Career Killer Survival Kit: Centering Single Mom Perspectives in Composition and Rhetoric

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This article argues for greater attention to the embodied experiences and material practices of single mothers in the academy. Using critical imagination (Royster and Kirsch) to analyze how texts in the field have represented single motherhood, I identify three patterns of how mothers complete work, or what I term survivalist strategies to resist career killing. Considering these strategies result from an absence of institutional support systems and structures, I also provide suggestions and resources for better supporting single moms in academia.

Asemester into my PhD program, I began the process of divorce and found myself learning how to single parent. Such a transition made me more aware of the absences of support for graduate student parents in general, and single parents in particular. I also became more aware of how the challenges and experiences of a single parent can get lost in the challenges and experiences of parents more generally. I recognized the conflation of parenting identities and how various identities get erased in that conflation. And I realized that my parenting experience presented challenges I had not seen reflected in the work I read on academic motherhood. Specifically, I learned how important a support network is as a single academic parent. I first realized this through experience. I could no longer count on getting any work done after my daughter went to bed because when she woke up, I was her only means of support. The weekends, at one time spaces of potential with open, uninterrupted work time, quickly disappeared, as I became the primary parent. Conference options became more complicated without a consistent source of care. Supplemental job opportunities that required working on nights and weekends were no longer opportunities. I learned how to maximize 15-minute intervals to write, compose emails asking for extensions and reschedules of meetings, explain class cancellations due to a sick child, and maneuver an uphill campus with a stroller and a 2 ½ year old when she couldn't go to daycare.

My experience led me to do what I think most academics do in moments of uncertainty—research. I read about mothers and mothering experiences in academia, and in this reading, I encountered the term "career killer,"[1] from Mary Ann Mason, which she uses to describe what having children means for

women in academia—"For men, having children can be a slight career advantage and, for women, it is often a career killer." The use of "career killer" implies that children are a professional death sentence for women, and I recognize the subversive career killers in my own experience—the lack of uninterrupted time, the need to bring my daughter to class when she was sick, the need to cancel class when bringing her was not an option, the conference constraints due to a lack of alternative care, the inability to attend invited lectures or other departmental events because I couldn't get a babysitter. Single mothers are often working in a system with supports that are not designed for them, so how do they make a survival kit as a means of resistance to career killers? I decided to keep reading.

Reading revealed that representations of single mothers are largely absent from academic scholarship more generally and from composition and rhetoric in particular. Kate Vieira's "Fieldwork with a Five-Year-Old: A Summative Report" is an exception. In the article, Vieira describes her experience of completing fieldwork with her daughter in Latvia after her recent divorce. Through her descriptions of single motherhood, like packing a stuffed bunny and booster seat alongside a laptop, she reveals how the worlds of scholar, mother, and divorcee are enmeshed. She shares how she survives as a single mom in academia working as both a mother and teacher-scholar-writer. Vieira's representation shows the embodied experience and material practice[2] of a single mom going through a divorce. She shares the tools in her survival kit, like having a bubble popping game on her iPhone to occupy her daughter so that Vieira could conduct research interviews and countering financial challenges by taking on substantial student debt.

The notable presence of Vieira's article indicates gaps in the scholarship, which raises the question: Why is there such an absence of scholarship like Vieira's exploring how single mothers resist the career killer connotation and survive? Part of this absence may be due to single mothers' material circumstances and resources, and the constraints these place on publishing, particularly time (single moms do not have a lot of it), but part of it may also be due to the stigma connected to a single mother identity and the potential risks in being an openly single mom in academia. Single mothers who experience a "chilly climate" in higher education find various ways of dealing with the stigmatization they experience—"…they use a variety of strategies to manage their identity that include passing, using techniques of information control, and covering," but some single mothers also, "…actively challenge the stereotypes of single mothers they encounter in classrooms and across campus" (Duquaine-Watson 146). In other words, "stigma management" could be a factor in the lack of single moms' experiences in composition and rhetoric scholarship, but it also

has the potential to be a tool to resist and challenge negative perceptions and stereotypes of single mothers in academia (Duquaine-Watson 156).

