Exploring the Research and Library Needs of Student-Parents

Rachel E. Scott and Brannen Varner

This paper presents the results of focus groups conducted with student-parents at the University of Memphis. The objective of this study was to explore the research services and library spaces student-parents need to thrive in higher education settings. The results identify several ways in which academic librarians can support student-parents' research needs and contribute directly to their academic success.

Introduction

A recent Institute for Women's Policy Research briefing paper highlighted many obstacles that student-parents must overcome: lower rates of persistence and attainment, more work and childcare demands than traditional students, higher unmet financial need despite higher rates of aid and loans, more debt, higher enrollment in for-profit settings, declining availability of on-campus childcare services, and gender inequities in STEM fields. Additionally, students from underrepresented populations are disproportionately likely to be parents, 78 percent of single-parent students are considered low income, and almost half are first-generation college students.[1] Despite ample evidence that this population requires additional research support to thrive in the postsecondary academic setting, their research needs have not been adequately studied within the existing literature. Title IX requires universities to support the academic success of student-parents (for example, by providing potential accommodation and special services during pregnancy); however, few academic libraries offer targeted support to this student population.[2] If both the need and mandate have been established, what can explain the lag in academic libraries' response to serving this population? Several examples of isolated services offered and spaces created to serve student-parents will be discussed in the literature review; to date, however, no study has been conducted to determine the overall research and library needs of the specific demographic. This study presents the results from focus groups conducted at University of Memphis in which student-parents were asked to share their experiences, perceptions, and preferences related to their own research and study practices.

Student-parents' success rates are disproportionately low. Nelson et al. report that 53.2 percent of non–student-parents attained their degrees within six years compared to 32.5 percent of student-parents.[3] Their academic success may be influenced by the "chilly climate"

or feelings of marginalization, isolation, and stigma that student-parents report.[4] Despite shared perceptions of the campus climate, one cannot generalize a single-parenting student experience. The situations of this group are incredibly diverse: some are full-time students and some take only one class at a time; some prefer the convenience of online classes and others want a classroom experience; some are classified as adult learners and others fit within a more traditional age range; many file for financial aid and some do not; and others enjoy strong social support and some pursue the degree against all odds. Regardless of their specific situation, student-parents deserve tailored library interventions to facilitate their academic success.

Not only is there perceived stigma surrounding parenting as a student, there are also layers of stigma surrounding the academic library as a place as well as a service. Despite valiant efforts, the academic library remains a silent study space in the minds of many. A recent listserv reply shared a library poster that reinforced the idea of children as distractions in the silent academic library: "No one is allowed to interfere with someone else's use of the library. Interference may include… Bringing children."[5] Additionally, academic libraries' outreach and engagement initiatives frequently target traditional students and, in doing so, may preclude the involvement of student-parents by design. In addition to stigma, levels of anxiety surrounding academic libraries affect how many students interact with spaces and services.[6] For student-parents who experience library anxiety, bringing in a child, no matter how quiet or well-behaved, may exacerbate that anxiety. This research aims to acknowledge and confront existing stigmas surrounding student-parents and academic libraries to explore best practices in facilitating student-parents' research and study needs. By acknowledging and exploring the research and library needs of this demographic, academic libraries position themselves to become an integral part of student-parents' academic success.

The purpose of the study at hand is to gather undergraduate and graduate student-parents' insight into their research needs so that academic librarians can work collaboratively to make appropriate decisions to support programs, policies, and services that will support student-parents' educational success. The authors' intention is to amplify the voices of student-parents and not to ascribe value judgements about the spaces, services, and programming academic libraries currently provide.

Literature Review

Relative to enrollment numbers for "nontraditional" students, statistics for the "traditional" college student continue to dwindle, even if programming and resources still cater to this population. In their National Center for Education Statistics report, Horn and Carrol identified three criteria for nontraditional undergraduates: "enrollment patterns, financial and family status, high school graduation status."[7] Those not enrolling full-time immediately upon high school graduation and those who did not receive a standard diploma are considered nontraditional; both of these numbers are growing. US Census data shows that the percentage of the population who completed high school or college degrees as adults, defined as 25 or older, has steadily climbed from 1940 to 2015.[8]

For the study at hand, Horn and Carrol's most important criterion is financial and family status, which they define accordingly: "Family responsibilities and financial constraints used to identify nontraditional students included having dependents other than a spouse, being a single parent, working full time while enrolled, or being financially independent from par-

ents."[9] University students with dependent children, many of whom also work full-time and may be financially independent, are the focus of this study. Horn and Carrol's designation of parents of dependent children as nontraditional undergraduate students signals that this demographic has particular needs that may have been overlooked as library services, spaces, and collections were developed and evolved.

In their study entitled "Improving Child Care Access to Promote Postsecondary Success Among Low-Income Parents," Miller, Gault, and Thorman report that parents of dependents make up nearly one-quarter of undergraduate students in the United States.[10] This large, and growing, population of students is certainly worthy of a growing scholarly literature. Estes highlights the voices of individual student-parents to explore how both parent and student identities change in the context of higher education.[11] Beeler recently used Astin's "College Impact Model" to consider how single mothers in higher education differ from Astin's "ideal-student."[12] Studies of student-parents in academic settings have indeed increased; nonetheless, these studies are conducted outside of academic libraries and seldom mention libraries as partners or collaborators in efforts to promote student success. For example, a collection of case studies on establishing a family-friendly campus all but ignores the academic library, mentioning only that pregnant and student-parents lose access to the library—among other resources—when they take a leave of absence.[13]

Keyes finds that few academic libraries provide welcoming policies and facilities to student-parents.[14] Barnes' 2016 study confirms that student-parents face "compromised access to the library [that] (1) poses a barrier to using library resources, (2) impedes access to services that facilitate and support study activities, (3) diminishes their ability to engagement (sic) with learning material, (4) obstructs their access to Librarian expertise, and (5) diminishes their study experience."[15] She recently followed up on this research to document how her library worked to change policy and make their study rooms family-friendly. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with two students, one of whom was a parent and one of whom was not, to "investigate any ideas, questions, concerns or recommendations about this change in who may now use the library study-rooms."[16] Carmen's 2018 literature meta-analysis provides examples of academic library services currently offered to student-parents but does not address students' participation in their development.[17]

