

When Paid Work Invades the Family: Single Mothers in the COVID-19 Pandemic

Journal of Family Issues

1–27

© The Author(s) 2020

Article reuse guidelines:

sagepub.com/journals-permissions

DOI: 10.1177/0192513X20961420

journals.sagepub.com/home/jfi

Rosanna Hertz¹ , Jane Mattes²,
and Alexandria Shook³

Abstract

The Novel COVID-19 pandemic has dissolved the spatial distinction between production/workplace and reproduction/home. With essential services like childcare and public schools either shut down or dramatically curtailed, families have been stretched to the breaking point. Nowhere is the stress greater than among single mothers. This paper presents the results of a survey of single mothers who live alone with their children and single mothers who live in multi-adult households. We focus on three questions relevant to the situation faced by single mothers: (a) Does the experience of having created a support network prior to becoming a single mother mitigate the impact of the pandemic on single mothers? (b) Will the weight of daycare for preschool and school age children lead single mothers to look for new ways to organize their households? (c) More generally, will the antagonism between production and reproduction be altered as a result of the pandemic?

¹Departments of Sociology and Women's and Gender Studies, Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA, USA

²Single Mother by Choice Organization, New York, NY, USA

³Yale University, School of Management, New Haven, CT, USA

Corresponding Author:

Rosanna Hertz, Departments of Sociology and Women's and Gender Studies, Wellesley College, Wellesley 106 Central Street, Wellesley, MA 02481, USA.

Email: rhertz@wellesley.edu

Keywords

Single parents, work & family, COVID-19, household living arrangements, family processes

Over four decades ago, Heidi Hartmann (1979, p. 13) argued that institutions like gender and family could not (and should not) be understood independent of their embeddedness in the core structures of capitalism. In her words:

Economic production (what marxists are used to referring to as the mode of production) and the production of people in the sex/gender sphere both determine "the social organization under which the people of a particular historical epoch and a particular country live", according to Engels. The whole of society, then, can only be understood by looking at both these types of *production and reproduction*, people and things. (emphasis added)

In other words, production (in the workplace) and reproduction (at home, in the family) may be structurally and even spatially distinct from one another, but both are linked by virtue of their essentialness to capitalism. As Hartley (2017) put it recently: "We use our wages, for which we sell our labor-power, to buy food and clothes, to pay the bills for the homes in which we cook the food, do the dishes, and care for ourselves and our families."

Researchers have applied Hartmann's argument to include parallel systems of inequality. Briggs (2018), for example, argues that the ability of contemporary middle class women to pursue paid employment is predicated on the outsourcing of childcare and other reproductive labor to lower-wage women from another social class, racial group, or citizenship status.¹ And, Perry-Jenkins and Gerstel (2020) suggest in their decade review that the expansion of employer policies of flex- and part-time work does little to resolve the tension between production and reproduction—at least as it is experienced by working families (see Blair-Ioy, 2003; Moen, Fan, & Kelly, 2013; Williams et al., 2013). This is all to say that reproduction and production have a complex relationship that affects women of all intersectionalities in capitalist societies.

Recent history—most particularly the COVID-19 pandemic—raises the question as to whether the sphere of reproduction is infinitely elastic when it comes to reacting to the demands of production. That is, the COVID-19 pandemic has dissolved the spatial distinction between production/workplace and reproduction/home. With so many people forced to conduct paid work from home—and with so many social services like childcare and public schools that are essential to people's ability to work shut down—the

pandemic has stretched family to a breaking point. Moreover, fears about the communicability of the virus have forced many families to shut the door to outsiders—including aging parents and relatives—in order to accommodate the simultaneous demands of employment and family, even further complicating the relationship between production and reproduction.

Nowhere is this situation likely to be more intense than in single solo parent households. Even in “normal” times, single parents, and particularly single mothers², struggle to find time to earn a living (much less to make investments in skills that might qualify them for promotion), to care for themselves and their children, and to be active social beings (Christopher, 2012). Under a pandemic regime, it would be logical to expect all parents to be stressed, but single mothers more than any other category, as they must single-handedly work for pay in the odd hours when children are otherwise occupied, develop and/or interpret and then execute lesson plans for their children, and find ways to support relatives and friends who may be in even more challenging straits than themselves.