A single mother's identity and position shape how she lives and moves through the world. I conceive of single mothers as women who are divorced, widowed, or unmarried who single parent their children. And I understand mother as an identity to be inclusive of a range of embodied experiences including but not limited to "othermothers," (Collins 120) "geographically single mothers," (García-Louis) transgender mothers, adoptive mothers, egg-donor mothers, and gestational, or birth mothers. While single mother is the focus in this article, familial structures and experiences within those structures vary. While I do not have familiarity with the experiences of parents who may be living across states or countries while raising children, the experiences of single fathers, those who have a partner and children but choose to forego marriage, or a range of other familial structures and experiences, I do have familiarity with the marginalization of single mothers.

Single mothers may share challenges with single parents, but the stigmatization attached to single mothers means that how they combat those challenges, their career killer survivalist techniques, are unique to them. In explaining the contrast between stigmatization of single mothers compared to single fathers, Ruth Sidel writes, "Single mothers are often defined as deviants who are dangerous to their children, to the well-being of their family and of *the* family, and the wider society as a whole…single fathers are often seen as exemplary citizens, acting in ways that far exceed society's expectations of them and thereby meriting honor and respect in the community" (22-23). The experiences described and changes I advocate for may apply to single parents as a group, but single mothers are the focus as a means of resistance to their stigmatization and marginalization.

My experiences as a single mother and my research have informed my awareness of the need for a variety of support systems and structures in academia. In order to better understand what those support systems and structures might look like, there needs to be greater knowledge of experiences. We need to look at how the field has represented single motherhood and how the material conditions and embodied experiences of single mothers are rendered invisible, making it easier for these aspects to slip out of concern. An examination of how the field has represented embodied experiences and material practices of single motherhood and how single mothers have often been spoken for or about (or not at all), offers potential for developing policies, structures, and systems of support at the departmental, institutional, and organizational level. Such policies, structures, and systems can build on the survival kits single mothers, and those who work to support them, have already tried to create. In this article, I focus on and analyze scholarship that centers the lives

of mothers in composition and rhetoric. In my analysis, I identify three patterns of how mothers complete work, or survivalist strategies to resist career killing—mothering strategies and tactics, informal support, and structural and institutional support. These strategies make visible how in the absence of institutional support—mothers, specifically single mothers—must develop their own support systems and strategies to survive.

Making space for the consideration of single mothers creates an opportunity to look at the kinds of supports that exclude mothering bodies and to develop a greater understanding of the range of ways women in composition are getting work, including academic, domestic, and mothering work, done; such understanding is developed by looking at "interstitial gaps" in the scholarship—"the unheard, unthought, the unspoken" (Pérez 5). In *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas Into History,* Emma Pérez describes how she refers to grievances filed by the women of Yucatán with the Departments of Justice and Labor from 1915-1918 (49). Pérez's reliance on these grievances to understand how women chose to speak out against injustices demonstrates the need to be resourceful when representing and understanding marginalized experiences and histories. Without being able to get a sense of these accounts from the women themselves, there is a turn to the legal documentation about these women's experiences, which includes their voices and their words, but not necessarily from their own perspective. It is a retelling of their experiences from someone else. Like Pérez, I am looking to make the silences heard and also looking to the interstitial spaces where single mother experiences surface as places for expansion and further consideration (5).

In my search to find a way to make space for consideration of single mothers in composition and rhetoric, I implement "critical imagination," which provides a means to explore the marginalization of single mothers and the implications of that marginalization. I use critical imagination to identify the gaps in existing research as a way to inform future scholarship. Such a method acts as "an inquiry tool, a mechanism for seeing the noticed and the unnoticed, rethinking what is there and not there, and speculating what could be there instead" (Royster and Kirsch 20). Critical imagination encompasses "tacking in" which allows researchers to—"… focus closely on existing resources, fragmentary and otherwise, and existing scholarship to assess what we now understand and speculate about what seems to be missing" (72). In applying critical imagination, I look at scholarship that considers the material practice and embodied experience of mothering to see what a career killer survival kit encompasses for single mothers. I tack in to gain a sense of the ways in which single mothers and support systems and structures are positioned. I analyze three articles—two from a special issue in *Composition Studies*, and one from *Writing on the Edge,* and two chapters in edited collections, one from *Stories*

of Mentoring: Theory and Practice, and another from *WPAs in Transition.* These texts were selected because they are from composition and rhetoric publications and in conversation with one another citationally or conceptually. They also provide insight into the representation of single mothers' embodied experience and material practice over a 10-year period. In my analysis, I focus on how the texts' reference various types of support to better understand what these representations reveal about the kinds of support systems and structures needed for single mothers to survive in academia. Here I ask: What support systems and structures are present or absent in the way mothers work in the field, and what does this mean for single mothers?