Academic libraries that create space and services targeting student-parents report positive results. A family-friendly study room at Portland State University Library was created as a response to the "Presidential Task Force on Child Development and Family Support" and has served several repeat users.[18] Librarians at the University of Utah used survey data to demonstrate how their space for students with children contributes to the satisfaction of this student group.[19] Libraries at Edith Cowan University, Paine College, Southern Illinois University, and University of Colorado, Colorado Springs are among the increasing number of academic libraries to provide such spaces.[20] Edwards and Thornton published a case study on their outreach to university childcare center staff to promote library resources.[21] Although some librarians have demonstrated that they are eager to serve this demographic, no published study deeply explores the research and library space needs of student-parents.

Research Questions

This study seeks to understand the research needs of student-parents in a public university setting. Focus groups engaged current graduate and undergraduate student-parents at the

University of Memphis to gain insight into their experiences with, perceptions of, and preferences related to the research resources available to them. The authors identified the following research questions:

- What does it take for student-parents to complete their academic work?
- What campus research resources do student-parents need to be successful and which are missing?
- To what extent do student-parents feel that their children are welcome in the library?
- How can the library support student-parents' success as both a parent and a student?
- What services/resources would encourage student-parents to visit/use the library?

Methods

The University of Memphis is an urban public research university with a fall 2018 total enrollment of 21,521 and a Carnegie classification of Doctoral Universities: Higher Research Activity. According to 2018 self-reported data, the University of Memphis serves approximately 2,194 student-parents, or approximately 10 percent of the total fall 2018 student enrollment. This self-reported data is slightly lower than the 13.1 percent reported for undergraduates at four-year institutions and considerably lower than the 29.2 percent reported for community college students by Miller, Gault, and Thorman.[22]

Determining the needs of student-parents may present a challenge to academic librarians, who may not be entrusted or otherwise acquainted with the particular challenges student-parents face. The authors selected focus groups as the method of data collection for this study, because qualitative methods have been used successfully to delve into the academic experience of student-parents. Brown and Nichols interviewed pregnant and/or parenting university students to reframe their policy and programmatic needs through the lens of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital.[23] McAfee's narrative study of women pursuing degrees in higher education who identify as single heads of households identifies challenges pursuant to the competing responsibilities of caregiver, provider, and student.[24] Yakaboski conducted focus groups with single-parent students to explore the undergraduate experience from their perspective.[25] By allowing for the observation and influence of participant interaction, focus groups can provide more dynamic and nuanced insights than might be gleaned from other methodologies. Krueger and Casey identify potential uses of focus groups as helping "with decision making; [guiding] program, policy, or service development; [capturing] insights on user behavior; [providing] insight on organizational concerns."[26]

The authors met with a qualitative methods specialist in the College of Counseling, Educational Psychology & Research twice during the 2018 summer semester to plan the focus groups. The size and frequency of the focus group sessions, questions and prompts employed, recruitment of participants, and logistics of providing on-site childcare had to be determined in advance. Ritchie et al. indicate that focus groups typically involve six to eight participants but vary depending on the issue at hand, the population involved, and the data needs of the researcher, among other considerations.[27] The research group planned to hold four focus groups in September and invite 10 to 12 students to each. Because the University of Memphis is a commuter campus, student participation rates can be low and the authors wanted to ensure sufficient participation in each focus group.

The most important planning task was to develop questions that would facilitate student-parents' exploration of their learning and research needs, from ideal days and times for in-

struction sessions and programming to auxiliary services of interest (tutoring, advising) in an attempt to answer the following question: "How can the library assist you in your pursuit of academic success?" These questions are available in appendix A. The University of Memphis Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the study as exempt upon reviewing all recruitment materials and instruments.

The authors created a recruitment survey (see appendix B), requesting interested students to identify their academic status, ages of children, and general availability during the week and blind-copy emailed all student-parents a link to the survey. Student-parents were identified based on students' FAFSA identification of having dependent child(ren). The survey received a total of 260 submissions with varying levels of completion. Submissions with incomplete information were removed, and the completed submissions were organized by status of student (graduate or undergraduate), age of children (0–5, 5–18), and general availability (Monday/Wednesday or Tuesday/Thursday). Targeted focus groups were formed based on the number of submissions by student status and child age: one for graduate students with children of any age, two for undergraduates with younger children, and one for undergraduates with older children.

Between September 10 and September 13, 2018, the qualitative methods specialist facilitated four focus groups with 18 total students at the University of Memphis. Each focus group session began with introductions: name, age(s) of child(ren), and identified major or area of study. The authors attended all sessions, introduced the project, took notes, and participated as needed. Each focus group convened for a total of one hour in an enclosed space within the library. Holding the focus groups in the library allowed participants to be present within the space and heightened their awareness to the opportunities and challenges of the space. The researchers organized child care through the university's Child Development Center for the evening focus group sessions; the child care was provided within visual distance of the focus group session space, which provided parents with proximity to their child(ren). The focus group interviews were recorded with two digital audiorecorders. Focus group participants signed an IRB-approved consent form indicating their participation to be voluntary and approving the use of audiorecording. Packaged snacks and beverages were available in the focus group session, and participants received a $30 Target gift card for their participation.

To promote validity of these methods and the resultant findings and recommendations, the authors intentionally incorporated several of Creswell and Miller's recommendations for qualitative data.[28] "Thick, rich description" is established by including detailed responses and quotations in the results section.[29] By inviting focus group participants to read and answer questions about both the accuracy and completeness of the manuscript draft, the authors established participant "collaboration" and "member checking."[30] "Peer debriefing" occurred throughout the writing and revision process as the authors' colleagues asked "hard questions about methods and interpretations."[31] The authors then folded participant and peer feedback back into the manuscript.

