

“I Had to Jump through a Lot of Hoops”: How Working Mothers in Student Affairs
Navigate Institutional Policies and Student Affairs Norms

Abstract

In this instrumental case study, we explored the experiences of working mothers in student affairs and how their situated realities are shaped by institutional and professional norms, including commonly understood written and unwritten practices. We conducted interviews and focus groups with 21 mothers working full-time at a research-intensive university in the South. We crafted themes to illustrate how ideal worker norms, inequality regimes, and the maternal wall were persistent concerns for the mothers in our study (Acker, 1990; Acker, 2006; J. C. Williams, 2004). Mothers had to make decisions based on inadequate institutional policies while the institution simultaneously benefited from skills they imported from motherhood to student affairs work. Given the condition of federal and state policies, we offer implications for institutional and unit changes to better meet mothers where they are, accommodate their unique needs, and provide pathways for them to continue contributing meaningfully to the field.

Keywords: student affairs, working mothers, ideal worker, policy

“I Had to Jump through a Lot of Hoops”: How Working Mothers in Student Affairs Navigate Institutional Policies and Student Affairs Norms

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019), 71.5% of mothers with children under the age of 18 were employed in 2018. Being a working mother does not release women from societal scripts and expectations of being a good mother. These scripts dictate commitment to prioritizing their family above all else, sometimes with little help from spouses or other family members (Collins, 2019). Unsurprisingly, the normative expectation of being a good mother conflicts with the demands of being a working professional, particularly in student affairs. The student affairs profession, a field statistically dominated by women (Pritchard & McChesney, 2018), is time-intensive and often requires commitments outside of the traditional 8-to-5, 40-hour work week. Competing work and family pressures exist and are influenced by institutional policies and norms, yet the literature on working mothers¹ in student affairs is outdated. The research that has explored the experiences and career satisfaction of mothers in the profession indicates the field is unfriendly to women with children (Blackhurst et al., 1998; Marshall & Jones, 1990; Nobbe & Manning, 1997), yet no recent work has explored how working mothers navigate contemporary policies and norms.

The purpose of this study was to update the literature and to understand how mothers navigate systems and policies not designed for or accommodating of their unique needs within a demanding profession. We sought to answer the following research question: how do working mothers navigate professional and organizational norms and practices related to motherhood? Following the literature review, we describe our conceptual frameworks, explain our methods,

¹ By mothers we mean women who are parents and by working we mean working full-time as a student affairs professional.

present our findings using themes, and conclude with discussion and implications for practice.

We argue working mothers in the student affairs profession face an unsolvable conflict between work and home, pressures implicitly encouraging mothers to leave the workforce and the student affairs profession due to inequitable policies and practice.

Literature Review

Our literature review discusses policies and norms in higher education and how they influence mothers and fathers working within student affairs. Then, we describe our conceptual frameworks, which illuminate the mechanisms by which the ideal worker norm is sustained. Inequality regimes (Acker, 2006), how work is organized to reproduce inequities, and the maternal wall (J. C. Williams, 2004), how mothers are marginalized in the workplace, guided our study design and data analysis.

Policies, Norms, and Practices

Policies, norms, and practices within higher education are nested in larger systems. For example, the high cost of day care in the U.S. encourages women to leave the workforce (Collins, 2019), and the low pay of student affairs roles exacerbates this U.S. phenomena for parents in student affairs (Isdell & Wolf-Wendel, 2021), with some working mothers spending their entire salary on day care (Waltrip, 2012). These norms and policies, in particular low wages and lack of flexibility to support student affairs mothers, is consistent with research outside of education. For example, by studying 48 workers in the hedge fund industry, Neely (2020) found that the current model of the U.S. economy, particularly its policies and professional norms, mostly favor White men who ascribe to white-collar ideal worker norms. These norms make assumptions about race, gender, and social class, such as the assumption that *all* workers have a partner at home caring for the family.

Recent studies have shown that institutional norms and policies can be in conflict with working mothers' desire to integrate work and family, especially since these norms favor White, white-collar, cisgender men (Collins, 2019; Neely, 2020; Sallee et al., 2021). Furthermore, a review of the literature indicates that mothers in student affairs face multiple modes of oppression from their workplaces and the field of student affairs, sometimes causing them to leave the field (Jo, 2008; Waltrip, 2012). In addition, more recent work (e.g., Pal & Jones, 2020), while not explicitly focusing on mothers in student affairs, found that the punishing schedule of senior-level student affairs employees would not allow for sufficient time for family care, thus encouraging mid-level employees to stay at that professional rank.

Student Affairs Context

Student affairs, while nested in the large structures of higher education institutions, has its own set of norms. The evolution of student affairs work stems from the shift of *in loco parentis* responsibilities from faculty to staff and has further evolved to the creation of a profession focused on the holistic development of students (Duffy, 2010). To help faculty focus on students' academic needs, the creation of Deans of Women positions at higher education institutions placed responsibility for care-taking and non-academic aspects of student life onto women in that role (Doyle, 2004). Since the beginning of the profession, the primary focus of the type of work of student affairs professionals has largely been gender-specific (Sallee et al., 2021)

Furthermore, the field of student affairs is largely dominated by women who are committed to social justice work (ACPA & NASPA, 2015; Pritchard & McChesney, 2018). We might expect these features of the field would lead to a commitment to ensuring equitable treatment for mothers, but this expectation does not always match reality. Between the demanding, time-consuming nature of their professional responsibilities dedicated to student

success, student affairs professionals are not ever really free from work (Fochtman, 2010).

Student affairs professionals are socialized throughout their careers towards an ethos of self-sacrifice (Isdell & Wolf-Wendel, 2021); jobs requiring working nights and weekends encourage work to be the priority. The push to be productive at work resulted in motherly guilt about time spent away from children (Hebreard, 2010) and caused some mothers to leave the field entirely (Hebreard, 2010; Waltrip, 2012). While 45% of student affairs professionals leave the profession within the first five years for reasons such as low pay and poor supervision (Marshall et al., 2016), women with young children specify that work-family conflict, lack of support, and inflexibility of the work environment and of supervisors are reasons for their attrition (Hebreard, 2010; Waltrip, 2012).

Mothers in Student Affairs

The experiences of working mothers in student affairs remain underexplored in the extant literature and is outdated. Within the four-year, not-for-profit higher education sector, prior qualitative studies have centered successful senior-level student affairs professionals and how they navigated dual roles, or being a mother and a professional (e.g., Marshall, 2002; 2009); mothers who are mid-level student affairs professionals (Bailey, 2011; Fochtman, 2010; Supple, 2007), and mothers who opted to leave the profession (Hebreard, 2010). The majority of these studies are dissertations (e.g., Marshall, 2002; Bailey, 2011; Fochtman, 2010; Snyder, 2011; Supple, 2007; Hebreard, 2010), and most have not been published in peer-reviewed journals, meaning this knowledge has not been disseminated to the broader academic community.