Research on single mothers has shown them to be remarkably resourceful when it comes to managing the antagonism between production and reproduction (Jones, 2008). One of the distinguishing characteristics of single-adult households has been the way they create and sustain supportive networks of resources. Hertz and Ferguson (1998) termed these “strategic villages” because they operate outside traditional markets and rely on bartering, reciprocity and family-based generosity. Each single mother’s village is essential to her ability to parent and be employed; indeed, it might be argued that her claim to having a so-called normal family is predicated on her ability to mobilize others so she can earn a living (Hertz, 1999; Hertz et al., 2016; Van Gusse and Mortelmans 2020). Single women are as successful as they are in juggling the tense dichotomies of paid work and family because of their ability to mobilize others and divide the sphere of reproduction and production. Moreover, the use of a division between home space and work space has been critical to single women’s cultural construction of motherhood as *not* being in opposition to a job or career (Collier et al. 1982, p. 34).

Three questions demand attention when it comes to the situation created by the novel COVID-19 pandemic faced by single mothers. First, does the experience of having created a strategic village mitigate the impact of the pandemic on single mothers’ ability to be employed? Second, will the weight of daycare for preschool- and school-age children lead single mothers to look for new ways to organize their households? Third, and more generally, will the antagonism between production and reproduction be altered as a result of the pandemic? To answer these questions, we need data that compares how

women's households and networks operated before and after the onset of the pandemic.

This paper reports findings from a survey of single mothers carried out in June 2020, eight weeks after the first "wave" of the pandemic hit North America. The survey was designed to highlight pre- and post-COVID-19 strategies for accomplishing core family tasks and for coping with changing societal conditions and government regulations. In addition to asking respondents to describe their actions, we asked if and how their roles were changing and how sustainable they felt their adaptations were likely to be. After reviewing the key findings, we consider the implications for paid work and family policy for the post-COVID-19 era.

Context

Middle class/professional class women who became single mothers did so with two fundamental assumptions in mind: that they would continue to be employed after giving birth or adopting and that someone—an individual or an organization—would care for their children while they were in the workplace (see Hertz, 2006, Hertz et al., 2016). Sometimes, as in the case of women in top-tier professional roles, the goal was to fulfill personal ambitions; with the expectation that earning a high income would make it possible to purchase childcare.³ In most instances, economic necessity drove single women to accumulate a financial cushion in savings that would offset the initial costs of having a child alone (Hertz, 1999; Hertz & Ferguson, 1998) and then to organize a network of "others" that would allow them to work while raising children (Bock, 2000; Hertz, 2020; Hertz & Ferguson, 1998; Jociles et al., 2012; Jones 2008). Afterward, the decision to parent without a partner also included a strategy for whether they would continue to live in single-adult households or pursue a multi-adult living arrangements. This latter move could include moving in with parents or other relatives or taking on roommates who could share expenses as well as provide childcare.

Available research on the effects of the pandemic on dual-earner families suggests that there has been little change in the division of labor between men and women (Carlson et al., 2020; Manzo & Minello, 2020). To wit: women continue to do the bulk of reproductive labor and the principle shifts have involved wives curtailing their paid labor hours to accommodate men's employment requirements—moves that widen rather than dissolve the gender gap (Boca et al., 2020; Collins et al., 2020; Manzo & Minello, 2020).⁴ In effect, women in dual-earner couples are reducing their hours, making this "choice" for their family (Damaske, 2011).

Far less is known about the effects of COVID-19 on working and middle class single mothers. Even if these women had previously created a village or network to care for their children, many were suddenly left without a separate space where their children could go daily—a space that would give kids freedom of movement and interaction and that would give mothers a block of time to earn the paycheck essential to living a working or middle class life. It would be reasonable to expect that juggling employment and domestic responsibility would strain dual-income couples; but single mothers are likely to face even greater physical and psychological strain as they handle both without the aid of a co-parent.

Of particular interest are differences in experience and response between single mothers who go it alone and those who belong to multi-adult households. We seek where possible to compare single-adult households with respondents who lived in multi-adult households to learn whether different types of household experienced the collapse of separate spheres differently. Such a comparison offers the opportunity to assess whether multi-adult households offer a workable alternative for single mothers when communities go on lockdown.

