It came in waves: Doctoral students' resilience during Covid-19

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This inquiry is focused on beginning to understand the graduate student experience in the midst of COVID. The authors hope readers will take away intervention points where policy change can happen and identify ways that faculty and students can support one another during their transition back to pre-pandemic life. To do this, this study enacted focus groups to explore the experiences of graduate students in an art education department at a large southeastern university. Through poetic assemblages, authors used the arts to bring these experiences from the margins of institutional and pandemic narratives, into the center. This inquiry explores how sharing the stories of student vulnerability and resilience during the COVID pandemic might help transform post-pandemic teaching and learning environments into places that are responsive to student needs.

Keywords: graduate school | teaching | COVID | poetic inquiry | assemblage | higher education

On March 14, 2020, our university closed residence halls for spring break. March 23 - April 5, 2020, all university classes moved to remote instruction. Face to face classes were set to resume on April 6, 2020. Now, 676 days later, we are still operating at limited capacity in a mostly remote setting. Three days ago, this was released:

> *Florida State University* will resume normal, pre-pandemic operations effective Aug. 1, 2021. A few public health and safety protocols remain for student organizations and some specific events including residence hall move-in. Masks are recommended but not required on campus except in designated healthcare locations. Classes will return to predominately face-to-face instruction and indoor space limitations will be discontinued. A small percentage of designated courses will continue online as offered prior to the pandemic. Employees will return to pre-pandemic work locations and schedules. (*Florida State University Will Resume Normal, Pre-Pandemic Operations Effective Aug. 1, 2021,* 2021)

With the reopening of campus on the horizon, the questions of *pre*-pandemic expectations continue to float through our collective consciousness. We, a faculty member and a graduate student, are just beginning to emerge from quarantine and isolation, where a normal existence seems hard to imagine when the current vaccination rate in our state is just 43% (*Florida Coronavirus Vaccination Progress*, 2021). So, while campus may return to *pre*-pandemic operations, the student and academic bodies may have a harder time adjusting.

Unlike institutions, bodies are easily damaged. Metal rusts, concrete crumbles, but it takes more time to degrade than the soft skin covering bodies. So while this institution might have been built to protect those inside, it was never great at that to begin with. What happened to the academic bodies, student bodies, your body? What happened when these bodies were displaced, left homeless and exposed to the elements.

So here we begin

Separated by degrees

Connected by disease

An academic body

A student body

Wanting to know more

This inquiry is focused on understanding the graduate student experience in the midst of COVID, in hopes of identifying ways that faculty and students can support one another during the impending transition back to *pre*-pandemic life. Early research on returning to work post pandemic shows that "physical distancing, stay-at-home orders, and isolation have produced drastic social, economic and health consequences...with a disproportionate impact on those more disadvantaged" (Shaw et al., 2020, p. 299). Students, an already disadvantaged population in the strata of power structures in higher education, also encounter various subsets of intersecting vulnerability and power, i.e. race, social, political, and financial realities to name a few (Harris & Patton, 2019). And within this grouping, graduate students emerge as a particularly vulnerable population (Ballamingie & Johnson, 2011). Graduate student success often relies on factors that are far beyond the reach of the student themselves. Influences like faculty interactions/support, financial aid, and community are key indicators of graduate student performance and are also prime examples of the factors most impacted by the COVID pandemic (Bain et al., 2011)

As members of a graduate only department, we are interested in exploring how graduate students are navigating the experience of COVID. The goal of this work is twofold. For the academic body, understanding the varied ways students have shown both vulnerability and resilience is important to be able to identify ways of moving into the Fall semester to safeguard and protect the students in our department. For the student body, this was an opportunity to explore and express the process of vulnerability and resilience by providing "specific intervention points and possible pathways to vulnerability reduction" (Miller et al., 2010, p. 14)**.** Ultimately we see this inquiry as beginning a conversation through "collective reflection and learning...so as to better capture important lessons learned" (Miller et al., 2010, p. 18). This study enacted focus groups to explore the specific experiences of graduate students in our art education department. Through poetic and artistic assemblages, we seek to use the arts to bring the

experiences of graduate students from the margins of institutional narratives, into the center (Atallah et al., 2019). In this inquiry we look closely at how exposing the stories of student vulnerability and resilience during the COVID pandemic might help transform post-pandemic teaching and learning environments into places that are responsive to student needs. From this point forward all of the poetry, except that presented from the academic body's perspective, was taken and composed from focus group transcripts.