Results and Discussion

A voluntary post–focus group demographic survey highlights participants' diversity (see appendix C). All 18 participants were women; three identified as Hispanic or Latinx, six identified as white, and nine identified as African-American. The majority of participants identified as heterosexual (67%), with some identifying as bisexual (22%) or other (11%). Sixty-seven

percent of participants identified as married, 22 percent identified as single, and 11 percent identified as in a relationship. Participants reported a variety of employment status, with 44 percent working part-time, 22 percent full-time, 22 percent not currently working for pay, and 11 percent working other. Additional information was gathered at the beginning of focus groups, where students introduced themselves by sharing the ages of their children and their academic program or major, with students representing Arts & Sciences, Business, Education, Engineering, Nursing, and University College. The following sections present the authors' identification of the themes and patterns that surfaced across all focus groups. The authors employed what Hsieh and Shannon define as summative content analysis, which relies on "identifying and quantifying certain words or content … with the purpose of understanding the contextual use of the words or content."[32] The goal of this analysis is to leverage student-parents' words and responses to quantify and contextualize their research perceptions and preferences.

RQ1: What does it take for student-parents to complete their academic work?
Academic Work/Life Balance: "You forget about you."
Students were asked to describe what it takes for them to complete their academic work. As needed, they were prompted to describe the perfect scenario: "Where are you, what time is it, what resources do you have access to?" One of the major themes that developed throughout all focus groups was the participants' desire to be a role model. Students clearly indicated that they wanted to make their children proud and inspire them to pursue their own dreams. Specifically, they wanted their children to appreciate the importance of completing a higher education degree. Unfortunately, this desire to serve as a role model was frequently accompanied by what participants characterized as deprivation and neglect. Most participants commented that "something gets neglected" in their attempts to raise children and succeed as students. Several explicitly mentioned sleep deprivation and some acknowledged their fear that both children and schoolwork were at times neglected.

Time and scheduling concerns were another theme under the question of work/life balance. Most participants mentioned attending to their schoolwork late at night or early in the morning and planning their time extensively. Students identified several strategies for coping with busy schedules; some set detailed personal schedules, many used time on campus for study, some dedicated their children's naptime or postbedtime to their own study. However, some indicated that without "a 48-hour day," some responsibilities would necessarily be neglected. Two persistent challenges identified were syncing their own schedule with that of their children's childcare and the challenge of studying in their homes.

Participants agreed that they were most successful when they completed their work ahead of the class schedule and stayed on top of readings and assignments. One student indicated that she works two to three days ahead of schedule to allow for changes and surprises in her personal life. One student responded that if she were to get behind, she might not pull an all-nighter the same way a student without children might. Scheduling was confirmed to be critical, down to scheduling meals, sleep, chores, and children's homework. This explicit and detailed scheduling of research and studying was a common theme among all focus groups.

Both paid and unpaid labor were important themes in each focus group. Within the home, many participants felt significant pressure and time constraints surrounding housework. Related to the need for scheduling, one participant stated the essential need to prepare meals, laundry,

and cleaning ahead of time to prepare for the ensuing week. One participant stated that meal delivery has freed up some of her time for schoolwork. Few participants were forthcoming with examples from their paid work. One participant mentioned that, as a night nurse, she can occasionally squeeze in some schoolwork at work. Two participants indicated that they rarely find time to accomplish schoolwork at their paid jobs. Interestingly, one participant noted that the only schoolwork done in her home is her children's; the after-care program her children attend strongly suggests that homework be done at home and that the focus of after-care is play.

Another major thematic area was the distribution of labor within their families. Some participants offered that family members, especially their mothers, watch their children regularly so that they can attend to academic work. Many participants said that their families offer emotional support but not necessarily material support. Several limitations on the extent and variety of support were recounted: "My husband helps, but I'm the one getting the kids ready in morning and evening," "Even if dad can help….they want mom," and "My husband works from home and helps out a lot, but I still have to find childcare." Once again, the idea of making their children proud appeared as the participants shared how their families had worked to prioritize their academic success. One participant mentioned an exceptional sacrifice: her child offered not to participate in extracurricular activities for one year so she could focus on completing her graduate degree.

All participants in the focus groups used some form of childcare, whether daily or infrequent, paid or unpaid. The frequency of the topic demonstrates how essential it is to their work/life balance. A common theme was the need for better and more extensive childcare on campus. Some participants indicated that they had had to take kids to class with them because of unreliable childcare, some pay additional charges for before- and after-care so they have a bit more study time, and some have family members watch their children but miss class when the family member cannot make the engagement. One participant said that she takes her three children everywhere, noting the cost savings as well as the need to acclimate them to various settings. One participant with no family in the area noted that she had to rely on another parenting student to help watch her child during an evening class. Another participant was disappointed that childcare issues prevented her from participating in student leadership, and several echoed that they would gladly participate more actively if affordable, reliable, and high-quality childcare were not such an obstacle. Participants expressed interest in less-conventional models of daycare, such as a daycare co-op.

Another inevitable theme was the financial component of their education. Several participants reported stress and frustration related to their student loans. Many participants noted the reality of accounting for childcare in the financial aid process. One participant was reluctant to take classes full-time but needed to do so to take out sufficient loans to afford childcare. At the end of one focus group, a participant inquired after campus resources for free healthy food for her family; the financial stress of being a parenting student was evident. The University of Memphis is a commuter school, and it is no surprise that participants' commute time was mentioned as a hindrance to work/life balance. Several participants pointed out that class attendance was not the only time invested in their academic performance; the commute, parking, and navigating to classes are perceived as wasted time. Many participants indicated that they had a 30-minute drive to campus.