Methods

The data for this study comes from an online survey developed by the authors and administered from June 1 to June 30, 2020. Wellesley College's Institutional Review board approved the survey. The survey was sent to three groups whose members already have a child without a partner or are considering solo motherhood (regardless of method of conception or adoption). To be more specific, all current members of the Single Mothers by Choice organization received an invitation to take the survey.⁵ The organization hosts online forums as well as local meetings in many areas. Jane Mattes (founder of the organization) posted a link to the survey on the organization's online page and sent a note to all current members and chapter leaders asking that the contact person post on the local chapter's Facebook page. The authors also reached out to Sharna Cohen, the current co-chair of the Counselling Special Interest Group of the Canadian Fertility and Andrology Society, and to Jan Silverman who facilitates a large group of solo mothers in Canada. They sent an invitation to group members, which included women who are thinking of having, trying to have, or have children as single mothers, similar to the U.S.-based organization. Finally, we posted the survey to a Facebook group called "Single Mothers by Choice" administered by Niki Coleman and Anissa Stern. This is a private group for women who conceived with gametes or who adopted children without partners. They specify that their group is

“not for women whose partners have left them.” We gave permission to members in these groups to forward our request to other women who were raising children with partners, which produced a smaller group of married women.

Participants were informed at the start of the survey that they could stop and return to the survey at any time. Since we wanted to tap the experiences of single mothers we turned to these organizations built around conception, adoption and parenting without partners, reflecting a growing trend in North America, Australia and Europe (Hertz et al., 2016).

The online survey consisted of closed- and open-ended questions. The survey’s initial aim was to update an article written 20 years ago by Hertz and Ferguson (1998). That qualitative study revealed the importance of social and financial supports that single middle class women organized as part of their strategy to raise their child(ren). We had begun to write the survey at the end of February 2020 with a focus on social supports and care work. However, we revised the survey to include questions about life before and during COVID-19 to reflect the closure of offices, daycare centers, schools, and non-essential businesses that began in March 2020. We used the term “height” of the pandemic because countries and states reopened in phases and at differing points, allowing women to base their answers on their own experiential timeline.

The survey focuses on the way single mothers responded when workplaces, childcare facilities, and other personal supports (i.e., gyms and self-help group meetings) abruptly shut down. During the period that the survey was open, all 50 U.S. states were discussing plans for reopening their economies in stages; the same went for Canada and European countries.

To enable this analysis, we encouraged women to elaborate on their answers to many of the survey questions, such as how they felt and managed care for children at home in conjunction with continued paid employment. The qualitative comments were intended to capture respondents’ “lived experiences” after approximately 2.5 months of closures—a point at which the home became the center of work, education, and family activities. We received between 290 and 300 comments per question; about half the respondents chose to write a paragraph. This extraordinary rate and quality of response encouraged us to analyze the qualitative comments alongside the survey responses. Qualitative comments were coded and analyzed using the methodology of hypothesis generation and saturation at the core of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

In total we received responses from 833 people. This paper focuses on the 722 single mothers who answered the survey. Among these single women, the average age was 46 years, and the majority held at least a bachelors’ degree. 86% identified as white. Among these single mothers the average age

was 46 years and the majority held at least a bachelors' degree. 86.4% identified as white and 87.5% as straight. Respondents reported a range of incomes; just over half report incomes that reflect middle or upper middle class income levels.⁶ At the time of the survey, 92.6% of women had at least one child who was between the ages of birth and 18 years or high school completion. The average age of children was 7.3 years and the mean number of children women had was 2.2. The pool of respondents reflected the geographic diversity of the single mother organizations and online groups we tapped. Respondents lived throughout the world, with the majority living in the United States and Canada. The 606 respondents from the United States lived in 46 states (see Table 1), providing regional diversity. Regardless of their residence, respondents had experienced shutdown of all but essential services. The vast majority of respondents (98.9%) reported that they "socially isolated." Only those who worked in essential industries ventured outside their homes on a daily basis.

While three-quarters of our respondents lived in single-adult households, a quarter lived in multi-adult households.⁷ Multi-adult households were not always multi-generational; they could include other family members, paid caregivers, or roommates. However, almost half the multi-adult households included the respondents' parents, followed by a mix of other relatives that included their grown children. A smaller group lived with nannies, roommates, or a person they identified as a significant other (Tables 2 and 3). Only 7.7% reported that their household composition had changed due to COVID-19; in most instances the change involved respondents and her parent(s) moving in together or older children returning home when their college closed.