A STUDENT BODY

AN ACADEMIC BODY

Students went home. Parents packed them up left.

One day I ended class and never saw them again.

Trips cancelled. Events postponed.

A few weeks to flatten the curve.

The streets,
the school,
the city,
was empty.

Curfew. Lockdown. Shutdown.

We were locked inside.

Lonely.

Isolated.

Faces behind a computer screen.
Hearing sirens through the phone.
Watching the death count rise.
Loved ones lost loved ones lost loved ones.

Our kids are screaming at our feet.
Furloughs and layoffs all around.
Watching bank accounts dwindle.
Still the emails ding, begging our attention

Trauma of the pandemic.
How do we come together? How do we get support?

We talk, texted, Facetimed, Zoomed.
Some of us moved home to be with family.
The closeness brought us comfort.
Some of us went back to therapy.
Talking with each other helped us heal and cope.
In some of our classes we were given space to be vulnerable.
Stopping to reflect and express our anger, sadness, fear, and anxiety.

We planned, strategized, zoomed.
Most of us spent hours moving classes online.
Family always around, distracting from our mission.
For others isolation suffocated and overwhelmed
Making it hard to be engaging.
How do we give space for vulnerability,
When all our space is occupied or empty.
How to make time to reflect on a moment in the making.

Teamwork. Collaboration. Vulnerability. Togetherness.
Adapting. Changing. Transforming. Sharing.

Wake. Work. Eat. Sleep. Hurry up and put the class online. They need stability.

The pandemic parted the waters.
And we need to work together on understanding
How the chasm looks from both sides.

3

Resiliency in Context

> *Dear Students,*
>> *We want to applaud you for your strength and resilience during these uncertain times. This pandemic has affected every aspect of our lives, and we know everyone is anxious to return to a less disruptive way of life. As we look toward the summer and fall semesters, we know you may have questions about what to expect on campus and in the classroom. While we will continue to closely monitor conditions and consult with the CDC and state and local health officials, at this time, the university is confident that we can resume more normal operations in the coming months.* (*What to Expect for Summer/Fall 2021*, 2021)

A definition of resilience in higher education is elusive at best but is generally conceptualized as the ability of students to adapt or change in response to a stressor (Brewer et al., 2019). It is important to note that this operational definition, as demonstrated in the university announcement above, is rarely tied to the role or responsibility of the institution; instead, most of the literature supports resilience as viewed through student behavioral and psychological responses (Robbins et al., 2018). While it may seem logical to link resilience to individuals, in our case graduate students, it also seems important to consider the role of the institution in creating and perpetuating an environment that triggers and complicates a chain of events that contribute to the need for resilience in the first place. For the purpose of this inquiry, our understanding of academic environmental and institutional impact moves beyond the everyday stressors of a graduate education, like performance expectations and course-loads, to include factors complicated and created by the institution; like socioeconomic stressors, racial and ethnic biases, and political agendas.

Through this lens, resilience is viewed as deeply complex and calls for an understanding of stressors and the responses they invoke as contingent on an interconnected web of social, political, and environmental influencers. Meaning "a given factor may be protective in one situation, and yet cause vulnerability in another, whereby the conditions of human suffering and resilience may be considered within almost paradoxical relations" (Atallah et al., 2019, p. 9). A scoping review of literature is used when high-quality, randomized control research is lacking. This term specifies that a systematic review of literature is not possible (Brewer et al., 2019; Rumril et al., 2010). In a 2019 scoping review of resilience research in higher education, scholars found that "[r]esilience enabled people to withstand stress or adversity, maintain well-being, and return to their pre-existing state" (Brewer et al., p. 1109). We, the academic and student bodies, are living in this moment of change, where the higher education system asks us to return to normal, but what does normal mean in a *post*COVID[1] world? What happens when higher education's pre-existing state maintains a conceptualization of normal that requires varying degrees of resilience that disproportionately impacts minoritized students? Thus, the juxtaposition of these intersectional identities with the overwhelming prevalence of white norms and values, serves to reinforce the foundation of oppression higher education is asking us to return to.