The mothers who persisted in student affairs, despite these challenges, expressed concern that the work environment is designed for men (Levtov, 2001; Marshall, 2002). An organization designed for men assumes an ideal worker is available to work full-time and has no biological

interruptions to a career trajectory (Acker, 1990). Marshall's (2002) qualitative dissertation included 17 participants at the dean level or higher who were trendsetters, namely some of the first women in high level positions with children who had to challenge unfriendly work policies, such as inadequate family leave. Most of Marshall's participants navigated unfriendly policies by taking leave or stopping out of the profession for a time. Anderson's (1998) dissertation surveyed 218 women senior student affairs professionals who described less satisfaction in the workplace than men. Also, the 12 mid- and upper-level women in Fochtman's (2010) dissertation felt a constant risk of entering the “mommy-track,” a career position where superiors no longer considered mothers for promotion and high-status opportunities (p. 18). Working mothers also perceived a need to constantly “prove themselves” and their career dedication to their colleagues and supervisors (Bailey, 2011, p. 176). They sometimes overcompensated by working late hours and through their lunch times out of concern they were not perceived as productive enough (Fochtman, 2010; Waltrip, 2012).

Flexible environments were positive aspects of career satisfaction (Nobbe & Manning, 1997; Padulo, 2001), yet the literature reflects that most women were challenged by inflexible work environments and policies demanding physical presence in an office (Fochtman, 2010; Hebreard, 2010; Jo, 2008; Waltrip, 2012). Telecommuting was a preferred, but rare, option for working mothers. This is consistent with Collins (2019), who found that inflexible institutional norms and policies often punish working mothers in the U.S. as a result of the inflexibility. Schreiber (1998), writing broadly about women and career development, argued that telecommuting can be seen as a form of oppression in order to keep women in low-paying and unstable jobs, as well as hinder their career development and future career opportunities; it keeps

professionals invisible to their colleagues, therefore removing them from consideration for career development opportunities. This claim is, however, contextualized by late 1990s technology.

The experiences of working mothers in student affairs were not entirely grim. Some women did perceive positive aspects to being both a student affairs professional and a mother and believed they were better able to separate their personal identities from their professional ones after they had children (Lehman & Krebs; 2018; Marshall & Jones, 1990; Nobbe & Manning, 1997). For instance, Marshall and Jones (1990) surveyed 348 participants who stated having children helped them prioritize more effectively, gave them more empathy for their students, and motivated them to achieve career success. Similarly, Lehman and Krebs (2018) interviewed 11 children of student affairs professionals who perceived their student affairs parents as caring helpers in their work. Student affairs professionals are not alone in being impacted by institutional policies and norms within higher education.

Fathers in Student Affairs

The research conducted about fathers in student affairs (Sallee, 2019; Sallee et al., 2021) shares conceptual similarities to ours. Based on interviews with 24 working fathers in student affairs across 22 campuses (Sallee, 2019, p. 1239), Sallee’s research also utilized the ideal worker construct and analyzed hegemonic gender norms within student affairs. Sallee’s research found that working fathers are hampered by the gendered expectations of the field of student affairs and parenting norms. Fathers were expected to put their work identity over their father identity, a choice enabled and implicitly encouraged by the overrepresentation of White men at the top of the student affairs hierarchy. Student affairs itself is a profession that demands more than a “9 to 5 workday” from its employees (Sallee, 2019, p. 1242). While fathers were celebrated for their visible expressions of caring for their children, some observed penalties for

working mothers doing the same care work due to ideal worker norms within student affairs. As Sallee (2019) observed, student affairs are “greedy institutions” demanding much from workers, fathers and mothers alike (p. 1253). In this study, we build on Sallee (2019) and Sallee et al. (2021). We apply insights about fathers working in the student affairs profession to the experience of working mothers in student affairs.

Conceptual Frameworks

We utilized two complementary conceptual positions: inequality regimes (Acker, 2006) and the maternal wall (J. C. Williams, 2004). Both of these concepts are grounded in Acker’s (1990) work on the ideal worker, who is available to work at all times because the worker is assumed to be a cis heterosexual man who has a wife to take care of domestic responsibilities. The ideal worker, in being an assumed cis man but not explicitly gendered, “both obscures and helps to reproduce the underlying gender relations” (Acker, 1990, p. 151). In addition, women who choose to have children are poorly served by the ideal worker norm because “the ranking of women’s jobs is often justified on the basis of women’s identification with childbearing and domestic life. They are devalued because women are assumed to be unable to conform to the demands of the abstract job” (Acker, 1990, p. 152). Ideal worker norms serve to contextualize the work environment from a macro perspective, while inequality regimes and the maternal wall help us delve specifically into the experience of the participants in their institutional setting.

Inequality regimes are useful to understand “specific organizations and the local, ongoing practical activities of organizing work that, at the same time, reproduce complex inequalities” (Acker, 2006, p. 442). Acker suggests focusing on understanding inequality regimes, or “loosely interrelated practices, processes, actions, and meanings that result in and maintain class, gender, and racial inequalities within particular organizations” (p. 443) in order to understand why

patterns of inequality persist. When examined in a more localized, specific way, this examination can reveal politics, history, and culture that contribute to systemic inequalities within an organization (Acker, 2006). Focusing on the system as the driver of inequity contextualizes participant experiences and illustrates how structures and policies shape them.

To enhance our ability to understand the specific positionality of mothers within an organizational context, we overlay J. C. Williams’ (2004) maternal wall work. Williams (2004) describes how mothers are marginalized in the work force, including stereotyping, the glass ceiling, the competency struggle (women must work harder than men to be perceived as competent), the competence reality (similarly situated men are perceived as more competent), the competency penalty (women are penalized for their behavior, seen as too aggressive or too maternal), and the maternal wall (work biases and stereotypes related to motherhood adversely affect women). The glass ceiling and maternal wall are the most relevant concepts for our data.

J. C. Williams (2004) also emphasizes the detrimental impact of systems and norms on non-mothers and fathers, who also experience adverse outcomes. For example, women are unable to leverage their mother colleagues in the fight for gender equity while fathers are unable to take advantage of paternal leave policies due to negative perceptions. The concept of the ideal worker, “who starts working in early adulthood and continues full time (and overtime) for forty years straight” also informed the study (p. 20). Our focus is on understanding how working mothers navigate the larger system of the institution and profession. Taken together, inequality regimes and the maternal wall provided us opportunity to investigate the larger implications of gendered labor in the academy and amplify the voices of this understudied population.