Student-parents had mixed responses to the appeal of online versus in-person classes. Several participants indicated that they choose online courses when available because of their

convenience and flexibility. One participant had been taking evening classes but switched to online because evening childcare arrangements posed challenges. Many participants also noted challenges presented by online courses. One participant suggested that online courses do not account for the amount of time it takes to learn and process the coursework. Another indicated Learning Management System (LMS) challenges and a lack of technical support to learn the LMS. One student voiced a complaint common to participants: "I hate online; I need interaction and the ability to meet and talk it out." Several indicated that the accountability of in-person classes is helpful but that online is more convenient. Many participants chose to prioritize the needs of their family over their personal preference for face-to-face classes.

As previously mentioned, participants identified finding an ideal situation in which to complete academic work as a challenge. The location should be both outside their home and their paid job; participants expressed regret that they cannot study at home or at work because of all the distractions. One participant noted: "I have to leave the house to get things done. I go to Health Sciences Library or another library." Many participants noted that they do as much as possible on campus, and some schedule additional time on campus, either between or before/after classes, to get ahead on assignments. A few mentioned specific campus spaces such as computer labs in specific department buildings or library study rooms. Participants who take exclusively online classes expressed the challenge of forcing themselves to find a place to "go to class."

Participants noted a less concrete component of creating the ideal working environment, namely the need to ensure the safety and contentment of their child. Related to completing their academic work when children are napping or sleeping, student-parents mentioned that, before they could do schoolwork, they need to be sure that their children are taken care of. Some participants mentioned that they can only do their research when their children are entertained or sufficiently engaged. A parent of older children indicated that she takes evening classes and studies when they are at school. One participant noted: "I read [for class] on my phone when they are in band practice." The bottom line for these participants seemed to be that one cannot focus on anything when worried about one's child.

RQ2: What campus research resources do student-parents need to be successful and which are missing?

Campus Context: "I've definitely felt like I've had to keep my family life and my school life completely separate… to the point where [my child] asks, 'Where do you go all day?'"

Participants were asked to consider the broader campus context and reflect on the resources that had contributed to their academic success and to identify what was missing. The most prominent theme in the responses to this question was the stigma around being a parenting student on campus. Participant responses to stigma were categorized according to university employee training, campus policies, campus culture, and campus experiences. Responses to the question of what is missing are organized first into currently existing resources and then those to be added.

Participants noted the need for training of various campus employees on providing an understanding space for student-parents, just as Safe Zone training exists for allies of LGBTIQ+ students and Green Zone training exists for allies of veterans, current service members, and their families. Specific training is needed to help the broader campus community understand

the needs of and support student-parents. Participant responses focused on instructors and expressed great frustration with their perceived lack of understanding and concern. Several participants noted that both online and in-person instructors are not sympathetic to their responsibilities and challenges. As one student noted, "When my child is sick, I am penalized. If I tell you my child is sick, believe me." One participant noted that she had given up on reaching out to instructors because she did not see evidence that they cared why she could not attend class. One participant had taken her children to class when their childcare fell through to show the professor how deeply invested she was. Participants want university personnel—and especially those teaching their courses—to understand that they do not have the luxury of "just doing school." They are working hard to balance several crucially important things.

Participants also identified several campus policies that contribute to stigma surrounding parenting as a student. Most participants noted that the campus childcare currently provides no infant care, serving only children 30 months or older, and has other limitations that make it less useful for many participants. Several participants noted a policy forbidding children in the university's main computer lab; one of these students expressed profound embarrassment after she and her child were asked to leave. Some participants noted that course-required group work presented challenges because children are explicitly forbidden from some campus spaces. Some participants who had children with special needs pointed out the opportunity to create policies that prioritized children of current students in existing campus research programs for special-needs children. One participant suggested allowing, by policy, the doctor's note for their child's sickness to count for their class absence.

The need for a broad cultural change institutionally was noted by many, and several participants expressed relief that the University of Memphis had earlier that week surveyed student-parents about their experiences. One participant noted that the University of Memphis has many nontraditional students: they are not the exception to the rule. Several participants expressed feelings of isolation and were grateful for the opportunity in the focus group to meet with other student-parents with whom they could share the experience. Several participants noted ways in which their classroom relationships were strained relative to more traditionally aged peers. For example, several had had experiences such as being older than the instructor, receiving unwanted attention while pregnant, performing emotional labor to make other students comfortable, coordinating group work with childcare, coming out as the only single mother in their program, feeling out of place and excluded in the classroom and casual conversations, and being unable to relate to peers without similar responsibilities and demands on their time. One participant indicated that she felt so out of place in the classroom, she became an online-only student. Another participant indicated that nobody would talk to her or even sit next to her in class when she was pregnant.

These feelings pressured some participants to draw distinct boundaries between their children and their academic lives. Two students mentioned their fear, as pregnant students, of going into labor while in class and the challenges of attempting to plan coursework around labor. One participant indicated that she is not necessarily forthcoming in discussing parenting with her classmates: "I don't hide it; but I don't offer unless someone asked." Participants recounted stories related to their experience as a parenting or pregnant student on campus that ranged from absurd to offensive. For example, while walking across campus with her two children to participate in the focus group, a male student accosted one participant and, referring to her child, said: "I want one of those, I got one in my nuts!" (The participant used

the situation as a "stranger danger" learning moment for her children.) The stigma, according to one participant, was as apparent as a "scarlet letter."

On the other hand, some participants expressed pride in showing off their campus to their family. One first-generation college student indicated that she was proud to bring her children and nieces and nephews on campus. She shared that the university needs to "view young children as the future of University of Memphis; it is mutually beneficial." Nonetheless, the feelings of guilt and stigma are pervasive. One participant noted a strong need for a place on campus to bring her children and not feel guilty.

Many participants commented on the lack of perceived resources available to student-parents. As one participant quipped when the question was posed about campus resources that have contributed to their academic success, "What campus resources?" Resources identified by participants included the Commuter Services space in the student union building, the computer lab in the business building, the public elementary school on campus, to which staff and faculty have priority registration, and the newly added lactation suites. The campus childcare center, again, was a topic of much frustration. Participants identified the following limitations: one room; crowded; inadequate; kids play, they don't learn; it doesn't work for family needs; children were not welcomed; information about their services were not readily available; it is not intended as a full-time center; it is not intended as a drop-in center; the 30-month age requirement is a problem; and infant care is needed.