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[1] We use this term to describe the Fall 2021 semester where many universities, like ours, are asking faculty, staff, and students to return to campus and resume face to face classes. Specifically, our university is asking that we return to pre-pandemic life, even though the pandemic is still evolving and advancing on a local, state, national, and international scale.

First Wave Resilience

This desire to return to *life before* is often referred to as the act of *bouncing back* or "recover[ing] quickly to protect the *status quo*" (Atallah et al., 2019, p. 5). First-wave resiliency research often neglects the nuanced realities of the members of an ecosystem in favor of the ecosystem as a whole. This way of thinking about resiliency can often put specific populations at odds with one another (Atallah et al., 2019). For example, a return to *pre*COVID campus procedures gives academic bodies the ability to return to their offices, utilize campus services, and teach in traditional formats; but what if these academic bodies are primary caregivers for small children? How do you reconcile a return to normalcy while simultaneously putting your child, who is ineligible for vaccination, at a higher risk of illness? Who is responsible for staying home in the event of a COVID exposure or extended illness? Or another example to highlight the deep social inequities for student bodies, we might ask, what happens when students are asked to return to campus after a year where many relocated or reorganized to seek out financial, physical, and/or psychological support? How are some of these student bodies put at risk of poverty and compromised mental health as they relocate to meet the needs of an institution? These examples highlight how a given factor, like a return to *pre*COVID campus life, "may be protective to resilience in one cultural context or situation and yet can cause vulnerability in another depending on complex social-political processes" (Atallah et al., 2019, p. 5)

Second Wave Resilience

In an attempt to shift away from a view of resiliency as the ability to return to the *status quo*, second wave resilience thinking focuses on a more holistic and critical perspective. This rethinking centers the unique and complex identity of individuals and their relationship with institutions by considering the role of "culture, resources, neighborhood, community, and environment" (Atallah et al., 2019, p. 8). This framework understands resilience by critically unpacking the inherent economic, social, and political processes impacting individuals and institutions ability to bounce forward. This focus on adaptation and transformation for both individuals and institutions acknowledges that institutional expectations deeply impact individual outcomes, and that often a return to the *status quo* might be unproductive or undesirable for some (Atallah et al., 2019). In this way institutions can be viewed as "persistent, sustainable, and resilient depending on a range of parameters, including legitimacy; agenda setting and the selecting of environmental risks which resonate with the institutions agenda; and the maintenance of social capital" (Adger, 2000, p. 351). This model of resilience builds heavily on a concept known as social resilience and has a concentrated focus on adaptation and transformation. Meaning, that moments requiring resilience often expose individuals to trauma, but on the other side of that trauma is a positive shift "in their thinking, understandings, skills, spiritualities, and social relationships" (Atallah et al., 2019, p. 7). To highlight an example of this are the narratives of academic bodies, like Sara, who has had to balance both work and home while keeping children out of school; or for student bodies, like many of the research participants herein, who report stopping everything and moving home to relieve the physical and financial burdens early in the pandemic. Both academic and student bodies reflect how complicated and difficult this extended time with family was, but conversely, how important it has been in strengthening their relationships with loved ones. So, while this optimistic view of resiliency

might indicate adaptation and transformation, it does nothing to unpack or explore the deep inequities present in a *post*COVID world for primary caregivers or housing insecure bodies.