Methodology

Our work is considered *instrumental* since the primary focus of our analysis is the experiences of working mothers. In an instrumental case study, “the case is of secondary interest, it plays a supportive role, and it facilitates our understanding of something else” (Stake, 2008, p. 137). The exploration of working mothers in this particular setting was a central task, but it supported our gaining insight to a broader issue: working mothers in student affairs. An instrumental case study is pursued with a bounded system (Merriam, 2009) that “is examined mainly to provide insight into an issue or to redraw a generalization” (Stake, 2008, p. 137). We bounded the case by focusing exclusively on working mothers in student affairs at the site institution. The site is a doctoral-granting, research-intensive institution in the U.S. South, chosen for the researchers’ knowledge of the site and its professional norms.

Recruitment and Participants

We recruited a first wave of participants through a post made on the site institution’s e-mail listserv for working mothers. Subsequent recruitment took place through an e-mail message sent to the university’s diversity and student affairs divisions.² We received 22 completed responses that indicated willingness to participate and were able to schedule interviews with 21 of them. Participants self-identified as mothers working full-time in student affairs who were not currently graduate students. The women interviewed in our study were primarily mid-level career professionals and had been working in the student affairs field for more than five years. Participants held positions such as Academic Advisor, Director, and Specialist, some with and some without supervisory responsibilities. See Table 1 for additional demographic details³.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

³ We present data in aggregate form to preserve participant privacy.

Data Collection

We used semi-structured interviews to collect data. In pairs, members of the research team interviewed each participant. In designing the protocol, we used our understanding of the literature on working mothers in student affairs and organizational theory more broadly—including the ideal worker phenomenon (Acker, 1990)—to construct questions about the experience of being a working mother in student affairs. We conducted two pilot interviews to refine the interview protocol.⁴ In our interviews, we asked about typical work routines, experiences with institutional and national policies including relevant leave policies, and feelings navigating work and home pressures. We also provided them with the definition of the ideal worker and asked them to keep it in mind as we asked them follow-up questions such as “What challenges have you faced in your roles as a mother and a professional?” We did so to investigate our conceptual constructs explicitly and to check if participants shared our understanding of this instrumental concept (Stake, 2008).

After concluding individual interviews, we organized focus groups to put participants in conversation about their experiences and to better understand what common and unique challenges they experience related to their different work units and motherhood. We conducted five focus groups with a total of 18 participants in groups ranging from two to five people at a time. Participants were primarily grouped based on their scheduling availability. When we had discretion in focus group construction, we created a group comprised primarily of staff with supervisory responsibilities and a group without supervisory responsibilities. We further avoided pairing participants who worked in the same office into one group. Each interview and focus

⁴ Four members of the research team collected interview data, while two members joined later and participated in the focus groups, which took place after interviews. All team members participated in data analysis.

group lasted approximately 60 minutes. We also accessed written policies and relevant institutional web resources when needed to contextualize participants’ experiences.

Data Analysis

Our analysis focused on exploring the experiences of working mothers in the context of organizational policies and norms. We utilized constant comparative strategies, such as coding data, writing jottings during coding, and writing memos after each interview, to consistently engage with the data and discuss potential interpretations with the team in a recursive manner (Merriam, 1998). This process involved using derived emic codes from our memos and debrief sessions, such as Emotion-Guilt—as well as etic codes from our conceptual framework such as Ideal Worker (Maxwell, 2013). Each member of the research team initially coded a subset of transcripts with these start codes. Through discussion, we then iteratively developed the full code book, which included 32 codes and subcodes. Each member was assigned a subset of transcripts to code; the lead researcher master-coded all transcripts to ensure consistency of code usage. As each coder completed their analysis of an individual interview, they wrote a detailed field memo about that participant. To move from coding, jottings, and field memos to themes, the team engaged in multiple recursive de-brief sessions (approximately 25 hours of debriefing sessions during data collection and analysis) to engage in pattern analysis and explore interpretations (Maxwell, 2013; Saldana, 2013). We discussed how codes related to each other as well as comparing and contrasting across participant experiences to investigate how our theories helped explain participant experiences (Maxwell, 2013; Saldana, 2013). This process helped us analyze participant experiences within the contexts of the institution and professional field.

Trustworthiness

We addressed trustworthiness through multiple qualitative techniques. We focused on the credibility and authenticity of our data and findings; in other words, we sought to represent “believable” themes through the genuine reflections of the participants (Hays & Singh, 2011, p. 200). A pair of interviewers conducted each semi-structured interview, usually held in the participant’s office space so two researchers could offer their interpretations of each interview. We also conducted member-checks during interviews by paraphrasing participants’ words and inquiring if our understanding was accurate. Focus groups offered an additional form of member checking as we shared initial findings and participants clarified their ideas with peers. Interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded and used to produce verbatim transcripts. After the interview, each member of the research team wrote field notes and reflections on the interview content, impressions, and initial analysis (Hays & Singh, 2011). Finally, we utilized multiple triangulation techniques, including triangulation of interviewers, positionalities, theories, and analytic techniques (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). We also triangulated among data sources, including interviews, focus groups, researcher jottings, field notes, and policies at the institutional and unit level, as well as national policies like the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA).

Researcher Positionalities

Our research team was a six-person group including faculty, graduate students, and student affairs professionals (see Table 2). Our shared experiences as scholar-practitioners helped us make sense of how participants described the way professional and organizational norms interacted in their lives. We also employed our lived experiences working in the field of student affairs to identify inequitable policies and practices that impact working mothers as a part of our analytical lens. For some, the researchers relied on their identities as parents to investigate the way policies and practices may push working parents out of the

workplace. We leveraged our respective insider and outsider statuses to examine the environments that impact working mothers in student affairs, up to and including gender, race, professional student affairs experience, and parental status.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

We acknowledge our bias by being explicit about our conceptualizations of the field. We view student affairs as a profession requiring substantial and demanding care work that can unfairly penalize working mothers. Lastly, we focused on co-construction and triangulation. The researchers stayed in conversation with each other by writing memos and engaging in team debriefing discussions throughout the research process. Our collaborative discussions enabled us to interpret data and generate knowledge together and provided space to debrief our lived experiences and identities (Maxwell, 2013). For example, three researchers are parents and two of them are mothers; two had a decade’s worth of student affairs experience while one worked in student affairs while a graduate student. The researchers’ positional lenses provided rich context for exploring interpretations and implications as we wrote about and discussed the data.

Limitations and Delimitations

The scope of this study was limited to examining the experiences of a select group of individuals (full-time, non-student, student affairs mothers) from a single public, research-intensive institution. As a result, this study was delimited in scope by a particular group of people from one particular site, which allowed the researchers to delve deeply into the lived experiences of the participants. This site did not, however, allow for the wide range of potential differences in the experiences of mothers from across institutions in the United States. In addition, despite multiple rounds and types of recruitment methods, we were unable to obtain as diverse a sample as desired.

Further, the study’s intentional selection of full-time student affairs professionals, who were not students, who identified as mothers, reflected a delimitation. We focused on this specific population and not the whole population of student affairs professionals and/or mothers. We wanted to isolate our instrumental case study to motherhood and the profession rather than introducing competing variables (Stake, 2008). For those reasons, we also did not study parents of other genders (e.g., men, nonbinary individuals) in student affairs. Our assumptions in this study are guided by our own experience with the field, as detailed above.