Engaging with Motherhood in Composition and Rhetoric

I have been in composition and rhetoric in one form or another—as a student or professional—for the past 16 years. During that time, I have seen and experienced the field's investment in equity and inclusion. I have benefitted from the childcare grant offered by Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). At the most recent Feminisms and Rhetorics Conference, I attended a presentation where, as I listened to the presenter's WPA experiences, I watched her child play with board books and teething toys. While this may read like progress, over 10-years ago, there was a CCCC Task Force on Child Care Initiatives that secured $6,000 in funding for on-site childcare at the conference; today, the funding for childcare support from CCCCs has been cut in half, and the task force no longer exists (Glenn W67). Nearly half of eligible candidates for the childcare grant were turned down in 2019 due to a lack of funds, and a funding request submitted to the CCCC Executive committee was not approved ("Minutes of the CCCC Feminist Caucus"). The woman who presented at Feminisms and Rhetorics while her child played was on a panel alongside one of her child's babysitters, who did her best to keep the child content as the mom spoke.

Within my own experience, I have had faculty critique my approach to networking because they hadn't thought about my obligations as a single mother, and my need to leave conferences early. When I've told faculty that I considered bringing my daughter to a conference, they responded with surprise, commenting that it wasn't something they had considered before. I have had colleagues schedule conversations about article revisions after work hours out of personal preference. This meant I was video chatting about how to revise an article conclusion while simultaneously feeding my daughter dinner and then giving her a bath. My experiences are not isolated.

At conferences, I have listened as women shared how their academic institutions prohibit children on campus because they are considered an insurance liability. I have learned of women in visiting instructor positions keeping

their children secret for fear of being seen as less committed to and less serious about their jobs. I have watched women with tears in their eyes share how they returned to teaching first-year composition two weeks after they gave birth. Experiences of mothers within the field reveal that while striving for equity and inclusion, the field is still working to combat traditional ideas and values.

While motherhood in composition and rhetoric has been an increasing area of focus in the published scholarship[3], considerations of single mother's experiences in the field, their embodied experiences and material practice, remain marginalized. In 2017, Nora et al. wrote about the need for greater representation of mothers' embodied experiences and material practice: "Far more research is needed. For example, further inquiry can examine what percentage of compositionist mothers are disabled, single or married, living with a mate, LGBTQ, and so forth—exploring how each of these factors uniquely impacts a mother's journey in academia" (142). This research is still just as needed today.

Representations of Single Mothers in Composition and Rhetoric

The consideration of how mothers get work done has recently increased as evidenced most notably through the formation of The Mothers in Rhetoric and Composition NCTE SIG in 2016. There has also been an increase of conference presentations on the topic, as well as upcoming scholarship like Christine Tulley's book project tentatively titled *I Know How She Writes It: Parenting, Publication, and Professionalism in Rhetoric and Composition* and Vieira's *Fieldwork: A Memoir*. However, the consideration given to the embodied experience and material practice of single mothers is still very limited and can be found in one article, Vieira's "Fieldwork with a Five-Year-Old: A Summative Report" and one blog post, Aja Martinez's "On Our Path, Me and My Libby," which appears on a website not affiliated with comp/rhet. The scholarship on the lives of mothers often acknowledges the role of various types of support used to get work done. In my analysis of such scholarship, I identified three patterns of how mothers complete work, or survivalist strategies to resist career killing: mothering strategies and tactics, informal support, and structural and institutional support. Mothering strategies and tactics are the self-resources mothers draw on to facilitate their own work, like having a child watch a television show while the mom grades papers. Informal support refers to the networks of support mothers may turn to or have available that are not formally implemented by academic institutions or based on self-resource (Hinton-Smith 92 and 113). For example, a close friend who provides the financial support for a mom to pay for conference registration, or a mentor who helps in finding care, so the mom can attend a conference. Structural and institutional support refers to the institutional