Third Wave Resilience

Third wave conceptualizations of resilience begin to try and reconcile the deep work of understanding the relationship between *vulnerability and protection* and how social, political, and economic factors intersect and impact, causing resilience to shift and change based on the population impacted by trauma. This work expands to include literature focused on how these deeply interconnected and intersectional realities manifest different experiences of *suffering and resilience* (Atallah et al., 2019). This version of resilience thinking holds central the vision of a sustainable *social-ecological system* that is simultaneously creating and supporting change through "reflection, learning and adaptation" (Folke, 2016, p. 13). This view of resilience as a complex theoretical assemblage of personal, physical, political, social, and ecological interactions, becomes a productive way of researching the experience of both individuals and institutions during traumatic events, like COVID (Atallah et al., 2019; Donovan, 2017). This call for resilience research to mirror the theoretical act of assemblage has seen a concentrated focus on how multiple or new disciplines might offer nuanced portraits of resilience in context. In their call for *transdisciplinarity*, Atallah et al. (2019) seek out fields like education and the arts to begin to offer perspectives that might "decentralize academia as being the only hub for the production of knowledge related to resilience" (p.11).

Methods

This inquiry is guided by the authors shared interest in the arts as integral to the research process. This study was reviewed by IRB staff and it was determined the protocol qualifies for exemption, effective on 3/18/2021. Specifically, we draw connections to arts based researchers engaged in poetic inquiry (Gillies, 2007; Glesne, 1997; Knowles & Cole, 2008; Leggo, 2008; Owton, 2017; Prendergast, 2015; Prendergast et al., 2008; Rooyen & d'Abdon, 2020). We, like others, see arts based inquiry, as challenging traditional forms of scholarship and the kinds of knowledge they utilize and prioritize. Poetry, as a form of arts based research, centers the participants' experience and "suggests a way to decolonize knowledge production" (Rooyen & d'Abdon, 2020, p. 2). This work of both decolonizing knowledge and centering participant experience is also a call from resilience research as the field suggests that resilience and disasters might come to be viewed as complex theoretical assemblages (Atallah et al., 2019; Donovan, 2017).

Poetry as Assemblage

As arts practitioners, we understand the process of artistic assemblage as the act of bringing together parts to create new things, or in this case understanding. More specifically, we are interested in the act of artistic assemblage because it pays homage to the original form of objects (or for us, words) while juxtaposing them along-side one another to say something new (Dezeuze, 2008). Research as an artistic assemblage of raw data, challenges the act of looking and seeing. As an artistic practice, assemblage puts "emphasis on process that suggest[s] the ways in which subjects are formed through [a] changing set of relations" (Dezeuze, 2008, p. 32).

Instead of data collection, analysis, and interpretation being processes of looking and seeing *for* the reader, we view these processes as the act of looking and seeing *alongside* the reader.

In this inquiry we explore poetry as an artistic assemblage, specifically by looking at how poetic or artistic assemblages might use the words from participants in the same way that assemblage artists use "elements sourced from pre-existing manufactured or found materials and objects" (Grisoni & Collins, 2012, p. 39). We extend this integration of the found to include ideas and inspiration from research surrounding resilience, specifically the metaphor of the wave (Atallah et al., 2019). The poems that have resulted from this inquiry have been created and visualized through the metaphor of waves, specifically thinking about the waves of experience the participants spoke about in their interviews. Once these initial waves were broadly conceptualized, we used the words of participants to create poems assembling multiple experiences, vantage points, and perspectives to encourage the reader to immerse themselves into the data and experience something for themselves. In this way, the work in these poetic, artistic assemblages puts trust in the reader by shifting knowledge production away from the researcher.

