

i am the working class mother

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i am the working class mother

i am the person left cold in the rain
when the tax shelters do little to shelter me

i am the laborer left parched
when trickle down economics do not afford me even a drink

i am the working class woman fighting harder for more shifts
when i realize i have been fighting the wrong fight all along

i am the working class mother
and the tell me that hard times end, but hard workers prevail
and i ask you when?

i am the mother caught in a corner
when even overtime won't cover the sitter and my child sits at home

i am the mother forced to choose the non choice
caring for my children tonight
without a plan for them tomorrow
or be able to provide for them in the morning
only to see them taken away

i am the mother caught in a corner
patching together child and eldercare from the scraps of social support
only to find that this parachute has plunged me into a free fall

i am the mother who can't play the ideal worker
because play time is reserved only for those without other responsibilities
(which is exactly who you want me to be)

i am the mother who can't play the ideal worker
because there is no such thing as ideal child care at the wages you pay

i am the working class mother
and i can no longer afford to listen to what they tell me

because the fruits of my labor
can not afford decent meat or fruit for my babes

because the excessive cost to my body
does not cover the cost of my child care

because my lack of benefits, benefits none
when emergency rooms are the only place that treats me

because sick leave is not an option
and i am sickened by the sound of a coughing child

i am the working class mother
and this is my reality
and it frightens me that, really
my “choice” of industry shapes my vitality

and it frightens me that only
women in third world countries have the same maternal policies as me

i am the working class mother
and i ask
who will stand for me?

I am the Working Class Mother: Poetry as Method

As researchers struggle to create a coherent argument from the volumes of literature, they stumble upon what is for many an invisible choice. Richardson (1997) argues that in writing “our choices are simultaneously political, poetic, methodological and theoretical,” (p. 17). Though the diversity of methods in qualitative research is expansive, many scholars return to traditional reports time after time. Ellingson (2009) contends that though the illustrative goal of qualitative methods is clear, the way that we construct our representations is still open. Like more traditional scholars, my earlier qualitative projects represented a traditional structure (e.g., Denker & Dougherty, in press); however, through expanding work through crystallization, researchers have the opportunity and possibility of reaching multiple audiences (Ellingson, 2009). Crystallization includes diverse analysis and styles of representation into a clear manuscript(s) that offers more views of the fractured reality we hope to illuminate (Ellingson, 2009). Specifically, *dendritic crystallization*, a form of crystallization achieved through multiple texts—like the shift from traditional thematic analysis, branches out into “patterned but also unpredictable, unique, and often beautiful forms of representation,” as unpredictable as a shift from the long quotations to rhythmic lines (Ellingson, 2009, p. 125).

i am the working class mother came out of the literature I was reading in the process of expanding my research in couples’ work-life co-constructions. Mulling over pages and analyzing arguments, my understanding of the situated lives of working-class mothers deepened and I found myself constructing lyrical lines rather than the traditional literature review framework, experiencing what Prendergast (2009) would call “literature-voiced” poetry that emerges from text (p. xxii). Researchers note “poetry’s work is the clarification and magnification of being,” (Hirshfield, 1997, p. vii). Through this clarification and magnification,

what both researchers and readers really see expanded is meaning. My goal with this text was a process piece, not only for myself as I work through the complexities in the literature of working-class mothers, but to also create a more evocative text that engages individuals. Allison (1994) argues that “class, race, sexuality, gender—and all the other categories by which we categorize and dismiss each other—need to be excavated from the inside” (p. 35). Through poetry, readers can explore and engage with these different identities, rather than compartmentalizing and dismissing others. Research poetry (Ellingson, 2009) or investigative poetry (Hartnett, 2003) provides the venue for engaging audiences as well as offering another facet through which we can better understand the complexities of work-life and working class mothers. Poems immersed in research merge the “evidence-gathering force of scholarship with the emotion producing force of poetry” (Hartnett, 2003, p. 1). Richardson (2000) suggests that poetry is “both a *practical* and *powerful* method for analyzing social worlds” (p. 933, emphasis in the original). Poetry speaks the unspoken, or unacknowledged, and through this becomes both personal and political (Parini, 2008; Pelias, 2005). Similarly, Denzin (1997) notes that these new forms of ethnography, or ethnographic poetics, offer a starting point for social criticism and social activism. This piece represents my first representational turn in my work-life research. I offer it as both scholarship and activism.

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