Some participants noted that they do not necessarily want to have their children on campus during class or while they are researching. However, they noted that having resources on campus would relieve some of the stress, during breaks and finals especially. Participants offered several ideas for campuswide services or resources, including the following suggestions:

- study, support, and social groups for mothers of young children or pregnant moms;
- free child-friendly social and cultural events;
- free tutoring for children;
- study spaces and computer labs specifically for families;
- play spaces for children;
- "mommy and me" homework sessions;
- infant care;
- crosswalks to ensure traffic safety;
- financial aid help for parents;
- special needs services;
- expanded courses at branch locations;
- more evening classes.

Participants noted that University of Memphis students in a variety of disciplines need internship or practicum credit, and family-friendly programming could make use of such campuswide talent.

RQ3: To what extent do student-parents feel that their children are welcome in the library?

Perceptions of Library: "I never thought children would be welcome."

Students were asked to share their perceptions of the main library's physical spaces, focusing on how/if they are welcoming for their own children. Participants indicated that the library as it currently exists feels off-limits. They offered a variety of reasons, ranging from expectations

of quiet to the absence of designated family-friendly spaces and resources. When asked what it would take for student-parents to be comfortable bringing in their family, one participant said that they would need "some kind of insurance that I wouldn't be shamed or embarrassed for kids being kids." When considering why and how the library was not currently family-friendly, several participants noted how making it family-friendly would be beneficial: "Being able to bring in my children would help foster children's interest in University of Memphis and in going to college."

Most participants replied with comments about the expectations of quiet in the library, both their own and those of others. Many stated that they felt like they needed to be quiet when they walked in and some had told their children that libraries are quiet places as they walked in for the focus group. Some referred to the fear of bringing active, talkative, curious, and/or volatile children into a quiet library: "I would be terrified; babies can be smiling and laughing one minute and screaming the next." One participant noted that, when she had previously brought her child to the library, she felt self-conscious because "he was loud and wanted to touch everything." Another participant worried that having children in the library might be a distraction for other students. One participant joked that students do not want to see a child walk into the library; a few participants used the word "sneak" to characterize their behavior when bringing their children with them into the library.

Participants agreed that the entire library need not be made child-friendly but did offer several ideas for making the space more welcoming and inclusive to families. Several participants conveyed that the goal should not be to make the library a playground but to have spaces that promote that learning is fun. One participant noted that "children can experience the library as a learning place and not a play place." Several noted the need for an enclosed space so that children could move around and touch things without becoming a distraction to library users. When considering what an appropriate space might look like, several participants referred to local public libraries—noting, for example, designated spaces for children with child-sized tables; colorful decor; an aquarium; and developmentally appropriate toys, books, and games. One participant, when imagining how her child might respond to a visit, shared that the child "would want to come in and read, and ask me questions [about the books] and be engaged…she would be able to have a library experience as well."

Participants shared several recommendations on how to communicate to student-parents that the library is a welcoming space. Some noted that a crosswalk from the library to the parking lot would enhance safety outside the building. Within the building, the priority is a family study room, preferably a group study room that enables children to learn to socialize and communicate and provides student-parents an opportunity to connect with other student-parents. Multiple individual study rooms—simply an enclosed area in which children can be safely contained while their parents are working—were also requested. These spaces would ideally have the following provisions: some level of soundproofing; a location on the ground floor to facilitate accessibility; a changing table and/or family bathroom nearby; a desktop computer with printer in room; access to a microwave and fridge to facilitate bottle and food preparation.

Children-specific ideas for these spaces were more varied; for example: a child's computer with restricted access; flashcards with sight words; learning materials for kids organized by learning years; age-appropriate games; children's toys; beanbag chairs; media attraction of some kind that would make the library a destination for the children. Participants offered dif-

ferent ideas about access to these spaces: for example, accessing the space(s) through online reservation or student identification card swipe, and proximity to their children in these spaces, with one noting that video monitoring of the children's space for parents working on other floors would be desirable, and others requiring no separation from child. The overwhelming need was for a designated space to which student-parents could bring their children with the confidence that the entire family would be welcomed and educationally engaged.

RQ4: How can the library support student-parents' success as both a parent and a student?

Recommended Library/Study Services: "I do love instant messaging a librarian."

Students were asked how the library can holistically support their success as both a parent and a student. As a follow-up prompt, students were asked if they had ever used the library's virtual reference and what barriers to library use they encountered. Additionally, they were asked where they turn to for help when they are stuck in their research. The responses made it evident that they needed to be made aware of the existing library services relevant to them. Participants indicated that email is a great way to reach them, because it can be read at their convenience and convey a good amount of information. Participants recommended an email detailing the ways in which the library is children-friendly be sent out to student-parents. This email should emphasize family study rooms and list specific resources and spaces, such as research consultations with librarians, instant messaging service, text-to-speech functionality in databases, online tutorials, and help guides.

Other marketing ideas included setting up a table in the University Center to advertise library resources, extending an explicit invitation to the children of student-parents, and collaborating with instructors to spread the word about library resources for student-parents. Participants noted that their knowledge about the library comes from what they heard about from teaching faculty. An example of this limited knowledge about library services is seen in the library's long-standing chat reference service; only a few participants knew about the service, but those who had used it advocated for it to their peers.

According to participants, however, before beginning a marketing campaign, the library should make some substantial changes to better serve student-parents. Specific examples of services included:
- extending hours;
- open earlier in the mornings;
- coordinating hours and increasing programming to support student-parents during local K–12 school breaks;
- expanding family-friendly programming on weekends (which were deemed more convenient than weekday evenings);
- recording all workshops that take place in the library for exclusively online students;
- expand tutorial offerings to cover not only databases, but research basics;
- grant funding and scholarship searching;
- pull and hold physical items at desk for quick pickup;
- extending database search sessions to avoid timeout errors;
- enhancing text-to-speech offerings for students with long commutes to be able to listen to class readings when driving;
- offering virtual proofreading services.