Research Context and Positionality

Both researcher bodies, the academic and student, are currently housed in an art education department at a major southeastern university. The researchers authoring this paper work in art education and arts administration. We are currently housed in the department of art education, inside of a college of fine arts. The student body, Emily, is a PhD student in the arts administration program; while the academic, Sara, is an associate professor of art education and department chair. Emily identifies as a 30 year-old, financially stable, white, queer, femme identifying person. She interviewed the participants who were both friends and classmates in the program. Sara identifies as a white, 38 year old, married, mother of two children under the age of 5. As tenured faculty her roles as wife and mother often conflict with career expectations, while she benefits from white, cisgender and heterosexual privilege as faculty in a predominately white institution. These bodies collided in a qualitative research class where the opportunity to complete a class research project was presented by Sara. Emily expressed interest in participating in the group project, but no other students were interested in joining, resulting in a two person research team. Throughout the semester Emily devised a research project that explored doctoral students' resilience during Covid-19. They worked with Sara, to finalize the topic, research questions, and organize participation. In total, there were seven graduate student participants from four degree programs. While participants stretched across a range of intersecting identities, we are only able to report the identifying factors self-reported in the focus group discussions. Participants varied in which stage of their academic career in the program (first year, second year, and in the initial stages of dissertation). Participants were primarily white female-identifying students, with the exception of one white male-identifying student, one female-identifying international Asian student, and one female-identifying Black student. Students were not asked to disclose their sexual identities, orientations, or preferences. One student was in a long-term relationship, and two were married with children. Some students lived alone while others lived with family members and participants had various financial incomes as some had full or part-time jobs or had dual incomes. Finally, several students noted that they struggled with physical and/or mental health issues.

While this paper is a collaborative effort, the research team decided that the data collection and initial coding would be conducted by Emily. Both authors felt it was important for the

conversations about the educational experience during COVID to occur between peers. We worried that the presence of the faculty researcher would impact student responses. Additionally, Emily blinded, coded, and did first wave categorization of the student data before Sara began to help with final stages of coding, categorizing and analysis.

Data Collection

Three small focus groups of two students and one interview were used as the primary data collection method (Mason, 2018). Suter (2000) discussed how focus groups and small group interviews are a helpful way to extract information about difficult or rarely discussed topics. Emily paired the student participants by degree programs to help them feel comfortable opening up to each other and Emily. This pairing also helped the student participants to converse in a dialogue rather than a one way conversation typical of interviews. These focus groups allowed participants to interact, build off, and reflect on each other's responses. Each group interview took place online via Zoom during a two week span in April 2021.

When developing questions, Emily utilized Masten's (2014) *Ordinary Magic* to highlight the belief that students do not need extraordinary abilities to be resilient, but rather their ordinary, common adaptations and protections may have helped them overcome adversity, obstacles, and difficult situations. For Masten (2014), such systems include having a "healthy human brain in good working order; close relationships with competent and caring adults; committed families, effective schools and communities; opportunities to succeed, and belief in the self, nurtured by positive interactions with the world" (p. 8). The focus group questions built out of Masten's work and asked participants to discuss the personal changes they made to adjust, the impact of family and friends, and the role of professors and classmates. Questions asked included:

- How did you adjust from in-person to online classes?
- What support did you receive from faculty/staff, family and friends?
- What was your emotional state like?

<div align="center">

Can you clarify?
Pause
It was hard…… hard to remember.
Long Pause
I am trying to remember, but it's a bit of a
blur.

</div>

Data Analysis

In round one of coding the data from the three focus groups and one interview, Emily highlighted emergent themes around personal adjustments, academic adjustments, family/friends adjustments, community adjustments, emotions and feelings, and the concept of time. She then developed twenty poems surrounding these themes, some individual participant poems about a theme, others, long combined poems surrounding a theme. For the second round of coding, Emily and Sara were inspired by the emotions and feelings participants spoke about moving through during the pandemic. Working together, the authors reorganized and coded the data around the broader emotions identified in the first round of coding. These feelings became the

central coding construct as the authors reworked and reorganized the participants' words around the emotional waves of *denial, anger, fear, anxiety, isolation,* and *perspective*.

The poems in the following sections are poetic, artistic assemblages, sometimes called found poems, that use direct words, phrases, or sentences taken from the participants to compose poetically rendered data excerpts. The poems act as assemblages by weaving together multiple participants' voices to convey each of the overall themes (Butler-Kisber, 2002; 2017). The main goal of this analytic work is not to give voice to individual participants' experiences, but instead "to draw readers in and invite them to explore, analyze and draw their own conclusions" (Gillies, 2007, p. 176).

