

2021

## Nothing is Normal and Yet Normalcy is the Demand

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### Recommended Citation

Matey, Crystal L. (2021) "Nothing is Normal and Yet Normalcy is the Demand," *ABO: Interactive Journal for Women in the Arts, 1640-1830*: Vol.11: Iss.1, Article 14.

<http://doi.org/10.5038/2157-7129.11.1.1269>

Available at: <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/abo/vol11/iss1/14>

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Shortly after the insurrection at the Capitol Building on January 6, 2021, I came across a meme of a dog working at a computer. Behind the dog, the world is literally falling apart – there are fighter jets in the sky, there's a mushroom cloud from an atomic bomb, and there are buildings on fire. According to the included caption, all of this destruction is going on while the dog is writing its syllabus. Ironically, I was writing my syllabi on the day the Capitol was attacked. On the one hand, I laughed when I came across this meme because of how accurately it represented reality. On the other hand, it tapped into feelings I have been trying to manage since March 2020 when my courses moved online – feelings of sadness and frustration and cynicism.

I started on the tenure track at a teaching-focused university in August 2019, where I teach a 4/4 class load and 3-4 preps each semester. A mere seven months later, my classes shifted to remote courses due to the outbreak of COVID-19. And now, a year later, my classes are meeting in a modified hybrid schedule where half of my students come on one day, the other half come on the next, and both meet online for the day they aren't present in-person. It is a schedule that is double the amount of work and requires more emotional labor than I have ever exerted before. Despite the increased teaching workload, expectations for service and scholarship remain unchanged at my university. As someone who is a new hire and up for my pre-tenure review in less than a year, overwhelmed does not even begin to describe how I have felt this past year.

Shifting to remote instruction also impacted me at home because my child's preschool did the same. For six weeks and then two weeks again when his school closed for the second time, I became my son's pre-kindergarten teacher, and he was home with me every day. When kindergarten began, the first three weeks of the year and the first three weeks after winter break unexpectedly switched to online instruction. Each of these closures and moves to online schooling happened during crucial times that I typically reserve for my own work since my schedule during the semester leaves little room for research and scholarship. That time was taken from me, and I was unable to accomplish any writing. At the same time, I felt immense guilt because I was also failing at being a sudden stay-at-home mom and at being a good teacher for my child.

Just living with the pandemic this year would have been enough to handle. But when you add in the racial unrest and resulting Black Lives Matter protests across the country in the summer of 2020, an emotional and contentious presidential election, the Capitol insurrection, many mental health struggles, and both parents diagnosed with COVID, it has been too much to bear. The hardest part has been the lack of empathy or allowances or understanding about what so many of us are

facing. This year of collective trauma has been unacknowledged by people in power. And nothing has been done at my university to help women scholars not fall through the cracks, even when headline after headline shows that working women's careers are suffering because of the pandemic. The expectation that everyone should proceed as normal and "get back to business" has shed light on just how exploitative academia is. No one in power seems to see me as a human being or to see all of these situations as human situations that come with complex emotions and complex problems.

So, how do I keep my head above water in a whirlpool? For me, it was taking the advice I got during New Faculty Orientation – write about what you are teaching. That meant writing a book chapter on using Young Adult literature to teach social justice in the secondary English classroom because I was teaching an English education course. Although I am happy that I wrote something this year, it's not scholarship in the "long" eighteenth century, which is what I was trained to do and where my true interests lie. I fear what this will mean for my career. Will I be able to remain an eighteenth-century scholar? Do I even want to stay in a profession that doesn't treat me humanely? This year could have been an opportunity to reimagine so much. But, unfortunately, it's just more of the same.