   Participants heartily recommended services that would provide space to connect with their peers. Instead of a traditional "support group," they recommended: student-parent study groups; events offering homework help for both parent and child(ren); peer mentor assignments; first-time parent groups; resources for children of student-parents. Participants indicated that they could be best served by being welcomed into a group of peers who truly understand the challenges that they face as a parenting student.

RQ5: What services/resources would encourage student-parents to visit/use the library?

Recommended Programming: "I'd pay for it if it's worth it."

Students were asked to discuss library programming targeted toward student-parents, with follow-up prompts asking them to identify and discuss library or study services that would make them use the library. Participants communicated that the timing of programming was incredibly important. Their schedules are often set in advance and do not allow for much flexibility, especially on weekdays. Weeknights are especially hard for working student-parents, and most participants indicated that weekend programming was more convenient. Participants indicated that weekend programming should be family-friendly programming and that some events should be explicitly baby-friendly. Participants indicated a desire for opportunities to socialize—not among themselves, but by bringing their children together. Several indicated that this would make their children interested in going to the library with them. Participants were particularly interested in programming during school breaks, which can be a challenging time to coordinate childcare with their own classes and work. Participants noted that many of the ideas for library programming involved the skills and resources of other campus and community partners. They proposed that the library collaborate with: relevant campus units for tutoring (which recently implemented a 24/7 online tutoring service); early and K–12 education students (to oversee practicum and volunteer placements); student involvement (which is concomitantly expanding services to student-parents); and local public libraries (which have established programming for children of all ages).

   Programming ideas were categorized as either homework help, continuing and one-shot programs, and ongoing collaborations. Participants in each focus group identified homework help sessions as a major programming opportunity for student-parents and their children. In each group, participants highlighted the opportunity to collaborate with other academic units to secure excellent practicum participants who needed the experience engaging with children. Participants also discussed continuing programs available through public libraries and other regional institutions. The researchers were surprised to learn from graduate student participants that they would gladly pay for quality programming. Ideas for continuing programs included reading programs for children or families; summer or semester-long camps based on university disciplines; story times; and yoga for children. Participants pointed out that this kind of library programming would necessitate collaboration across campus, and the opportunity for revenue generation would be beneficial given the recent adoption of the University of Memphis's strategic resource investment (SRI) budget model. Participants also noted the positive learning and socialization processes of such extracurricular educational programs: one parent summed it up with a quip about her children being willing to listen to and learn from anyone else over her.

Participants offered several ideas for one-shot events, and the theme of being a positive role model for their children surfaced again as participants highlighted events focused on learning and academics. Several students identified the desire to teach their children something about their academic discipline via an event or programming based on majors. One example of this is engineering for kids, which would allow the library to contribute to existing "Engineering Day" programming. A participant indicated that the library could create packets themed around different majors/disciplines for those children who wanted to "study like mom!" One participant said that her son loves to look things up and indicated that the library could host an event where children could learn how to use age-appropriate learning tools to answer their questions. Another participant noted that hosting such child-friendly, themed/educational activities would help foster community among single moms or families. Many participants noted that the goal should not be to make the library a play place, but rather to allow their children to have an authentic library experience. Participants want their children to see their academic efforts and appreciate that honing research and literacy skills, whether by engaging in an age-appropriate game or by participating in a reading club, is a gift they are giving to their future.

Limitations
None of the focus group participants identified as men, which may limit the representativeness of the results. Nonetheless, if those student-parents who identify as women were more interested in participating in a focus group, these same women may be more likely to take advantage of library services and spaces tailored to student-parents. The identification as a parenting student may be something with which women were more comfortable.

Recommendations/Action Points
The recommendations identified in the four focus groups can be grouped into three main areas: space, programming, and services. Librarians looking to expand or create student-parent initiatives should seek to understand and take part in the broader campus direction for supporting student-parents and their children. Participating in campuswide student-parent committees and working collaboratively to conduct student-parent needs assessment through survey, focus group, or other appropriate methodology may help identify student-parents' specific needs. Identifying realistic, accomplishable initiatives is crucial; unrealized initiatives may be detrimental to garnering trust and establishing relationships. Prior to taking action, identify in what ways supporting student-parents' research and library needs will fit within the institution's overall vision, mission, and strategic plan. Library initiatives that serve student-parents and were developed according to local needs and resources will be welcomed in many academic settings.

Space
Librarians can identify existing spaces and also begin to consider the construction of new spaces. Recommendations for a space that is welcoming to student-parents include:
- An enclosed space
- A visible policy inviting children of student-parents
- Soundproofing/dampening
- Family-friendly restrooms with changing table

- Lactation area
- Food preparation and/or storage area
- Child-friendly furniture and toys
- Stroller accessibility and/or parking
- Desktop computing and printing for parents
- Games, toys, and other educational activities for children of a variety of ages
- Sufficient space for children to interact with and learn from one another

Programming

Some librarians may be able to develop programming independently, but focus group input focused on collaborations. Suggestions also highlighted that existing programming could be reimagined to better accommodate parent-students and their children. Recommended programming includes the following suggestions:

- social (support and affinity group meetings for student-parents and their children)
- administrative (student success, advising)
- academic support (tutoring, writing center)
- children's literacy (library as host)
- children's science, technology, engineering, arts, & mathematics, or STEAM (library as host)
- parallel events for both children and parent-students (research/homework help)
- paid events for libraries encouraged to generate revenue
- parallel events for student-parents and other nontraditional student populations

Service

Most libraries already offer services student-parents would seek out. By targeting student-parents in their marketing, libraries can better communicate their welcoming spaces and services, which may cause student-parents to be more likely to use the library. Recommended offerings include the following:

- targeted communication through newsletter, e-mails, podcasts
- accessible feedback channels for identifying additional needs
- integration of virtual reference into the university tutoring platform
- expanded online assistance resources (such as LibGuides and tutorials)
- onsite research help at the university's daycare facility

Conclusion

As the first study to investigate the research and library needs of student-parents in a university setting, the results from this study fill a gap in the literature about the research perceptions and preferences of student-parents and provide context surrounding the broader experience of student-parents in higher education. By convening targeted focus groups for graduate and undergraduate students and providing them space to discuss their experiences with, perceptions of, and preferences related to the research resources available to them, the authors gained insight into their expectations and needs. The authors' presentation of student responses to questions detailing what it takes for them to complete their academic work, what campus research resources they need to be successful, the level of comfort within the library environment, and the services or resources that would promote their success provide insight that may prove useful to other academic librarians.