Findings

We share participants’ experiences in thematic groups to illustrate how student affairs mothers navigated the profession and their daily work environments (Maxwell, 2013). We discuss the following four central findings: The Burnt-Out Mom, Policy Driven Decisions, The (Institutional) Glass Ceiling, and Mom Strengths. We only present participants’ self-identified racial and ethnic identity, their marital status, and their number of children to preserve participant confidentiality. Our findings holistically illustrate how working mothers negotiate and move through and outside policies in an environment unfriendly to working mothers.

The “Burnt-Out Mom”

Participants consistently talked about the culture of burn-out that they experienced from work expectations imposed by the field of student affairs and by their daily work environments (Schaufeli et al., 2009). More specifically, participants shared their struggles about the “expectation to always go above and beyond,” as Amelia⁵, a married, Asian-American participant with three children described. In addition, the pressure to continue to work at home

⁵ All participant names are randomly generated pseudonyms.

after hours, such as having to “check your email after putting your kids to bed,” as Cassandra, a married, White participant with one child shared. The following quotation from Lina, a married, Black participant with four children, represents how the student affairs mothers in our study experience burn-out in their daily work and within the field of student affairs at-large:

I definitely think that there’s an expectation in student affairs that you are on top of things at all times because...our field is under attack a lot of times and [it is expected] that you’re on top of everything, on top of all the things that are going to take you away from work during the day. I don’t know if there’s a lot of acknowledgement for the fact that you do begin a second shift, because regardless of whether you have a partnership or not, you’re still leaving a job to go to a job as a parent.

In her comment, Lina described the sense of expectations from the field and the importance of keeping up with work at all times, regardless of any other time constraints or commitments. Furthermore, as expressed by many participants, attending to family responsibilities after work hours was a common challenge to balance with their professional lives. In other words, the “second shift” phenomenon that Lina mentioned was described by most participants in different forms, which contributed to the burn-out culture experienced by student affairs mothers (Hochschild, 2003).

Participants were used to thriving in their demanding jobs before they became mothers. They expected to achieve at the same high level after becoming mothers and applied that same quest for excellence to being a parent. American societal norms about what constitutes a good mother contributed to this sense of trying to juggle two competing but all-encompassing roles (Collins, 2019). These impossible expectations of the field and being a mother, or kind of double manifestation of the competency struggle (J. C. Williams, 2004), caused severe personal and

professional burn-out and, in many cases, led participants to switch jobs or even consider leaving the profession in their quest for a more balanced and healthy life.

Policy Driven Decisions

Participants described ways institutional policies shaped their strategic decisions as both a mom and a worker. Many participants employed careful planning around their pregnancy, from hoarding sick and vacation leave, to applying for childcare the moment conception was confirmed, to finding lactation rooms, to understanding convoluted and unclear institutional policies, to deciding on housing and childcare, to major career decisions.

Insurance, comp time, and sick leave were prevalent in many of our conversations with participants. All participants discussed saving up sick leave and vacation time. Mary, a married White woman with one child, described that to create some semblance of maternity leave,

I had used all of my vacation and sick time and then I came back and then she [daughter] got sick and I was screwed and then ... she was probably about 4 months old um and my husband got a hernia and had to have surgery and couldn't lift her for 6 weeks and ... he's been in the hospital and then he had to have 3 [more] surgeries, like within like 2 months after that ... I had no time to use and so other people had to donate sick time to me, and which I was really grateful that they did but it was like really stressful.

Human resources (HR) policies had no way of accounting for a series of challenging events, and no HR mechanisms existed to provide adequate accommodation for her family's unique needs.

Lorena, a married White participant with one child, spent a significant period in the hospital after her child was born prematurely; she told us dealing with HR and insurance was one of the chief stressors during that time. Lorena held a high position at the institution, which had its drawbacks because the high level of responsibility meant that she could not count on anyone else

to fulfil her duties. She had to balance taking care of her son and herself while working enough hours to avoid gaps in services in order to keep her health insurance, in addition to seeking out doctors' signatures to prove her medical needs:

I had to jump through a lot of hoops. So here I was already dealing with a lot of trauma and going to the hospital multiple times a day to see my [child], and having to pay \$50 every time I needed a document signed by a doctor so that I could prove what was going on with my [child] and myself.

Keeping up with the bureaucratic demands claimed a significant portion of Lorena's time, money, and emotional energy in an already difficult period.

Because of the assumption inherent in the profession that student-facing roles required face-to-face interactions inappropriate for children, employees were also disallowed from bringing their children to work. This assumption led to participants using their limited sick, vacation, or comp time to stay home with their children to handle childcare emergencies. Women were not provided an opportunity to integrate their home and work lives, which meant all work decisions had to be filtered through the lens of being a mother. This is a manifestation of inequality regimes, in that policy, practices, and normative expectations position working mothers as aberrant and unable to access their full selves at work (Acker, 2006).

For example, Helena, a married, Latina participant with two children, described the way her promotion negatively impacted her family and inadequate policy guidance through this transition. When she was promoted, her status with the university changed: “Somewhere in my switches, which I wasn't made aware of, they paid me out on all my leave.” When her child was born, she had “no leave, or very, very little leave,” and she was unpaid for a month. She said,

...it was one of those where, do I take this, do I just deal with this the way that, essentially, I have to? Or do I come back early from my leave and miss out on the valuable time with my family? I opted for the latter. We made it work. But not being informed of all of the policies whenever they're gonna switch your roles like that can be pretty daunting, especially as a soon-to-be mom...I didn't even think to ask that question ...because you assume that everybody's doing the same thing. And it's not...Everyone's in different status and what that means, it can be different for everybody.

Helena did not know the questions to ask and neither her supervisors nor HR representatives were primed to educate her about the process given her specific life circumstances.

The (Institutional) Glass Ceiling

The participants in our study who worked in student-facing positions noted that their job responsibilities afforded them limited time and work flexibility to meet their family responsibilities. This restriction manifested in inflexible HR policies, including no possibility for working remotely or telecommuting; therefore, mothers shaped their career around finding or remaining in a mother-friendly work environment. Conversely, participants who held higher-ranking positions in the institutional hierarchy did have more flexibility, including the ability to bring their child(ren) to work, a schedule requiring them to be physically present in the office less frequently, and with this, the potential for even further career advancement. Most mid-level participants felt limited in the scope of their careers because the demand of student affairs professionals to be student-centered, which often translated in practice to being physically student-facing, which conflicted with their role as mothers.

Supervisors

Career choices for participants revolved around whether their current or potential future jobs were friendly to their maternal responsibilities, which influenced how they worked with supervisors. For instance, Nicolette, a married, White participant with one child, stayed in a very demanding but unsatisfying job because her supervisor allowed her to keep flexible hours.