Findings

Impact of the Pandemic on Single Mothers' Ability to Work for Pay

The employment impacts of COVID-19 on women in the study mirrored the states and countries in which they lived. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the overwhelming majority of women in this study were employed full-time (83.7%); 7.1% were employed part-time. Fourteen percent of women in single-adult households and 18.7% of women in multi-adult households experienced an employment change related to COVID-19 (Table 4). Most of those changes involved a furlough or reduced hours, regardless of household composition (Table 5). However, during the height of the pandemic, women who lived alone with their children were less satisfied with their work hours and more likely to wish they could decrease them. Yet, only a few women actually did this, regardless of household of composition (Table 6).

Table 1. Demographics.

Age of respondents	46.3 (7.6) ¹	
Respondents who identify as white	86.4%	
Respondents who social distanced during COVID-19	98.9%	
Expected yearly income (USD)	%	n
Income decreased due to COVID	28.2%	171
<40,000K	10.2%	61
\$40,000–\$79,999	30%	180
\$80,000–\$119,999	26.5%	159
>\$120,000	33.3%	140
Education	%	n
High school degree	0.5%	3
Some college	2.9%	18
Associates degree	1.8%	11
Bachelors degree	23.3%	144
Masters degree	44.0%	272
Professional degree	27.4%	169
Other	0.2%	1
Sexual Identities	%	n
Heterosexual	87.5%	539
Homosexual/Gay/Lesbian	3.3%	20
Bisexual/Pansexual	6.8%	42
Asexual	2.0%	12
Other	0.5%	3
Countries Respondents live in	%	n
United States ²	82.5%	563
Canada	10.2%	70
Other countries	7.1%	59
Employment Status Prior to COVID-19	%	n
Full-time employed	83.8%	372
Part-time employed	7.2%	32
Unemployed	5.2%	23
Retired	2.0%	9
Other	1.8%	8
<i>During COVID-19 experienced employment change</i>	16.2%	75

Note. ¹Variance in Parenthesis.

²46 US states represented.

However, shifts in the *place* of employment posed the greater challenge for single mothers, especially those who lived in single-adult households. With little warning, 73% of employed women were directed to work exclusively

Table 2. Current Household Composition.

	%	n
% of respondents in single-adult households	74.3%	459
% of Respondents in multi-adult households	25.7%	159
Avg # of children	2.2	
Avg Age of children	7.3	
% of children 18 or younger	90.3%	558
% whose household membership changed with Covid-19	7.7%	42

Table 3. “Who Are the Adults You Currently Live With? (Check All That Apply)”¹.

	Percent of Multi-Adult Households with Each	n
Parents	47%	75
Other relatives write-in response (including cousins, siblings, and adult children)	34%	54
Child care providers	14%	23
Significant others	9%	14
Roommates	11%	18

Note. ¹Single-adult household n= 459, multi-adult household n= 159.

Table 4. “Has Your Employment Status Changed Due to Covid-19?”¹

	Single-Adult Household	Multi-Adult Households	n
Yes	14.5%	18.7%	69
No	85.5% (337)	81.3% (107)	375

¹n in Parentheses.

from home. Another 8.7% were asked to work a mix of home and away from home, and the rest continued to work outside their homes. (Data not shown.) Once home, they struggled to accomplish more tasks with fewer resources, for example, paid work and children competed for attention. A mother who lived in a single-adult household illustrated her experience with young children interrupting her while she tried to do her job: “Some of my meetings have been chaos. My kids have been crying and I’m running to find things to

Table 5. “Which of these best describes your work change?”¹.

	Single-Adult Household	Multi-Adult Household	n
I was fired	8.7%	5.6%	5
I was furloughed	28.3%	16.7%	16
I left my job voluntarily	-	16.7%	3
My workplace increased my hours	2.2%	-	1
My workplace reduced my hours	32.6%	33.3%	21
I chose to reduce my hours	17.4%	16.7%	11
I chose to increase my hours	-	5.6%	1
I re-entered the workforce full-time	8.7%	-	4
I re-entered the workforce part-time	2.2%	5.6%	2
	(46)	(18)	

¹n in Parentheses.

Table 6. “If You Could Change Your Hours, Would You?”¹.

