

Math Mamas: Changing the Narrative

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Math Mamas: Changing the Narrative

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Motherhood and mathematics are not commonly discussed unless you identify as a “math mama.” So why would the mathematics community need an entire issue of a journal discussing experiences by mathematical mothers? Moreover, why would we, as editors, not present an issue on parenthood and mathematics? The simple answer is that we are mothers who are mathematicians. We realized we were not anomalies but comprise a productive part of the mathematics community. So we sought to uncover hidden narratives like ours, full of hope and courage, involving women breaking the stereotype of what a mathematician and a mother should be. These stories are about women striving to overcome challenges and seeking to find balance in both their personal and professional lives as academics.

Proudly, these stories embrace the intersectionality of our identities. We know that both men and women are parents. We know both men and women are mathematicians. But the intersection of these identities – woman, parent, and mathematician – has its own unique set of challenges. We know this from research exploring the underrepresentation of women in math-intensive fields, which demonstrates that women being employed in positions offering fewer resources is mostly not due to discrimination based on sex. Rather, it is due primarily to factors surrounding family, child rearing, gendered expectations, lifestyle choices, and career preferences [1].

Several research articles presented in this issue provide further evidence to these challenges. We also know it through our everyday lives, documented in the World of Mathematics section of this special issue. Recognizing that the expression of our lived experiences can take shapes beyond narratives, this special issue expands into art and poetry. Each section of this special issue is presented in the order of a life history progression from parenting babies to teenagers, with broader scope stories at the start and end.

One could argue that this issue is more important than ever. In our current political climate, many marginalized groups are seeking to change the narrative shaped by systemic bias. This special issue is no exception and, as a co-editing team, we are proud to bring these narratives forward.

Through this work we were reminded that there is no right or wrong decision about whether to have children, when to have children, or what kind of professional position is best to raise children. In fact, there are so many success stories from so many different settings, that it all comes back to finding the right path for oneself. Each math mama does their best to make the right decisions with the information and resources present in the moment. Having learned and grown from stories that made us laugh, made us gasp, and made us cry, we are now excited to share them with you.

We hope this work provides readers with hope, lessons of acceptance, and a sense of community. We ask that you use this special issue as a resource, a starting place for conversations, and as a way to rally support for positive cultural shifts at your institution. We present this collection all with the hope that together we build a mathematical community in which all members, including mathematical mothers, can thrive to their fullest ability.

We end by taking a moment to thank the *Journal of Humanistic Mathematics* for hosting this special issue. As we embarked on this editorial journey, it was particularly important to us that the content of this issue be freely available to the larger academic community. We could not be happier to have worked with the *Journal of Humanistic Mathematics* to have brought this project to life.

References

- [1] Stephen J. Ceci and Wendy M. Williams, “Understanding current causes of women’s underrepresentation in science”, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, Volume **108** Number 8 (February 22, 2011), pages 3157–3162. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1014871108>.