Regarding her supervisor, she said,

She has been amazing, and I know I’m lucky in that aspect...No matter whether I’m completely happy with my job or not, I’m not going anywhere...because I do have that flexibility at this point and I just can’t imagine going someplace else and not being able to split my day up and go to a story time to meet [husband and child] if I wanted to.

Although she described being exhausted and said, “I just wanna nap in the blanket” instead of working late, this so-called “flexibility” and the presence of a supportive supervisor were the main reason Nicolette stayed in her current role.

Nicolette was not alone in recognizing the importance of supervisors. Almost every participant commented about the importance of a supportive supervisor who had some understanding of the challenges of being a working mother. Roslyn, a married White mother with one child, summed up a common perspective in a focus group:

I think that as a field, there are a lot of women and I think a large percentage of those are women with children. And in spite of that or because of that, the people who are at the next level up that make the decisions that dictate this is the schedule you’ll need, are not necessarily working mothers. And so I think that’s where we get the hold up. So a lot of deans are not working mothers. A lot of [provosts] are not working mothers. So at that administrative level, I think we need more people who have experienced the ground level in this identity to move up. But that’s hard to do without sacrificing some of the things

that might be important to you. And I think this can be a cushy place to stay where you can get a balance of I can have a satisfying career and also deal with your family, but you might not have that push to go further.

Nicolette replied to this comment by saying,

It’s something that I would like to see myself go up and do, but I do wonder what will that look like? And I guess I could see myself saying, “no that’s not worth it.” But it’s not something I’m ruling out at the moment. I think probably if your kids are older then it’s easier to put more time into your work. But right now my kids are young and daycare closes at a certain time and I have to be there and he can’t get himself home. So it’s not an option for me to be staying.

This conversation illustrates two key points. Working mothers desire to continue progressing their careers but often opt out because of the incompatibility of being a working mother and moving up the career ladder. Leadership that understands the positionality of being a working mother matters, particularly as decisions around working environments are made. This finding also illustrates the persistence of the maternal wall (J.C. Williams, 2004) and inequality regimes (Acker, 2006) in student affairs supervisory and leadership practices and norms.

Inflexible Work Environments

Participants asked for more telecommuting possibilities that were not accessible or available due to institutional and student affairs norms to be present on campus for students⁶. One married White participant with two children, Hanna, who has since left the field after working at the same institution for over ten years, wanted to telecommute to fulfill home and

⁶ The data were collected prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, but we analyzed the data during the pandemic.

work responsibilities, like doing the laundry, but her unit’s leadership denied the request. Hanna also encountered resistance when she asked to work part-time. When responding to a follow-up question about how she experienced a lack of support from the field as a mother, she said,

When I said ideally changing [my] schedule up, being able to work part-time, even if it was some temporary arrangement, they [leadership] were pretty resistant to having those discussions because my understanding being that they can’t offer it to one person if ... they’d have to be able to offer some type of arrangement like that to...[every staff member in Hanna’s area] whereas most of those people are not parents.

In this situation, parents were considered a group deviant from the norm. Therefore, flexibility could not be afforded to all employees—for whatever reason—and this inflexibility contributed to Hanna’s decision to become a stay-at-home mother. The rigidity of the work environment reflects how assumptions about the work perpetuate the maternal wall (J. C. Williams, 2004).

Another participant, Sandra, who was White and married with one child, was in a supervisory role. Sandra tried to give her employees the ability to work part-time and discouraged them from trying to accomplish a substantial amount of work after hours, but she found her hands tied in the ability to allow those she supervised to work outside of the office:

I’m not able to approve work from home. So, it’s just something that the powers that be [dictate]. Based on our [role as] student-facing, the idea is that our positions do not allow us to work from home because we are student-facing. We have to be here to serve the students...Even though there are a lot of administrative tasks that could easily be done if you kind of saved them for a certain day that you would be home...There are days when I look at my calendar and I’m thinking I could be way more productive if I did not have the

interruptions of the office. But student affairs—just the university structure being a state employee just doesn’t give us that flexibility. It’s considered an 8-to-5 position.

Sandra contrasted this lack of flexibility with her friends and relatives in the private sector who did have that ability to frequently work from home. This restriction existed due to inflexible HR policies, including no possibility for working remotely or telecommuting.

Mom Strengths

Despite the clear challenges presented by navigating motherhood as a student affairs professional, on an individual level participants also revealed the way motherhood enhanced their work and their ability to navigate policies and norms, particularly regarding how they engaged and deployed emotions. For example, several participants discussed a level of compassion that motherhood brought to their many life roles. They developed social skills that allowed them to employ empathy when appropriate whether at home or at work, as Brittany, a married, White participant with three children said:

Motherhood has taught me that there are always back stories and unseen things going on that deserve more compassion than I might have delivered before. I try to approach people from a helpful standpoint and encourage that in others...Being a mom has also made me see scenarios in terms of motherhood. People who are completely wishy washy. I’ll take my mom brain and go, “Okay, here are two choices. Choose one. Either is fine with me.” Techniques I learned as a mom; I have also employed [at work].

This “mom brain” allowed Brittany to work through certain situations she faced at the institution and cut out some unnecessary discussion, leading to more productivity and more understanding with colleagues and students. It was common for participants to see these unanticipated skill sets from being a working mother as beneficial in their lives.

Not only were participants able to work better with their students, but they were able to help their colleagues take new perspectives on working with parents of students. They understood parents were not solely annoying intrusions. Participants understood that students' parents should not automatically be dismissed as a stereotypical helicopter parent. College student's parents are just as concerned and engaged in their child's education experience as our participants were about their own children's educational experiences. This new perspective contributed directly to their ability to do the key student affairs work of helping students and, sometimes by extension, students' parents. As Carla, a married, Latina participant with two children described when working with parents whose child did not received admission to the university:

I feel like having those conversations now as opposed to before I was a mom was so different because I can tell them things like “I know what it's like to want the most for your child...for you to have worked so hard to give them everything and for every opportunity and for this to be the time that they're being told no and that's really hard for you,” like I would never have even thought to say that before, you know...because I work hard for my kids to have everything and want the best for [them] ... so I can imagine [being told no]... your bubble burst, and reality sets in. I feel like I'm better able to calm people down and to understand and give them a sense that somebody cares, and it's not ...just being told, “here's the company line”...It's more authentic.

Carla's empathy was a key strength as she worked with students and their parents as they themselves navigated higher education set-backs and challenges.

Participants expressed surprise at their productivity and efficiency increased after they became moms. They brought multitasking “skills to work...and [were] much more focused,”

said Nicolette. Showing the prevalence of the ideal worker norm (Acker, 1990), one reason for their productivity was the constant stress of leaving work at any moment to handle parental issues. Lucille, a married White woman with two children, stated,

I’ve been surprised both times at my efficiency and focus at work versus when I was not a parent, and then when I was a parent of just one. I surprise myself at how much I could get done and how driven I was to get it done...I had this, this feeling like at any moment I might be called away to pick up my kids for something. So, I want to make sure I get this stuff done. So, I just had this determination and this focus that never existed before.