policies or practices that facilitate mother's survival, such as parental leave policies. The articles in this analysis move away from what can often happen at the policy level—an erasure of multiple identities. However, even in this attention to practice through personal narratives, there are limitations in considering differences of experiences across mothering identities. An analysis of the selected articles makes visible the representation of single mothers and the roles various supports play in their career killer resistance.

Mothers, regardless of their single or partnered status, craft survival kits through a reliance on mothering strategies and tactics. While the necessity is different for single mothers, especially those who do not have shared custody or any type of co-parenting arrangement, the strategies are often the same. Mothers, and single mothers in particular, integrate their own means of support to get work done. This might mean having crayons and coloring books for a child to use, allowing space for a child to interrupt interviews, promising a child something like "Beanie-Boos" for good behavior, or placing a young child in an octagonal play area with board books, measuring cups, and other toys to keep them occupied (Marquez 78; Vieira 24 and 25). Oftentimes, these strategies and tactics are tools that provide a limited amount of time to complete work, even as little as five minutes (Marquez 78). These moments demonstrate mothers' agentive practice in avoiding subversive career killers, but because mothering strategies and tactics only go so far, there is often a need to turn to other resources, like informal support, to complete academic work.

Informal support for mothers is found in partners, mentors, colleagues, family members, and friends. When mothers write about their own experiences, they describe informal support as a means to provide care for their children, so that they can attend departmental and faculty meetings, complete dissertation writing, conduct research, grade student papers, or any other number of tasks that might surface for someone regardless of rank or institution (Vieira; Marquez). When looking at informal support as written about from the perspective of single mothers, we see how such support is about affective needs rather than material ones. For example, it can be a friend that helps with a sick child, those moments when "…a friend makes a house call, makes her voice soft, gives us her stethoscope, and my daughter stops vomiting" or offers comfort in food and housing, giving you space to, "Sleep briefly and wake in your friends' cozy *dacha* to find *blini* with fresh jam for breakfast" (Vieira 24-25). In the absence of an official policy, it can also be departments and programs allowing children on campus to "attend guest lectures, department meetings and orientations, dissertation defenses, and social gatherings hosted by professors" (Martinez, *Counterstory: The Rhetoric and Writing of Critical Race Theory,* 66)[4]. Often, using informal support involves a trade-off: hiring a babysitter can result in exorbitant amounts of student debt (Vieira 18); alternating care

with a partner can become "tag-team parenting" (Marquez 77); reallocating care responsibilities can often result in feelings of guilt (Gabor et al. 102); and bringing a child to campus can often mean turning to mothering strategies and tactics to get them through the long meetings and lectures. Dependence on informal supports creates additional work for mothers where they are coordinating and organizing their own systems to complete work: mothers are the ones who need to "arrange childcare" (Gabor et al.; Marquez 78). They are left to decide how to accommodate academia rather than the other way around.

When others write about the support they provide to mothers, they acknowledge the value and importance of such support. As Gabor et al. explain, "social support is key to women's success," and they recognize that "mentees tend to seek out mentors with similar life circumstances," which suggests not all people may be able to find this support with the same amount of ease (100). For single mothers, as well as "Mother-Scholars of Color," seeking out a mentor with similar life circumstances is difficult because of the racial and gender disparities in higher education[5] (Herández-Johnson et al. 129). However, scholarship has centered on a means of career killer survival that balances the line between formal and informal support—mentors. Mentors are described as providing support through actions like offering advice to mothers about how to deal with childcare, how to deal with feelings of guilt when prioritizing one's career over her family, and how to reallocate childcare responsibilities to a partner in order to get work done (Gabor et al. 102). Career killer survival also occurs through instructor support. For example, Gabor et al. describe granting an incomplete to a graduate student for a class she had previously withdrawn from due to morning sickness and hospitalization for dehydration,[6] and then continuing to "work through options" with the student after the incomplete was granted (105). Similarly, Kate Pantelides describes helping develop a survival kit for a single mother by letting the student bring her daughter to class, making visible single parenthood in academic spaces, and also trying to be understanding and supportive by reaching out through email when the student ended up failing the course. In both examples, instructors, who are also mothers, offer support in the absence of institutional structures and supports.