	Single-Adult Household	Multi-Adult Household	n
No, I'm satisfied with the hours I work.	36.8%	48.3%	148
Yes, I would decrease my hours.	47.2%	31.0%	163
Yes I would increase my hours.	5.21%	8.1%	22
N/A	10.8%	12.6%	42
	(288)	(87)	

¹n in Parentheses.

appease them while trying to keep my meeting going and get through all of the requirements.” Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, single mothers had no choice but to work full time to support children and to delegate the care of their children to others. Suddenly these single mothers found that the shutdown required an “intensive” engagement with their children’s needs. This resembled the “intensive mothering” ideology that Sharon Hays (1996, p. 151) detected that at minimum requires “the day-to-day labor of nurturing children, listening to the child, attempting to decipher the child’s needs and desires.” These single mothers felt accountable to an ideology to which they had never subscribed. But, as the aforementioned woman indicated, she could not focus a disproportionate amount of time on her children since she was expected to meet paid work requirements. Still, during the pandemic, workplaces expected the same levels of work involvement and

Table 7. “Do You Feel That Your Work Productivity Has Changed Since COVID-19 Began?”¹.

	Single-Adult Household	Multi-Adult Household	n
I'm not sure	12.3%	9.7%	48
It hasn't changed	23.7%	34.4%	107
Yes, it's gotten better	6.3%	8.6%	28
Yes, it's gotten worse	57.6%	47.3%	226
	(316)	(93)	

Note. ¹n in Parenthesis.

productivity and, not unlike expectations prior to the pandemic, workplaces continued to assume that working mothers had no family obligations (Acker, 1990; Guendouzi, 2006; Williams, 2000).

Mothers in single-adult households were more likely to feel that their work productivity declined by comparison to women who lived in multi-adult households (57.6% versus 47.3%; see Table 7). The absence of another adult to help with children, even with occasional interruptions, made a difference in how they experienced working during the shutdown. One single mother living alone with a five-year-old felt less present in her work: “[My daughter] wanders into the background of Zoom meetings a lot. I have to mute myself a lot because she is being loud in the background. That keeps me from speaking up in meetings like I would do in person.”

This is not to suggest that things were easy for women in multi-adult households. For instance, one woman explained that having her mother in the house was a mixed blessing:

Even though my mom watches my daughter throughout the day while I’m working from home, I still have to manage my daughter’s care. For example, if she is getting fussy and I hear her, I need to see if I need to put her down for a nap (my mom can’t climb stairs to bring her for a nap) and also try and give my mom breaks during the day as it is tiring for her to watch my daughter. I’m constantly distracted all day by how the two of them are doing.

Among those who reported a decline in their work productivity, it was the absence of boundaries between the expectations of family and workplaces that stood out as the cause. Not surprisingly, women who lived in single-adult households were more likely to cite “trying to work while caring for children at the same time” as a major impediment to productivity over women who lived in multi-adult households. (31.2% vs 20.3%; see Table 8).

Table 8. “Why Do You Think Your Productivity Has Gotten Worse? (Check All that Apply)”.

	Single-Adult Households		Multi-Adult Household	
	Percentage	n	Percentage	n
My work does not transfer easily to remote.	10.4%	49	13.6%	16
My home obligations have increased.	26.8%	126	29.7%	35
I'm now trying to work and take care of my children at the same time.	31.2%	147	20.3%	24
I can't seem to focus as well on my work.	26.8%	126	29.7%	35
My bosses or coworkers are not as available as I need them to be.	2.6%	12	5.1%	6
I have gotten sick (including, but not limited to COVID-19).	2.3%	11	1.7%	2
Total	100%	471	100%	118

Worries about current productivity carried over to concerns about future employment. These mothers worried that they might be judged more harshly in the future by comparison to colleagues who did not face the same constraints. This concern was expressed in comments like the following: “I felt like my children were my priority but there was pressure to not drop productivity at work”; “Work felt much less important than looking after my kids in the middle of a pandemic so it was incredibly hard to focus on it. Yet I couldn’t lose my job”; and “I did ask for a lot of help/understanding from work but [I] am concerned this made me seem weak and unable to cope as well as co-workers.”

Absent any sign that the pandemic was disappearing and concerned that children would have to continue to be cared for at home, women expressed a strong sense of malaise. This sentiment was captured best by one woman living alone with her two children: “Reasonably manageable days. Most days with ups and downs. The quality of engagement with my work suffered due to constant interruptions, general lack of motivation, and feelings of futility.”

The Weight of Daycare for Preschool and School Age Children

A care crisis arose when institutional arrangements for children disappeared. Complicating matters was the fact that respondents with parents who

Table 9. “Prior to Covid-19, Who Did You Rely On For Childcare?”.