Findings

While we are not poets, we see this practice of assembling poems from participant texts as challenging research processes, much the same way assemblage artists challenged the conceptualization that only artists can make artwork. Or in this case only researchers can do research, or poets can write poems. In creating the work that follows, we wondered if, as we encountered the words of participants, how might we put them together for others to experience and understand the world differently? And since the goal of research is to create or develop new knowledge and understanding, we see this work as creating opportunities for each of you, the readers, to do the same. We only ask that as you build and create this new knowledge that you consider the body you are in. What privileges does your body afford you? What access does your body give you? And as you read the words and create your own understandings, think about what changes your body can make in a *post*COVID world?

IT CAME IN WAVES

Waves crash around us.

Sometimes we survived them

A boat taking on water

Slowly sinking.

denial, anger, fear

Others more like storm surge overtaking

anxiety, isolation

Eventually subsiding, even if for just a moment,

Offering a reprieve.

Perspective

First Wave - Denial

Having a social life was not a thing.
  I was totally gone for a whole day.
     I went to school in the morning around 8am till late, like 6 or 7pm.
    I used to pack my schedule.
      I would work all hours of every day.
        I could not put the laptop down.
         I had no personal life. I was just working 24/7.
          I would go to class and work all day and come home and work all night.

It was not sustainable.
It was not healthy.
         I had….   We had….

<p align="center">~~ZERO BALANCE~~</p>

Then Covid Hit
At first,
  I was ...
    blissfully unaware.
      I did not understand the severity of how long this was going to last.
        When I saw the undergrads with their parents packing up the apartments and dorms,
        I thought that was weird.
          Complete ***DENIAL***, they are just blowing this out of proportion.
         I was ...
          under the impression that it would only last a month.
                STOP
                Everything had to STOP!
                My work. My school.

It's like a train wreck.
Like something stopping in the middle of a full speed thing.

Second Wave – Fear

GET OUT
GO HOME!
    I needed a break from everything.
      The biggest thing I remember was wanting so badly to leave.
       I just had to!
        So, I left and went home.
         And moved in with my family.
         I was consumed with ***FEAR***.
          Living in fear
           I was obsessed with news updates and checking social media.
           It damaged my sense of feeling safe and secure.

I was paranoid.
  The virus was everywhere.
    Everytime I went out, when I came home,
      No one could touch me, no hugs.
       We were not in our safe place.
        We did the best we could with our skills
       If we needed to
        Distract
         Protect
          Close Down
         We did

And for whatever reason
it's so freaking scary to ask for help.
To be vulnerable.

Third Wave – Anger

The semester was taken away from me.
   I remember being so mad in classes.
      There was displaced ***ANGER*** of the unknown.
         During that time, there were lots of Unknowns.
           A loss of control.

I was ...
   so upset about everything.
      losing ground.
         in survival mode.

I had to adapt, change course.
   Do I really want my life to continue to look like this?

The professors were supportive.	The teachers were still figuring it out.	I don't remember a lot of support.
My professor was extra accommodating In the spring semester.	They were doing the best they could.	I felt it was 'business as usual'.
I am grateful they advocated for us. It made me want to do my best.	I think they were trying behind the scenes to figure out what to do.	In the classroom they said everything is going to be normal. ITS NOT NORMAL!
One professor changed all participation assignments to an "A" for everyone.		It's was very much like "We don't stop for this [pandemic]."

This is a shit show.

Fourth Wave – Anxiety

There were times
It was too much.
I was ...
　overwhelmed.
　　Scared.
　　　Anxious.
　　　　Stressed.
In one class
the first time we came together on Zoom
my professor asked how we were doing.

I was ...
　overwhelmed.
The pandemic
　B
　　R
　　　O
　　　　K
　　　　　E
Me
And I started crying.
I was ...
　dealing with ***ANXIETY***.
　　Lots of unknowns.
　　　Worried for family, their business, their livelihood.
　　　　What if I caught the virus?
　　　　　It is everywhere..
　　　　　　I just couldn't
I was ...
　distracted with the thought.
　"You know, you should be reading something or writing something,"
And then when I tried,
I couldn't do it.
　I just ...
　　couldn't concentrate.
　　　couldn't read.
　　　　couldn't make connections.
　　　　　couldn't be fully present.