Like other types of informal support, as well as mothering strategies and tactics, when faculty describe supporting their mother students, the onus is put on the individual to determine a solution. In the previous examples, the instructors offering support to mothers in their classes are mothers themselves (Gabor et al.; Pantelides). These instructors offer a sort of ad hoc support to students to facilitate their continuation in higher education, which raises the question: What kind of support would there be for these students without these instructors? Given that "Graduate student mothers are at a higher risk of attrition than almost any other group in American Universities" (Ellis and

Gullion 153), that students of color are especially likely to be student parents (Schumacher 1), and that many student parents are single, there are multiple intersections of identity that exist for student parents, which exacerbate the challenges they face in completing their degree. These students are building a career killer survival kit within a system (higher education) that is not designed for them, one that marginalizes them. When there is a limitation in the availability of formal supports, there is reliance on, in this case, women who are also mothers with resources to make-up for that institutional absence of support.

The absence of structural and institutional support is made visible through mothers' descriptions of their embodied experience and material practice. While some scholarship recognizes the importance of funding to complete research (Vieira 23), funding to maintain a spot in a graduate program (Gabor et al. 105), assistantships (Gabor et al. 107), and therapy for mental health (Vieira 21), the scholarship also often acknowledges the need for improvement, specifically as it relates to family leave. While the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) does provide some support by offering employees up to 12-weeks of time off, this leave is unpaid, and contingent on meeting certain requirements to be eligible (such as a minimum of 1,250 hours in 12-months) Additionally, graduate students are often not covered (Cucciare et al. 53). Even though "pregnancy and maternity leaves" are essential to the retention of "smart women on the faculty" (Gabor et al. 105), even if those policies are in place, there are limitations —"Without changing structures, it is hard to alter practices so that people can legitimately take advantage of family-friendly policies. And without this, people find work structures hostile to families" (Cucciare et al. 56). Cucciare et al. reference the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) "Statement of Principles on Family Responsibilities and Academic Work," and CCCC's "Family Leave/Work Life Balance" as helpful resources in developing more supportive structures, alleviating the need for career killer survivalists to draw on their own strategies. Even so, career killer survivalists still need to have certain tools in their kit, but if they have fewer tools, as single moms often do, then they have to work harder to survive in academic systems.

As outlined in the analysis above, single mom career killer survival kits contain tools that draw on mothering strategies and tactics and informal support like self-advocacy, time management, meal prep, screen time, toys, children's books, art supplies, friends and family, bringing children to campus, reading theory aloud at bedtime, turning to administrative opportunities with course releases, taking out student loans, therapy, making children and mothering visible, and problem solving, among others. The tools in a single mother's career killer survival kit may be similar to those found in a partnered mother's survival kit, but when a single mother is living off of one income, lacks the informal

support of a partner at home, and is stigmatized for being a single mother, she uses her tools differently to enhance her chances of survival.

A single mom's position shapes what she has access to in her career killer survival tool kit, and also how she uses those tools. Because single moms identify in various ways—divorced with sole/shared/partial custody, separated, single mom by choice/change/circumstance, geographically single mom, among others—and are positioned differently along race, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, sex, gender, ability, and academic rank, their survival kits and strategies are different. A single mother's identity and position shapes whether she accepts a job, or even applies for one, as she weighs the pros and cons of staying rooted with reliable, informal support or moving 2,000 miles away and leaving that reliable support network behind. In Aja Martinez's experience, this meant knowing such a decision would entail needing to do more work than if she stayed to ensure her child remains connected to the language, food, and culture of her Chicana family members ("On Our Path…"). A single mother's position shapes her experiences at conferences and invited lectures. A single mom who lives in a state with no family has to figure out what to do with her children. Oftentimes, she needs to bring them with her, but finds herself coming up against "institutional red tape" and then "jumping through hoops" to make her attendance possible (Princeton Theological Seminary 07:03-08:00). And a single mother's marginal position in academia impacts her decision to buy her child equipment for an extracurricular activity or books for her Introductory Composition class. It impacts how much she publishes and how often, especially sole-authored pieces. As seen in the analysis, these decisions may be the difference between staying enrolled in school or dropping out, putting gas in her car to drive to campus or buying food for dinner. A single mom's position influences whether or not she discloses her single mom identity, knowing that "the Western culture education system privileges, supports, and validates the experiences and bodies of white, able-bodied, middle-upper-class heterosexual males," and such disclosure, particularly for women of color, transwomen, and women with disabilities, can lead to oppressive, marginalizing, and discriminatory treatment (Téllez 80).