Lucille further described how she accomplished more work in one day than before she had children because she highly valued her uninterrupted, dedicated time at work. Many participants expressed similar astonishment at how much being a working mother contributed to their work output. It was not something they initially thought would happen after becoming parents. Being a student affairs mom comes with many challenges and unprecedented stresses, but working mothers developed skillsets enhancing their student affairs work and benefitting the organization.

Discussion

Our study explored how policy is received by women and how they experience challenges navigating a system built for an ideal worker (Acker, 1990; Sallee, 2019). Our work both confirms the precarity of being a working mother in student affairs, as seen in previous literature (e.g., Marshall, 2009, Nobbe & Manning, 1997), and sheds new light onto the experiences of working mothers who persistently experienced inequality regimes and the maternal wall (Acker, 2006; J. C. Williams, 2004). Our study also echoes the totalizing norms of the student affairs profession as depicted in Sallee (2019) and Sallee et al. (2021) and provides an analogous investigation of working mothers.

The ability to navigate complex institutional policies relating to leave, sick time, et cetera was a prerequisite to being a successful working mother in student affairs. Because institutions presuppose student affairs staff to be ideal workers (Sallee, 2019), this ability constitutes additional labor required of exclusively of caregivers. Similarly, having to use sick time and vacation time to care for *others* rather than the employee presupposes an ideal worker. Ideal works are solely responsible for themselves within this logic, making care leave unthinkable.

Student affairs specifically, as Lina articulated, is “under attack” at the institution, placing student affairs staff into the position of needing to achieve above and beyond any other workers. The inability to thrive under the competing norms of the student affairs profession and the ideal worker left participants feeling guilty and like failures at work (Sallee, 2019), and driving Hanna out of the field altogether. Some difficulties of being a working mother in student affairs comes from institutions unfriendly to mothers specifically and to caregivers generally.

Individually, participants were trying to do their best to succeed in a field and in office environments that were rarely willing to make room for their unique needs. If they were supported, they felt the need to articulate how lucky they were. Similar to Pal and Jones (2020) and Jo (2008), we found mothers often had to choose between career success, which in student affairs meant attempting to move up the career ladder and into more time-intensive positions, or opting to stay in current, less-high-status roles that allowed them to leave work and arrive home in time to see their children. Positions with more flexibility or a supportive supervisor were more desirable (Hebreard, 2010; Waltrip, 2012). Assumptions about the nature of student-facing roles promoted less flexibility, even though student affairs work during the COVID-19 pandemic has

debunked some of these assumptions.⁷ The inequality regimes in the contemporary workplace punish women for failing to be ideal workers, bound to be constantly available to the institution and unburdened by out-of-work demands like parenthood (J. C. Williams, 2004; Sallee, 2019). Participants were aware of the maternal wall that they could foresee impeding their career progress, perceiving unfriendliness in their work environment (J. C. Williams, 2004), which encourages women to opt out of career advancement (Blackhurst et al., 1998; Jo, 2008; Marshall & Jones, 1990; Pal & Jones, 2020; J. C. Williams, 2004). The participants knew they faced a difficult path in making career decisions, which have serious implications for their families.

Participants also discussed the way their parenting experiences contributed to and improved their student affairs work. Similar to Marshall and Jones (1990), participants found skills developed through motherhood translated to their work in higher education. The positive aspects of being both a mother and a student affairs professional are an important contribution to the literature which often highlights difficulties rather than strengths (Fochtman, 2010; Hebreard, 2010), though). The strengths mothers specifically bring to their work also highlights that how institutions benefit from working mothers' skills and experiences while simultaneously penalizing them through norms and policies. In addition, it is possible to read their application of mothering skills to their work environment as simply another way that ideal worker norms have become deeply rooted in the all-encompassing expectations of student affairs (Sallee, 2019) as participants' skills needed to be applied to work. Relatedly, while participants benefitted from their new perspective on interacting with students' families—as Carla described—it is possible that the families saw the role of the student affairs professional as the caretaker of their child in a

⁷ While the data were collected and analyzed before the COVID-19 pandemic, we completed revisions of the manuscript during the pandemic.

higher education institution, further confirming the gendered nature of student affairs work as a caretaking profession relating to the labor of women (Duffy, 2010; Sallee et al., 2021).

Implications for Practice

In this study, we showed how mothers working in student affairs navigated challenging policies and how they brought skills from mothering to their work. Our study found systemic barriers that are unfriendly to student affairs mothers, which is consistent with the literature (e.g., Hebreard, 2010). Similarly, we found that many student affairs mothers are dissatisfied with their working conditions and its impact on their ability to be better parents and partners (Anderson, 1998). Many issues we found were related to job satisfaction, such as time, efficiency, and infrastructure. In addition, myriad challenges were due to confusing and conflicting HR policies and/or inadequate explanations of what policies could be used. We recommend institutions consider employing HR advocates who understand the nuances of policies working mothers will need to use before, during, and after pregnancy who can help empower mothers' choices. Given the literature on faculty fathers demonstrates inequitable policy usage patterns (Sallee, 2014), institutions should also consider instituting mandatory leave for parents to normalize its use, as Sweden does (Collins, 2019). Institutions should also consider options to return part-time but fully insured to ease mothers' re-integration to the institution. Supervisors and institutional leadership might also consider how care professions are recognized and valued on campuses.

Given the effects of the pandemic, specifically our ability to perform many work duties remotely and outside of the traditional 8-to-5 workday, our findings demonstrate how remote technologies and work hours flexibility have the potential to promote more equitable work environments. Most participants explained their supervisor provided flexibility in their work environment, not the institution. The institution neither provided an inclusive environment nor

addressed inequities. Many of the barriers participants shared could be eased by giving student affairs professionals the flexibility to perform their work remotely. For example, tele-commuting has the potential to drastically reduce issues, such as lack of lactation rooms, limited parking, long commutes, walking long distances from meeting to meeting, and many others.

In addition, the ability to work outside of the 8-to-5 workday without repercussions may provide the flexibility for working mothers to help promote more inclusive work/life integration. Many facets of student affairs work frequently occur outside of typical business hours. Perhaps the lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic could allay fears expressed by Schreiber (1998) about the negative impact of telecommuting and add to the literature on the positive effects of flexible work environments and retention of working mothers (e.g., Nobbe & Manning, 1997). Although we have yet to see how the COVID-19 pandemic will impact student affairs work in the long term, our findings underscored some specific barriers tied to traditional and rigid work structures that could easily be addressed through more flexible options. As such, institutions should carefully review and revise their policies and when appropriate consider giving working remotely as a tool for making the field more equitable. With time, this effort has potential to dismantle many systemic inequities and barriers that were voiced by participants and, due to the pandemic, have been shown to be realistic.