　　　　　　　I can't disappoint them or myself.

I was ...
  losing.
    My emotional state,
      I just closed it off,
        I shut the door to that area.
          There were so many things going on.
        I have ...
          to control.
            to ground [myself].
          to focus

SCHOOLWORK

                Even though it was hard.
             I had to study to comfort me.
             To gain a sense of control.
                  I made
        a lot more schedules and To-Do Lists.
          specific days for specific classes.
     sure that I stayed on top of assignments and due dates.
               But then

I MOVED HOME

It was ...
 really hard.
  not my own space.
    taking longer to complete work.
    taking more time to complete assignments
      I just had to give myself more time.
        Can I check this off my list?
          Can I just pass this class and move on?
        I am almost done with coursework,
        I have very little patience now,
          I am going to do the bare minimum.
        I think sometime we failed.
          But some days were better than others.
         It's just business as usual
          I still had to do so much.
            We *still* had to jump through hoops.
              Why are we acting like everything is normal?

Fifth Wave - Isolation

Being a mother and a student is hard.
    'Academic success' is not lined up in reality with being a mother.
      School work had to stop.
           And it was hard.
           But I focused on connections.
                    I went to live with my girlfriend's family.
                    We went there to care and be with them.
                Make sure they were safe and healthy.
             It's different from living with your own.
        There was a lot of loneliness, ***ISOLATION***,
Having to make sure my kids were ok.
    I had to stay strong for them.
      Then my husband had to leave,
        to take care of his ailing parents.
      I was alone for six months.
        Not having this person-to-person interaction was hard.
           I was alone.
           By myself.
                    Trying to occupy my time.
                Keep my hands busy.
        To not think and know and feel this sadness.
          Sadness we couldn't be vulnerable
        and they couldn't be vulnerable.
      Sadness about the state of the world.
It was scary
  all this alone time.
    But it forced me ...
      to finally focus on myself
        to find other means
          to know who I was.
           to find my own power again.
               I'm getting back in touch with myself

So now I am at my house.

Alone.

It's complicated.

My husband lives in China.

He was supposed to come and be with me and the kids.

But Covid happened.

And he couldn't come.

Now.

I stay home more.

They are happy.

My son drew a picture of me,

With the letter 'S'.

Superwoman.

He saw me, my strength.

I never knew I could be this strong.

But now

I see myself

grow, learn, change.

In good ways.

And recognized it in each other for the better.

Dealing with children and online school.

Making sure they get good grades.

Keeping them happy and mentally healthy,

with no possibility of seeing friends or going out.

I would call my parents crying.

Needing guidance.

My husband and I

The way we had to support each other was from afar.

We each held down a fortress.

In the end.

I was grateful for this pause.

To focus on what really matters.

We used to meet classmates at school or the library to socialize and do schoolwork.

Now we do Zoom happy hours once a week to check-in

Hop on and have a glass or wine

Or six.

This brought us closer together.

People moved.
Together.
A   p   a   r   t

Sixth Wave - Perspective

In the end.
    The positivity came in waves.
        I am glad for this pause.
           It showed me I was
               strong.
                   resilient.
                      I realized this affected me more than I thought.
                   I grew and learned.
                      I know there's just been so much loss.
                         But, you know, hopefully we gained something.

    I hadn't been around people in six months. March to August. Finally, I emerged.
               A new **PERSPECTIVE**
           We didn't cancel plans,
             we postponed them.
        We reevaluated and reconstructed
          situations, experiences, events.
Things will still happen.
      We just need to adjust our expectations
         do the best we can and
             F
               O
                  L
                     L
                        O
                           W
                              the thread of
                       positivity.
              Find that silver lining.