Developing Policy to Eradicate Career Killers

While single moms are adept at creating their own survival kits, it's exponentially more impactful for academic institutions to develop polices that alleviate the need for single moms to have such kits. In other words, institutions should make policies that work to eliminate the need for single moms to make career killer survival kits. Part of doing this means including single moms' perspectives, which come from their embodied experience, in the development of policy at the organizational, institutional, and departmental

levels. In *Mothering by Degrees* Jillian Duquaine-Watson writes about what is at risk in excluding perspectives and experiences of certain identities: "When the experiences of a stigmatized group are excluded, their perspectives, experiences, and unique knowledge are both devalued and cannot inform the theoretical and practical aspects of university matters as they relate to academic and student services" (158). Recognizing the survival strategies of single mothers provides insight into the uniqueness of how single mothers resist subversive career killers. This includes what tools they can benefit from on a policy level to support their academic career survival, as Jane Juffer writes, "I do not want to dismiss the importance of policy and structural change for *all* parents, but rather to stress that in order to support different family structures—something which many academics would, in theory, advocate—it must be acknowledged that the needs of single parents differ from those of couples who can extensively rely on each other's labor and emotional support" (103). In order to develop policies and change to better support single moms, there needs to be an acknowledgment of what their experiences are in the academy, those experiences that they draw on in crafting their career killer survival kits. Such moments as Vieira's strategies and tactics for conducting research abroad or Pantelides' informal support of a single mom in her class.

As previously explored, career killer survival kits are made from the contexts single moms are situated in. For instance, my dual identity as single-parent in academia means that I do not fit the ideal worker model—someone who has "The ability to devote long hours and weekends to professional advancement, to attend conferences, to move for both short-term fellowships and jobs, and to drop everything to meet deadlines [while depending] on the work of 'marginalized caregivers,' the supportive partners behind the scenes" (Kittelstrom). I am more apt to find myself in the leaky pipeline than a tenure-track position, encouraged to err on the side of caution when revealing my parental identity, and told that I am currently in the worst situation there is—a single parent in academia (Ballif et al. 182). There needs to be a move away from the idea that children are a professional death sentence, and a move towards changing the old academic culture, "which discourages family formation at all levels but is particularly unfriendly to graduate student parenthood, and especially to women," creating a risk of "losing many of our best and brightest minds" (Mason et al. 23). As we have seen, single moms respond to the absence of institutional and structural supports, "the old academic culture," with mothering strategies and tactics and informal support. Academic cultural change can happen at the organizational, institutional, and departmental level. The recommendations that follow for changes at these levels are informed by my own experience and research, as well as the previous analysis. The suggestions on this list are by no means all encompassing, but they are a starting point. While

the suggestions would be helpful to partnered parents, they are a vital necessity for single moms. Implementing them would alleviate the unique burden placed on single moms, who are creative in finding solutions to the challenges they face and skilled at developing workarounds to navigate academia—a space that was not designed for them. For a list of additional resources to consult for ways to support single parents, please see the Appendix.