	Single-Adult Household			Multi-Adult Household		
	Primary Care ¹	Secondary Care ²	Not at All Used	Primary Care	Secondary Care	Not at All Used
Daycare Center/School	69.9%	7.2%	22.8%	57.1%	8.8%	34.1%
Family/home daycare in a provider's home	9.6%	7.5%	82.9%	6.7%	7.9%	85.4%
Childcare provider who comes to my home (nanny, au pair, babysitter, etc)	11.6%	24.9%	63.5%	17.1%	13.6%	69.3%
Health care provider (nurse, therapist, etc.)	0.9%	18.5%	80.6%	0.00%	19.3%	80.7%
Grandparents	8.9%	51.8%	39.3%	25.3%	47.3%	27.5%
Other relatives	1.2%	30.1%	68.7%	3.4%	44.3%	52.3%
Friends	1.2%	42.5%	56.3%	2.2%	25.3%	72.5%
Significant other	0.3%	1.8%	97.9%	1.1%	2.3%	96.6%
Roommates	0.6%	0.3%	99.1%	3.4%	4.5%	92.1%
Neighbors	0.6%	15.7%	83.7%	0.00%	12.5%	87.5%
Parents from child's school or daycare	0.6%	19.6%	79.8%	2.3%	13.5%	84.3%
After-school program(s)	20.2%	11.0%	68.8%	14.6%	7.9%	77.5%
Extracurricular activities	7.4%	41.1%	51.5%	2.3%	34.8%	62.9%
Child cares for self after school	8.5%	2.4%	89.0%	9.0%	2.3%	88.8%
Other (please explain)	1.5%	1%	97.5%	2.8%	1.4%	95.8%

Note. ¹Primary Care refers to care that is utilized every day.

²Secondary Care refers to care that is utilized, but not every day. This can range from every few days to monthly.

provided care faced unique challenges due to age-related risks of severe illness and death.

Prior to COVID-19, single mothers used a variety of caregiving options (see Table 9). Those who lived in multi-adult households were more likely to have a broader repertoire of care-givers than women in single-adult households. Most had at least one additional child care resource living with them prior to COVID-19, usually kin and/or a nanny who provided some relief when institutions shut down. By contrast, respondents in single-adult households were more likely to use daycare (center or home-based) or schools (79.5% vs 63.8% for multi-adult households) even when we controlled for the child’s age. Friends rarely cared for children on a daily basis in either household type; but they were more involved with single mother households

Table 10. “During the Height of Covid-19, Who Did You Rely on for Childcare?”.

	Single-Adult Household	Multi-Adult Household
I continued to have my previous care plan.	12.6%	18.3%
I had only part of my previous care plan because I lost some providers.	12.0%	26.8%
I continued my previous care plan and added additional providers.	0.6%	1.2%
I lost some providers I previously used, but added others.	12.0%	13.4%
I had no childcare help.	62.8%	40.2%

as frequent backups. In short, even before the shutdowns, women who lived in multi-adult households had more robust care arrangements than their counterparts in single-adult households.

The loss of schools or daycare disrupted the relationship between employment and family life more significantly for respondents who lived in single-adult households. They were less likely to either continue their previous childcare plan (12.6% vs 18.3% for multi-adult households) or to have part of their plan remain intact (12% vs 26.8%; see Table 10). Comments by respondents in single-adult households reflected their strain: “My child was home with me all day every day and only me.” Another wrote, “During the height, my daughter was no longer in school or after school and was not going to grandma’s or being watched by a friend. I was watching her every day, all day.” With hindsight, she grasped more fully her reliance on her caregiver arrangements: “As a solo mom (no other parent exists), it’s incredibly draining to have a toddler around 24/7 with no chance for a break. It’s relentless. When I started sending her back to the nanny share, I suddenly gained perspective on just how depleted I was.”

Fear of spreading the virus caused respondents to stop relying on family who did not currently live with them. In multi-adult households (where 47% of these households included a parent), relatives posed a special concern. Respondents worried about exposing their parents to outsiders. For instance, a mother of teenagers lamented: “We were sheltering in place and did not want to expose my elderly father to any germs/risk. If I had needed childcare, I wouldn’t be comfortable to send my child to someone’s house when everyone is sheltering in place.” Another woman expressed her concerns about introducing other childcare providers into her home because her multi-adult household included her parents for whom she also cares: “Daycare is closed, I am working from home, but I do not feel comfortable having a babysitter

come, for everyone's protection." Finally, a woman who was an essential worker with non-standard hours had to eliminate her parents from her childcare repertoire. Unfortunately, her "solution" led to new worries: "My parents used to watch my son overnight when I was on call. Now I am afraid to expose them. So my son stays home alone over night when I am working. This concerns me. I am a physician and work overnight at the hospital 2-4 times a month." Among the 17% of women who went to work outside their home every day, many noted that even though their workplaces had daycare arrangements, they mostly found themselves at a loss over what to do with their children. A few women wrote in that they sent their children to live with their parents, seeing their children only at a distance.

