mask
- Protect elderly

**Good Employee**
- Volunteer for tasks
- Be team-player, leader
- Support students
- Attend every meeting

**Good Parent**
- Support extended family
- Respect and care for elders
- Maintain closeness
- Village raises children
COVID Ceiling

It is the unique combination of identity, discipline, and academic work requirements with care crisis and public health crisis that is contributing to the current and soon larger wave of mental health crises.

“Suicides are attempted and experienced by non-binary, LGTBQI2 and Indigenous persons, particularly youth, at higher rates than cis-gendered Western suicides.”

“Mental health advocacy groups warned that the student demographics at the most risk for mental health declines before the pandemic —such as Black children and L.G.B.T.Q. students—were among those most marginalized by the school closures.”
Moms: We are drowning. Help.
Everyone: Wow you’re superhuman!
Everyone: I don’t know how you do it!
Moms: We’re not. Help us.
Everyone: OMG you’re amazing tho 😍😍😍
## COVID Ceiling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS</strong></td>
<td>Low - all people&lt;br&gt;Medium - moms&lt;br&gt;High - vulnerable, minoritized, unpartnered moms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Increased Stressors <em>(Personal, Pandemic, Physiological)</em>&lt;br&gt;• Loss of Self-Care Opportunities</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2. PRODUCTIVITY DEFICIT</strong></td>
<td>Low - all working parents&lt;br&gt;Medium - working moms&lt;br&gt;High - vulnerable, minoritized, unpartnered working moms</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Loss of Village&lt;br&gt;• Increased Caring and/or Schooling of Child(ren)&lt;br&gt;• Increased Domestic Duties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. PRE-EXISTING INEQUITIES</strong></td>
<td>Low - all academic women&lt;br&gt;Medium - academic moms&lt;br&gt;High - vulnerable, minoritized, unpartnered academic mothers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Super-Mom Standards&lt;br&gt;• Inequity in Academy&lt;br&gt;• Wage Gap in Society&lt;br&gt;• Care Crisis in Society</td>
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Lack of Childcare + Decreased Resiliency = Productivity Deficit

- In 3 hours, the parent on duty was interrupted 45 times.
- The average length of uninterrupted work time was 3m24s.
- It takes 20 minutes or more to regain focus after being interrupted.
- This can lead to feelings of inadequacy, hopelessness, and despair.
Women are carrying higher burdens than men in 2-parent households.

Unpartnered women often carry the entire burden.

- Women spend 15 hours more on domestic labor each week.
- In households with children, 44% of women report being the sole caregiver for children, compared to 14% of men.
- Women faculty can be neither as productive nor as successful as their male peers or peers without children.


2 Gema Zamarro, *Gender Differences in Couples Division of childcare, Work, and Mental Health During COVID-19* (July 2020).
Lack of Self-Care + More Stressors = Vulnerable Mental Health

- In a report on gender differences of the impact COVID-19, 49% of mothers showed at least mild symptoms of psychological distress in early April 2020.
- Surely that number has risen given what we know now: women (esp. Black women, Latina, and Native American) are more likely to be unemployed, leave the workforce, get sick, or die from COVID-19.
Potential Consequences of COVID Ceiling in Legal Education

- Decreased mentorship of women and women of color law students
  - Women and women of color excluded from leadership roles, tenure positions
  - Less feminist and feminist critical knowledge production
  - Less women and women of color engage in rights advocacy
  - Less women and women of color enter pipelines, hiring pools, junior positions
  - Women and women of color excluded from leadership roles, tenure positions
Prevention Requires an Institutional Shift
Even super-moms have limits.
Thank you!

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