Organizational Level (Conferences, Invited Lectures/Workshops)

- Provide funding for parents travelling with children and materials that designate family friendly activities in the conference city. For example, in the "Welcome" section of conference programs that describe things to do in the host city, consider emphasizing restaurants and activities that are good for people with kids, along with attractions for those who are childfree.
- Make clear how family-friendly presentation spaces are. If possible, provide images of spaces to give a sense of how easy they are to exit with an irritable child, for example, and to also give a sense of how discretely a child might be able to play on a tablet or engage in other activities.
- Make clear where lactation rooms are and ensure that they are easily accessible and available during times when attendees will be present. The Thomas R. Watson Conference, as well as Feminisms and Rhetorics Conference are helpful models because they both provide detailed information online and in printed programs about where the lactation spaces are, when they are open, and how to access them, including who to contact with questions.
- Consider providing a crafting area for children. For example, CCCC provides space for presenters to create a sparklepony, and the Feminist Caucus provides an area for attendees to create quilt squares. Conferences could consider adding crafting and activity spaces for children who have outgrown daycare but are too young to freely roam the conference city or convention center.

Institutional Level

- Provide clear parental leave policies to *all* employees; this includes faculty, staff, and graduate students.
- Have family-friendly study rooms or areas on campus (libraries can be an ideal place for this). These can be locked rooms that those with children can reserve. Such spaces might include computers with scanners, a TV with DVD player and children's videos, chil-

dren's books, as well as children's toys. Have these rooms next to family-friendly, gender inclusive bathrooms.

- Provide affordable and accessible on-site childcare. While some colleges and universities do offer this, many often have lengthy waiting lists for up to two years if not more. In this case, it's helpful to provide a list of alternative childcare options in the area that have been used by other parents on campus. Such lists can be curated based on recommendations from faculty, staff, and students, and then included on university and college websites. University of Washington, Tacoma provides a chart on their student services website that includes information about various childcare options around the area such as the location, name, contact information, and childcare type (center, home, school affiliated).
- Have a Parental Resource Center (see University of California, Berkeley, University of Pennsylvania, and Michigan State University) where parents affiliated with the university can go with questions about housing, childcare, dependent care, dependent health insurance, and other caregiving related questions. If a parental resource center is not available, create a webpage with helpful links for parents at all levels (faculty, staff, and student) to access.
- Have multiple, accessible, maintained, and well-stocked lactation rooms.

Departmental Level

- Ensure that faculty members, as well as department and program chairs are knowledgeable about resources for parents at your institution.[7] For example, in their new faculty orientation, UC Berkeley has "an extensive segment on parental policies and support systems, including day care" (Mason et al. 113). Chairs of departments and programs there also receive a special orientation where they are "furnished with a toolkit that clearly explains their responsibilities in promoting use of family-friendly programs" (Mason et al. 113).
- Develop syllabus policies that consider student parents. Such policies can make clear that parenthood will not hinder a student's progress in your class, while also outlining the support available should a parent need to bring a child to campus. Dr. Melissa Cheyney from Oregon State University has a detailed policy that considers nursing mothers, what happens when school or childcare closes unexpectedly, and what is expected of student parents should they need to bring their children to class to "cover unexpected gaps in care."

- Schedule meetings during preschool and K-12 school hours. If this is not possible, provide transcripts from the meetings and/or allow participants to video into the meetings.
- Be clear about what family-friendly means for departmental events and if possible, let parents know what to expect. At a recent dinner I attended, I was encouraged to bring my daughter, even though it was in a hotel ballroom. The woman handling the RSVPs reassured me that she would be bringing her son as well, and then let me know that the food there wasn't kid-friendly, so it would be good for me to bring some snacks. This made the experience much more enjoyable because I knew what to expect.
- Have resources in your department/program that parents can use on days their children may need to come to campus, like crayons, coloring books, Play-Doh, stickers, and games; these can also often double as resources for multimodal teaching activities. Not all single parents carry these items with them, and having them readily available would ease the weight (literally and metaphorically) that a single parent carries when their child (or children) needs to come to campus.
- Video record or live stream invited talks and events your department or program holds; make transcripts for these events available, and also make clear in the advertising for these events that such resources are available.
- If you are a parent, be open about your parental status. Post pictures in your office, talk about your children, and be clear about your constraints. For example, if you say you need to leave a meeting at 3:00 to pick-up your child, leave at 3:00. This creates a precedent for others that it is okay to articulate and maintain boundaries, which is especially helpful to graduate student and tenure-track faculty mothers who may feel pressure to hide their parental status due to stigma (Mason et al. 76).
- Be considerate of when class and teaching times are scheduled. Provide students and teachers with multiple options, allow them to articulate their constraints, and work to prioritize accommodating their needs. I have been fortunate to have a coordinator who is attentive to my schedule constraints as a result of my single mom identity, making a substantial difference in my teaching and graduate experience, but not all parents are so fortunate. At one conference presentation I recently attended, a graduate student mother of three children shared how she was asked if she wanted to give up her