To fill the void left by the loss of institutionally based childcare, some respondents increased the number of people with whom they lived. Nearly 8% of women reported a change in their household membership during the shutdown, with women living in single-adult households reporting more changes than women who lived in multi-adult households (74% versus 26% data not shown). For example, a single mom and her parents combined households and became a "tag team" in response to loss of center-based care for her two year old son:

Prior to COVID-19, I relied on a full-time daycare center with help from friends, other daycare families, paid babysitters and occasionally my mother when I needed care outside of typical daycare hours. Since COVID-19, daycare has been shut down and we have not had contact with any of our usual friends or babysitters, besides my parents. We have been staying with my parents so they can help with childcare. All three of the adults are working remotely, and we tag-team care of my two-year-old as our schedules require and allow.

Others temporarily increased reliance on their parents. For example, one woman wrote: "No daycare, which I previously used Monday to Friday. Instead, [I] temporarily moved in with family and have my mom for childcare Monday to Friday." Another involved her parents though they did not move in together: "My daycare closed so after we self-isolated for 2.5 weeks, my parents began watching my kids four days a week instead of one." A few women who lived in single-adult households reported creating a "care pod" where the children went back and forth between two households, shared shopping duties, some dinners during the week, and an agreement that the adults would consent to any activity outside these two households: "I socially distanced with another family, so was able to leave her there if I had things to do." One woman wrote about joining with her sister: "I was not willing to leave my children with anyone who wasn't practicing the same strict isolation measures we were. Eventually, after two weeks, my sister and I decided to mingle our families."

In sum, even though women in both households lost external daycare providers, women living in multi-adult households found it easier to work from home and to have some personal time. Few of the women who lived in single-adult households and temporarily moved in with their parents or socially isolated with another family felt that those arrangements were sustainable indefinitely. For the majority of respondents, new childcare arrangements were just not possible, particularly when their parents lived far away or were at high risk for COVID-19.

Family and Networks Before and During the Pandemic

Since prior research highlighted the significant role played by strategic villages, we were especially interested to find a polarization in reliance on networks of family among our respondents (see Table 11). Regardless of household composition, the majority of women called on family for support prior to COVID-19. However, the pandemic led to a migration away from occasional family reliance into the extreme poles: daily help or not at all. This polarization occurred in both household types.

While all mothers experienced polarization in their use of family help because of COVID-19, those in multi-adult households tended to seek out family assistance with other things such as household tasks and social support more frequently. This movement towards more daily utilization and interaction may be explained by the physical proximity of other adults in multi-adult households.

Women who lived alone with their children faced the greatest difficulties. They had created families with the expectation that they would utilize external services to aid in childrearing. Now, however, they were cut off from those resources and were unprepared to deal with the demands of increased in-home parenting: "I never expected to spend this much time with her day in and day out. I'm just too exhausted all the time."

The Antagonism between Production and Reproduction

While both household types were disrupted by the pandemic, women in single-adult households wrote much more frequently about the emotional costs they bore, especially in the form of tensions that emerged between themselves and their children. The tension manifested itself in three themes derived from the open-ended comments.

No Room to Recover. The inability to carve up the day into discrete spaces and times away from children sapped women's ability to recoup their energy.

Table 11. Family Supports Prior and During COVID-19.