Recommendations for Future Research

While studies exist on mothers in corporate environments (e.g., Budig & England, 2001; Correll et al., 2007; Waldfogel, 1997) and mothers who are faculty (e.g., Mason et al., 2013; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004), the scope of this research emphasized the way in which full-time student affairs mothers navigate professional and organizational norms and its implications for practice and policy work. Future work might consider understanding the way supervisors can use

their agency to facilitate family-friendly environments. One possible approach might focus on department chairs who have both faculty and staff in their department, or even department chairs who are also mothers. This approach would enhance our understanding of how policies are implemented and how unit subcultures can foster a family-friendly environment. In addition, we recommend future research explore policy implementation, or how policies are being operationalized by supervisors and HR professionals. Policies provide guidance, but parents need to understand many nuances to navigate these complex and bureaucratic systems.

Other populations could prove fruitful for study. Future research might explore pay differences in student affairs roles, including parental status, number of children, and disaggregating those data by gender and race/ethnicity. This would help the field understand what kind of pay penalty may exist. While the participant sample included women of color, we recognize that the experiences of women of color navigating institutions differ from their White peers. Thus, future research studies should focus exclusively on the experiences of women of color who are mothers. In the same vein, while two of the mothers in our study were in same-gender marriages, future research on student affairs mothers should also exclusively focus on the experiences of student affairs parents who hold other historically marginalized identities, including but not limited to queer and trans* parents, single mothers, same-gender parents, and fathers. In addition, we agree with Culpepper et al. (2012) that future research should seek to examine a more holistic notion of work-life integration, including mental health, elder care, and community care.

Conclusion

Mothers working outside the home are neither a new nor a temporary phenomenon. In studying the experiences of student affairs mothers in the field, it is clear that additional research

is needed to bring awareness to these often overlooked, yet essential professionals on university campuses. At the same time, by virtue of their multiple responsibilities on campus as well as the traditional power structures that benefit patriarchal norms and expectations, student affairs mothers often struggle to integrate their roles as a mother and a professional. Student affairs mothers could very well be occupying top leadership roles in student affairs; however, our study reveals they might be prevented from doing so because of lack of institutional and societal support, even as they bring unique mothering skills to bear in their work.

As a result, in order to be fully inclusive of student affairs parents in the workplace, institutions ought to closely examine their policies and practices and the ways in which they are accommodating (or not accommodating) mothers in their respective departments. While the field of student affairs prides itself in being inclusive, it is important to carry out such a value not only with students but with professionals as well. Institutions and the student affairs field should uplift the narratives of student affairs mothers to live up to standards of equity and inclusion.

The COVID-19 pandemic's work change revealed a silver lining by debunking long-held assumptions about the need to be face-to-face, work between certain hours of the day, and have no children around to do work. We hope that institutions can start incorporating more flexible hours and telecommuting options, moving intentionally towards a more inclusive student affairs profession post-COVID-19. Higher education has an opportunity to lead in re-imaging institutions as family-friendly. Younger generations value being an un-ideal worker – one who has a rich personal life that integrates rather than competes with their work (Howington, 2018). Higher education must prioritize how to make organizations both gender-inclusive and inclusive of myriad lifestyles to thrive post-COVID-19.

References

- Acker, J. (1990). Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: A theory of gendered organizations. *Gender & society*, 4(2), 139–158. <https://doi.org/10.1177/089124390004002002>
- Acker, J. (2006). Inequality regimes: Gender, class, and race in organizations. *Gender and Society*, 20(4), 441–464. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243206289499>
- ACPA—College Student Educators International, & NASPA—Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education. (2015). *Professional competency areas for student affairs educators*. Washington, DC: Authors.
- Anderson, J. E. (1998). *A comparison of female and male senior student affairs officers' job satisfaction, life satisfaction, and inter-role conflict* (UMI Publishing No. 9839532) [Doctoral dissertation, University of Northern Colorado]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database.
- Bailey, K. J. (2011). *Women in student affairs: Navigating the roles of mother and administrator* (Publishing No. 926212425) [Doctoral dissertation, Texas A&M University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.
- Blackhurst, A., Brandt, J., & Kalinowski, J. (1998). Effects of personal and work-related attributes on the organizational commitment and life satisfaction of student affairs women administrators. *NASPA Journal*, 35(2), 86–89. <https://doi.org/10.2202/1949-6605.1045>
- Budig, M. J., & England, P. (2001). The wage penalty for motherhood. *American Sociological Review*, 66, 204–225. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2657415>
- Collins, C. (2019). *Making motherhood work: How women manage careers and caregiving*. Princeton University Press.

Correll, S. J., Benard, S., & Paik, I. (2007). Getting a job: Is there a motherhood penalty?

American Journal of Sociology, 112, 1297–1338. <https://doi.org/10.1086/511799>

Culpepper, D., Lennartz, C., O’Meara, K. & Kuvaeva, A. (2020) Who gets to have a life?

Agency in work-life balance for single faculty. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 53(4), 531–550. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2020.1791280>

Doyle, J.A. (2004). Where have we come from and where are we going? A review of past student affairs philosophies and an analysis of the current student learning philosophy.

The College Student Affairs Journal, 24(1), 66–83.

Duffy, J. (2010). How women impacted the historical development of student affairs. *The*

College Student Affairs Journal, 28(2), 235–250.

Fochtman, M. M. (2010). *Mid-career women student affairs administrators with young children:*

Negotiating life, like clockwork (Publishing No. 3435229) [Doctoral dissertation, Michigan State University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

Hays, D. G., & Singh, A. A. (2011). *Qualitative inquiry in clinical and educational settings*.

Guilford.

Hebreard, D. (2010). *Opt out: Women with children leaving mid-level student affairs positions*

(Publishing No. 503240291) [Doctoral dissertation, Western Michigan University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

Howington, J. (2018). Survey explores varying attitudes of millennials and older workers about

key workplace issues. *FlexJobs*. <https://www.flexjobs.com/blog/post/survey-finds-varying-attitudes-millennials-older-workers-about-key-workplace-issues>

Isdell, L. & Wolf-Wendell, L. (2021). How the structure and demands of student affairs reflect

ideal worker norms and influence work-life integration. In M. W. Sallee (Ed.), *Creating*

sustainable careers in student affairs: What ideal worker norms get wrong and how to make it right (pp. 15–33). Stylus.

Jo, V. H. (2008). Voluntary turnover and women administrators in higher education. *Higher Education*, 56(5), 565–582. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-008-9111-y>

Lehman, J., & Krebs, S. R. (2018). My father works with carpet, my mother works with emotion: Understanding the lived experiences of children of student affairs professionals. *NASPA Journal About Women in Higher Education*, 11(3), 284–296. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19407882.2018.1425145>

Levtov, A. (2001). Family-friendly? Challenging choices for women in the student affairs field. *The Vermont Connection*, 22, 25–36. <https://scholarworks.uvm.edu/tvs/vol22/iss1>

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage.