assistantship because her teaching schedule was incompatible with her two-hour commute and parenting obligations.

These shifts may initially be seen as accommodations, but my hope is that they can work towards means of accessibility. An accommodation approach—where there is consideration given to the various needs single mothers might have—can help make spaces, like conferences, more inclusive and accessible. What is needed is a move from reactive measures to proactive policies. Using a case-by-case basis of accommodation puts the onus on individuals to request accommodations they would benefit from. Single mothers need opportunities to share their accommodation needs, so that academia can work towards being accessible rather than just accommodating. I see accommodations as add-ons, adjustments that are made in certain circumstances. It's important to recognize the work that many people do to support single moms, however, this often happens independently of formal policies and structures. While I do not want to dismiss the importance of honoring accommodation requests, I think having to make such requests risks perpetuating the stigmatization of those making them (e.g.-single moms). In contrast, making something accessible means it is a regular and central part of the support system.

The development of support systems for single moms will benefit more than just single moms. This is not unlike what Kimberlé Crenshaw suggests for addressing discrimination, "If [those concerned with alleviating the ills of sexism and racism] began their efforts with addressing the needs and problems of those who are most disadvantaged and with restructuring and remaking the world where necessary, then others who are singularly disadvantaged would also benefit" (167). Restructuring and remaking spaces in academia, and specifically composition and rhetoric, to encompass and account for single mother perspectives and experiences would benefit more than just single mothers. Single mothers are a stigmatized identity in various contexts, but this stigmatization risks stifling the valuable insights of women's experiences navigating countless roles. By making space for inclusion of single mothers, there is an opportunity to develop a greater understanding of the range of ways women in composition and rhetoric are surviving. To begin to develop that understanding, academia—in general and the field more specifically—needs to start centering those with marginalized identities. We might start with single mothers and account for them in a way that moves beyond an accommodation stance and toward access and inclusion.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1. Thank you to T Passwater for suggesting the "Career Killer Survival Kit" part of the title.

2. Material practice refers to how mothers get work done, the day-to-day activity that such work takes; embodied experience refers to how particular experiences had by certain bodies shape individual behavior and responses to situations and interactions.

3. See Lindal Buchanan's *Rhetorics of Motherhood,* Heather Brook Adams' "Rhetorics of Unwed Motherhood and Shame" in *Women's Studies in Communication,* Timothy Ballingall's "Motherhood, Time, and Wendy Davis's Ethos" in *Peitho*, Lisa Mastrangelo's "Changing Ideographs of Motherhood: Defining and Conscribing Women's Rhetorical Practices During World War I" in *Rhetoric Review,* and "Visualizing Birth Stories from the Margin…" by Shui-yin Sharon Yam in *RSQ* for example.

4. There are some colleges and universities that have policies that prohibit children in such spaces or specify how long children are allowed on campus (Zahneis).

5. According to the NCES, "of all full-time faculty in degree-granting postsecondary institutions in Fall 2016, 41 % were White males; 35% were White females; 6 % were Asian/Pacific Islander males; 4 % were Asian/Pacific Islander females; 3% were Black males, Black females, and Hispanic males; and 2 % were Hispanic females."

6. Whether or not this student is a single mom is unclear, but she is the only mother in the article who is not explicitly described as being in a partnered relationship.

7. Similar recommendations for graduate student single parents appear in the forthcoming article Hanson et al. "(Re)Producing (E)motions: Motherhood, Academic Spaces, and Neoliberal Times." *Xchanges,* vol. 15, no. 1, Spring 2020.

Appendix: Sources to Consult in Developing Family Friendliness in Higher Education

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