Results indicate several challenges to the academic success of student-parents in higher education. This study confirms previously cited findings that student-parents face additional challenges to achieving balance among academic work and personal responsibilities; such challenges can prevent them from realizing their full academic potential. Study results also confirm the feelings of stigma and exclusion that student-parents experience on campus. Participants indicated that the lack of support, resources, programming, and social outlets tailored to them contribute directly to these perceptions. Of particular note to librarians, the findings indicate that the academic library still feels off-limits to student-parents and, especially, to their families. Librarians should strategically market relevant programs and services to students and collaborate broadly across campus to contribute to inclusive and family-friendly programs.

Student-parents deserve librarians' engaged support. This population routinely encounters stigma and isolation, considerable financial constraints, and significant demands on their time; all of these have consequences for their academic engagement and success. Academic libraries will vary in the support that they can reasonably offer to parent students; the uniqueness of each institutions' financial resources, staffing levels, physical spaces, administrative considerations, as well as the needs of enrolled student-parents mean that this cannot be one-size-fits-most. Instead of providing a monolithic solution, the authors have two goals: to amplify the voices of student-parents to a broad audience and to encourage academic libraries to collaborate strategically to promote the academic success of student-parents. Contributing to the matriculation, retention, and graduation of this stigmatized demographic will help establish the academic library as a welcoming and inclusive space for all students and will accordingly advance the role and profile of academic libraries within higher education.

APPENDIX A. Focus Group Questions

- What campus resources are missing that you need to be successful?
- Within physical spaces around campus/in the library, do you feel that your children are welcome? If so, why? If not, why not?
- Describe what it takes for you to complete academic work? What is the perfect scenario: where are you, what time is it, what resources do you have access to?
- What are some campus and/or community resources that have been helpful to you or contributed to your academic success?
- How can the library support your success as a parent and a student?
- What services/resources would make you visit/use the library as a parenting student?
- Have you ever used the library's chat or virtual reference service? What are your barriers to use?
- Would you attend programming targeted toward student-parents?
- When you're stuck in your research, where do you turn to for help? (YouTube? Professor? Library?)

APPENDIX B. Recruitment Survey

Welcome to the research study!

We are interested in understanding how the library can best support parenting students. A focus group will help us learn more about your particular research and learning needs as a parent-student. Please be assured that your responses will be kept completely confidential.

This survey should take you around 5 minutes to complete and confirms your suitability for the study. If you participate in a focus group, you will receive a $30 Target gift card for your participation. Your participation in this research is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any point during the study, for any reason, and without any prejudice. If you would like to contact the Principal Investigator in the study to discuss this research, please email Rachel Scott, rescott3@memphis.edu.

By clicking the button below, you acknowledge that your participation in the study is voluntary, you are 18 years of age, you are the parent of a dependent child, you are a UofM student, and you are aware that you may choose to terminate your participation in the study at any time and for any reason.

1. Which level of degree are you currently seeking at UofM?
    a. Bachelor's Degree
    b. Master's Degree
    c. Doctoral Degree
    d. None of the Above
2. How old is/are your child(ren)? Please list ages below:
3. Are you generally available to meet on Mondays and Wednesdays?
4. What times of the day are you usually available to meet on Mondays and Wednesdays? (Ctrl+click to select multiple choices.)
    a. 9am–12pm
    b. 12–3pm
    c. 3–6pm
    d. 6–8pm
5. Are you generally available to meet on Tuesdays and Thursdays?
6. What times of the day are you usually available to meet on Tuesdays and Thursdays? (Ctrl+click to select multiple choices.)
    a. 9am–12pm
    b. 12–3pm
    c. 3–6pm
    d. 6–8pm
7. Please provide your University of Memphis email so that we can contact you:
8. If selected, will you need childcare?
    a. Yes
    b. Maybe
    c. No

APPENDIX C. Optional Demographic Survey

1. Do you identify as:
   - ☐ African-American
   - ☐ Asian or Asian-American
   - ☐ Hispanic or Latinx
   - ☐ White
   - ☐ Other
   - ☐ Prefer not to answer

2. Do you consider yourself to be:
   - ☐ Bisexual
   - ☐ Heterosexual
   - ☐ Homosexual
   - ☐ Other
   - ☐ Prefer not to answer

3. Are you currently:
   - ☐ In relationship, but not married
   - ☐ Married
   - ☐ Single
   - ☐ Other
   - ☐ Prefer not to answer

4. How would you describe your current employment status:
   - ☐ Full-time
   - ☐ Part-time
   - ☐ Not currently working for pay
   - ☐ Other
   - ☐ Prefer not to answer

Notes

1. Bethany Nelson, Megan Froehner, and Barbara Gault, "College Students with Children Are Common and Face Many Challenges in Completing Higher Education," *Institute for Women's Policy Research Briefing Paper*, IWPR #C404 (March 2013): 1–7, https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED556715.pdf.

2. U.S. Department of Education, "Supporting the Academic Success of Pregnant and Parenting Students Under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972" (2013), http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/pregnancy.pdf.