Marshall, M. R. & Jones, C. H. (1990). Childbearing sequence and the career development of women administrators in higher education. *Journal of College Student Development*, 31, 531–537.

Marshall, S. M. (2002). *Women higher education administrators with children: Negotiating personal and professional lives* (Publishing No. 3073936) [Doctoral dissertation, Loyola University Chicago]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

Marshall, S. M. (2009). Women higher education administrators with children: Negotiating personal and professional lives. *NASPA Journal about Women in Higher Education*, 2(1), 188–221. <https://doi.org/10.2202/1940-7890.1031>

Marshall, S. M. (2021). Work-life integration: Women administrators in student affairs and higher education managing work and family. In M. W. Sallee (Ed.), *Creating sustainable careers in student affairs: What ideal worker norms get wrong and how to make it right*

(pp. 277–296). Stylus.

Marshall, S. M., Gardner, M. M., Hughes, C., & Lowry, U. (2016). Attrition from student affairs: Perspectives from those who exited the profession. *Journal of Student Affairs Research & Practice*, 53(2), 146–159. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19496591.2016.1147359>

Marshall, M. R., & Jones, C. H. (1990). Childbearing sequence and the career development of women administrators in higher education. *Journal of College Student Development*, 31(6), 531–537.

Mason, M. A., Wolfinger, N. H., & Goulden, M. (2013). *Do babies matter? Gender and family in the ivory tower*. Rutgers University Press.

Maxwell, J. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (4th ed.). Sage.

Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. Jossey-Bass.

Merriam, S. B. (2009). Qualitative case study research. In *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (3rd ed., pp. 39–54). Jossey-Bass.

Neely, M. (2020). The portfolio ideal worker: Insecurity and inequality in the new economy. *Qualitative Sociology*, 43(2), 271–296. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-020-09444-1>

Nobbe, J., & Manning, S. (1997). Issues for women in student affairs with children. *NASPA Journal*, 34(2), 101–111. <https://doi.org/10.2202/1949-6605.1014>

Padulo, M. K. B. (2001). *The balancing act: Work environment issues for women with children in student affairs* (Publishing No. 3007296) [Doctoral dissertation, University of San Diego]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

Pal, P. R., & Jones, S. J. (2020). Effects of the culture and climate of doctoral-granting

institutions on the career aspirations of women midlevel student affairs professionals.

Journal of Women and Gender in Higher Education, 13(1), 16–36.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/26379112.2020.1730193>

Pritchard, A., & McChesney, J. (2018). *Focus on student affairs, 2018: Understanding key challenges using CUPA-HR data*. College and University Professional Association for Human Resources.

Saldaña, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (2nd ed.). Sage.

Sallee, M. W. (2014). *Faculty fathers: Toward a new ideal in the research university*. SUNY Press.

Sallee, M. W. (2019). Complicating gender norms: Straight versus gay and queer fathers in student affairs. *The Review of Higher Education*, 42(3), 1233-1256.

<https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2019.0035>

Sallee, M. W., Yates, A. S., & Venturiello, M. (2021). Fathers in student affairs: navigating a gendered organization. In M. W. Sallee (Ed.), *Creating sustainable careers in student affairs: What ideal worker norms get wrong and how to make it right* (pp. 257–276). Stylus.

Schreiber, P. J. (1998). Women’s career development patterns. In L. L. Bierma (Ed.), *Women’s career development across the lifespan: Insights and strategies for women, organizations, and adult educators* (pp. 5–14). *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 80. Jossey-Bass.

Snyder, K. F. (2011). A study of motherhood and perceived career satisfaction of women in student affairs (Publishing No. 3493141) [Doctoral dissertation, Bowling Green State University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

- Stake, R. E. (2008). Qualitative case studies. In N. K. Denzin, & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.), *Strategies of qualitative inquiry* (pp. 119–149). Sage.
- Supple, B. L. (2007). *“Life as a gyroscope”: Creating a grounded theory model for full-time working mothers in higher education administration and developing and maintaining a fulfilling balanced life* (Publishing No. 3283411). [Doctoral dissertation, University of Maryland, College Park]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019, April 18). *Employment characteristics of families summary*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Division of Labor Force Statistics. <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/famee.nr0.htm>
- Waldfogel, J. (1997). The effect of children on women’s wages. *American Sociological Review*, 62, 209–217. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2657300>
- Waltrip, L. H. (2012, January 1). *Voices from the field: Stories of women who chose to leave their careers as student affairs professionals* (Publishing No. 3569506) [Doctoral dissertation, University of Florida]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.
- Williams, J. C. (2004). Hitting the maternal wall. *Academe*, 90(6), 16–20.
http://repository.uchastings.edu/faculty_scholarship/120
- Ward, K., & Wolf-Wendel, L. (2004). Academic motherhood: Managing complex roles in research universities. *The Review of Higher Education*, 27(2), 233–257.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2003.0079>

Table 1

*Participant Demographics*⁸

<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
<i>Age</i>		
25-29	1	5
30-39	15	71
40-49	2	9.5
50+	1	5
Unknown	2	9.5
<i>Religion</i>		
Christian	7	33
Unknown	11	52
Ex-Catholic	1	5
Catholic	1	5
Agnostic	1	5
<i>Race</i>		
Black	1	5
Hispanic	4	19
White	13	62
Asian American	1	5
Multiracial	1	5
Biracial	1	5
<i>Number of Children</i>		
1	8	38
2	10	48
3	2	10
4	1	5
<i>Years in Student Affairs</i>		
>5	2	9.5
5-10	11	52
10-15	6	29
16+	2	9.5

⁸ None of the participants shared they were trans*.

Table 1 continued

<i>Supervisor of Full-Time Employees</i>		
Yes	9	43
No	12	57
<i>Relationship</i>		
Heterosexual	19	91
Queer	2	9
<i>Highest Degree Earned</i>		
Terminal Degree	4	19
Master’s Degree	14	67
Bachelor’s Degree	3	14

Table 2

Researcher Positionalities

Author	Gender	Race/ Ethnicity	Work Status	Work Experience	Education Level	Age	Children
1	Woman	White	Full-Time	Student Conduct, Residence Life	PhD	30-34	0
2	Woman	White	Full-Time	Faculty, K-12 Teaching	PhD	40-44	0
3	Woman	Latina	Full-Time	Student Success Initiatives, Enrollment Management, Orientation	PhD	30-34	3
4	Man	Latino	Part-Time	Admissions, Residence Life & Housing, Diversity and Community Engagement	PhD	30-34	2
5	Woman	Latina	Full-Time	Advising, Student Success	Masters	25-29	0
6	Woman	Multiracial/ Latina	Full-Time	Multicultural Affairs	Masters	30-34	2