When I came back,
    I would make dinners with my roommate and her partner.
        My boyfriend would come to stay.
            Go on walks.
                I would call my friends,
                                family,
                        school peers.
                    Checking up.
                Supporting one another.
                    Caring.
                Just these interactions,
            some semblance at normalcy,
                    was nice.
            Now we can slow down,
                    Process
                    Reflect
                                        I remember crying,
                                    being vulnerable,
                            sharing my pain.
                    It helped the other students.
        They came to me after and told me it was
                MEANINGFUL to them!
                It MOVED them!
        This showed me,
        the best thing we can do for each other,
            is to reach out and ask for help.
                Like the first time,
                I had a hug.
    I wanted to cry in the comfort of it.

A Closing Note from an Academic Body

I felt these waves too, but was on higher ground, protected from the worst of the storm. The pandemic continues to illuminate pre-existing inequities in housing, safety, financial aid, mental and physical health, childcare, and access to resources. As the waves calm, I wonder if this was the institution *pre*COVID, is this the "normal, pre-pandemic" operations we are returning to in the Fall? What then of the 464 days since they sent us home? In this poetic assemblage we hope to have given not just perspective, but perhaps pushed you to consider your own intervention points (Miller et al., 2010). As we sit on the precipice of a transition back to *normal*, we must not ignore the injustices normal perpetuates and COVID complicates. The return to normal is an unreasonable request from an institution that prospers on unquestioning loyalty to the *tradition*

of higher education, while foregoing a deep look at the people in higher education. In this transition back, what happens to the collective vulnerability and resilience that we saw in the early days of COVID. How can we hold on to that vulnerability and resilience, not with the goal of pretending to be okay, but instead the goal of transforming?

I believe these moments, moments we have each lived a million different iterations of, are the intervention points for those with power to begin making changes. We, the academic body, should listen as students ask us to build support systems for those bodies who are parents or primary caregivers. For bodies who cannot financially support themselves or families. For bodies who are oppressed. For bodies who need physical and mental health support. For bodies who have always had other, more pressing responsibilities than just being a student. We must use our power to make changes and then we must demand those with power over us do the same. I know this will take time, but the pandemic has taught us about time. It has changed our relationship with time and shown us that time expands and retracts in strange ways when the world collectively stops. We close this part research, part poetic assemblage, part reflection with a final poem titled *Time*. We believe this, the final theme from our inquiry, captures the essence of what we have all lived. We saw this closing poem as an homage to the ways that time shifted and changed, pushing each of us to re-evaluate what matters most. As you read, we invite readers to remember that we only get one body, one chance, one opportunity to live. Again, we ask you to remember what opportunity and advantages your body affords you and consider how you might move and use your body to do something differently. We wonder how we might resist treading water as the waves of this pandemic continue to wash over us, and instead use the momentum to move towards a better version of higher education in a *post*-pandemic world.

TIME
Slipping….mixing together…
Taking TIME
Free TIME
More TIME
Enough TIME
Find TIME
Extra TIME
TIME at home
TIME with family
TIME for myself
TIME together
TIME alone
TIME for reflection
TIME to slow down and process
TIME to figure out new things
TIME to do more things
TIME to do other things
TIME to cook,
      watch Sopranos,
           study astrology,
                garden,

                    build furniture,
                           have virtual happy hours,
                              be with my kids,
                                   be vulnerable,
                                        have candlelit dinners,
                                          make art,
                                              take walks.
                              I cherished the TIME we had together.

More TIME
TIME for reflection.
Set boundaries,
Ask new questions.
Am I happy, joyful, and energetic?
Am I living in a conductive way?
How can I focus more on myself?
My mental health? My emotional health? My physical health? My spiritual health?
What can I learn about myself? How do I keep a positive outlook?

This TIME reaffirmed what I know about myself.
I am positive.
I am adaptable.

Now

           Focus on the present moment and being healthy
              Go back to therapy
                    Be with my kids
                         Be with family
                            Be vulnerable
          Explore new hobbies
                  Reevaluate situations and experiences
                    See who I am
                       Be together.

School work is important…..

But it's not everything.

Author Notes

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