3. Nelson, Forehner, Gault, "College Students with Children Are Common," 3.

4. Jillian M. Duquaine-Watson, "'Pretty Darned Cold': Single Mother Students and the Community College Climate in Post-Welfare Reform America," *Equity & Excellence in Education* 40, no. 3 (2007): 229–40; Virginia Brown and Tracy R. Nichols, "Pregnant and Student-Parents on Campus," *Educational Policy* 27, no. 3 (2013): 499–530, https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904812453995; Tamara Yakaboski, "Going at It Alone: Single-mother Undergraduate's Experiences," *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice* 47, no. 4 (2010): 463–74, https://doi.org/10.2202/1949-6605.6185.

5. Lori Mills, reply to the collib-l@lists.ala.org email list, "Library Posters and Displays: Looking for Ideas and How to Make Students Read/Follow Them" (July 5, 2018).

6. Constance A. Mellon, "Library Anxiety: A Grounded Theory and Its Development," *College & Research Libraries* 47, no. 2 (1986): 160–65, https://doi.org/10.5860/crl_47_02_160.

7. Laura J. Horn and C. Dennis Carroll, *Nontraditional Undergraduates: Trends in Enrollment from 1986 to 1992 and Persistence and Attainment among 1989-90 Beginning Postsecondary Students. Postsecondary Education Descriptive Analysis Reports. Statistical Analysis Report.* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, Superintendent of Documents, 1996): 15.

8. Camille L. Ryan and Kurt Bauman, "Educational Attainment in the United States: 2015 Population Characteristics," *Current Population Reports, US Census Bureau*, P20-578 (2016), https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED572028.pdf.

9. Horn and Carroll, *Nontraditional Undergraduates*, 15.

10. Kevin Miller, Barbara Gault, and Abby Thorman, *Improving Child Care Access to Promote Postsecondary Success Among Low-income Parents* (Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2011).

11. Danielle K. Estes, "Managing the Student-Parent Dilemma: Mothers and Fathers in Higher Education," *Symbolic Interaction* 34, no. 2 (2011): 198–219.

12. Sydney Beeler, "Undergraduate Single Mothers' Experiences in Postsecondary Education," *New Directions for Higher Education 176* (2016): 69–80, https://doi.org/10.1002/he.20210; Alexander W. Astin, "Student Involvement: A Developmental Theory for Higher Education," *Journal of College Student Personnel* 25, no. 4 (1984): 297–308; Alexander W. Astin, *What Matters in College: Four Critical Years Revisited* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass, 1993).

13. Margaret Sallee and Jaime Lester, *Establishing the Family-Friendly Campus: Models for Effective Practice*, 1st ed. (Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2009), 132.

14. Kelsey Keyes, "Welcoming Spaces: Supporting Student-Parents at the Academic Library," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 43 (2017): 319–28, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2017.06.001.

15. Joanne Barnes, "Student-Sole-Parents and the Academic Library," *New Zealand Library & Information Management Journal* 56, no. 1 (2016): 46–51.

16. Joanne Barnes, "Bring Your Children with You: A Case Study into Making the Tertiary Library Family Friendly," *New Zealand Library & Information Management Journal* 56, no. 2 (2017): 3–7.

17. Julie D. Carmen, "Nontraditional Service in Academic Libraries for Student-Parents," *Codex: Journal of the Louisiana Chapter of the ACRL* 4, no. 4 (2018): 6–28, http://journal.acrlla.org/index.php/codex/article/viewFile/140/285.

18. Joan Petit, "A Family-Friendly Study Room for Student-Parents and Their Children at Portland State University Library," *OLA Quarterly* 20, no. 1 (2014): 36–39, http://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/ulib_fac/154.

19. Ian Godfrey et al., "Supporting Student Retention and Success: Including Family Areas in an Academic Library," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 17, no. 2 (2017): 375–88, https://doi.org/10.1353/pla.2017.0023.

20. Jeff Murray, "Unaccompanied Minors in an Academic Library," *Incite* 28, no. 3 (2007): 10; Rhonda McCoy, "The Family Room, Collins-Callaway, Library and Learning Resource Center, Paine College," *Georgia Library Spotlight* (2013), https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/glq/vol50/iss4/5 ; "Family Friendly Study Room," Southern Illinois University, Morris Library, https://lib.siu.edu/facilities/family-friendly-room.php [accessed December 8, 2018]; "Group Study Rooms and Parent Child Room Policies," University of Colorado, Colorado Springs, Kraemer Family Library, https://www.uccs.edu/library/info/policies/studyrooms [accessed December 8, 2018].

21. Melissa Maxwell Edwards and Elaine Thornton, "Library Outreach: Introducing Campus Childcare Providers to the Academic Library," *Education Libraries* 36, no. 2 (2013): 4–16.

22. *Improving Child Care Access to Promote Postsecondary Success among Low-income Parents* (Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2011): 10, table 1.

23. Virginia Brown and Tracy R. Nichols, "Pregnant and Student-Parents on Campus," *Educational Policy* 27, no. 3 (2013): 499–530, https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904812453995.

24. Stacy Renee McAfee, *Single, Head of Household, Low-Income Women Pursuing a Higher Education Degree or Certificate: A Narrative Study* (EdD dissertation, Drexel University, 2015).

25. Tamara Yakaboski, "Going at It Alone: Single-Mother Undergraduate's Experiences," *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice* 47, no. 4 (2010): 463–74, https://doi.org/10.2202/1949-6605.6185.

26. Richard A. Krueger and Mary Anne Casey, "The Uses of Focus Groups," *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2015), chapter 5.

27. *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers*, eds. Jane Ritchie et al. (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE, 2013), 233–34.

28. John W. Creswell and Dana L. Miller, "Determining Validity in Qualitative Inquiry," *Theory into Practice* 39, no. 3 (2000): 124–30.

29. Creswell and Miller, "Determining Validity in Qualitative Inquiry," 128.

30. Creswell and Miller, "Determining Validity in Qualitative Inquiry," 127–28.

31. Quoted in Creswell and Miller, "Determining Validity in Qualitative Inquiry," 129.

32. Hsiu-Fang Hsieh and Sarah E. Shannon, "Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis," *Qualitative Health Research* 15, no. 9 (2005): 1283, http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1049732305276687.