	“Prior to COVID-19, how frequently did you rely on family members for various supports?”					
	Single-Adult Household			Multi-Adult Household		
	Daily	Not Daily, but on Occasion ¹	Not at all	Daily	Not Daily, but on Occasion	Not at all
I relied on family to help out with medical issues or illness (going to appointments, bringing chicken soup, etc).	5.0%	48.0%	47.1%	9.6%	42.7%	47.8%
I relied on family to share social activities.	4.1%	76.3%	19.6%	12.9%	69.7%	17.4%
I relied on family to do household chores.	1.6%	19.8%	78.6%	18.9%	24.4%	56.7%
I relied on family to run errands for me.	0.7%	27.3%	72.0%	4.4%	32.2%	63.3%
I relied on family for emotional support.	24.4%	60.8%	14.8%	31.8%	54.8%	13.4%
I relied on family for financial support.	2.1%	20.9%	77.1%	7.2%	15.0%	77.8%

	“During the height of Covid-19, how frequently did you rely on family members for various supports?”					
	Single-Adult Household			Multi-Adult Household		
	Daily	Not Daily, but on Occasion	Not at all	Daily	Not Daily, but on Occasion	Not at all
I relied on family to help out with medical issues or illness (going to appointments, bringing chicken soup, etc).	6.0%	14.4%	79.6%	10.2%	19.3%	70.5%
I relied on family to share social activities.	13.5%	25.5%	61.1%	29.9%	34.7%	35.3%
I relied on family to do household chores.	6.5%	9.9%	83.6%	28.0%	17.9%	54.2%
I relied on family to run errands for me.	1.9%	25.3%	72.8%	6.0%	30.4%	63.7%
I relied on family for emotional support.	32.6%	46.4%	21.0%	40.5%	41.7%	17.9%
I relied on family for financial support.	2.6%	13.2%	84.2%	7.8%	10.2%	82.0%

Note. ¹Not Daily, But on Occasion includes categories weekly, twice a month, monthly, and every few months.

Table 12. Returning Home.**A. In general, how difficult is it to have your children at home more?**

	Single-Adult	Multi-Adult
Extremely difficult	29.7%	24.7%
Somewhat difficult	51.0%	39.0%
Neither easy nor difficult	11.0%	18.2%
Somewhat easy	5.2%	7.8%
Extremely easy	3.2%	10.4%

B. During the height of Covid-19, how difficult is it to find personal space and/or time for yourself?

	Single-Adult	Multi-Adult
Extremely difficult	67.9%	51.8%
Somewhat difficult	18.2%	34.1%
Neither easy nor difficult	5.5%	5.9%
Somewhat easy	8.5%	7.1%
Extremely easy	3.8%	5.9%

C. During the height of Covid-19, how difficult is it to work and have children at the same time?

	Single-Adult	Multi-Adult
Extremely difficult	47.0%	31.8%
Somewhat difficult	27.0%	35.3%
Neither easy nor difficult	5.5%	5.9%
Somewhat easy	2.6%	3.5%
Extremely easy	2.0%	5.9%
Doesn't apply/ I was not employed	15.9%	17.7%

Qualitative comments were especially insightful in this situation. For instance, a woman who lived in a multi-adult household put it emphatically: “Don’t feel like I can be a good parent or good employee. Prior to COVID-19, I was good at compartmentalizing between home and work. That is impossible now and I feel like I fail in everything.”

Three survey questions provided a window into the dissolution of boundaries between paid work and family (see Table 12). By comparison to women who lived in multi-adult households, women in single-adult households were more likely to say it was *extremely* difficult to (a) have children home more; (b) find personal time/space; and (c) work from home and have children there at the same time. In Table 12, we see that both single-adult and multi-adult

women experienced about equal difficulty with having their children home more. However, a larger percentage of women who lived alone with their children expressed extreme difficulty finding time and space for themselves by comparison to women who lived with other adults. In addition to difficulty finding time and space for personal care, single mothers who lived alone found it more difficult to do their jobs with their children at home as against women who lived with other adults.

Intensity and Isolation. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, single mothers relied on social networks to round out their child's life and to modulate the intensity of mother-child relationships. One mother in a single-adult household described her situation poignantly:

Before COVID-19 we were social butterflies and I frequently used a sitter to have time away from her. [Now] it is hell on earth. My child has significant behavioral problems and the pandemic has greatly exacerbated them. Being stuck at home has been awful for both of us. She has major tantrums every day and I am trying to work from home.

Another woman in single-adult household described how her pre-COVID-19 network buffered the intensity of the mother-daughter dyad:

I've had to revamp how I interact with my daughter, as honestly. . . I had our lives set up so that other people were teaching her or occupying her time while I just "tagged along" (even the campgrounds we had picked people who entertained her, as they had functions and stuff, like Jellystone Parks). Now I've had to be a full time hands on mom, and it took some serious time to figure it all out and it was emotionally taxing.

Not only were women straining their relationships with children because of a lack of social buffers but they were also expected to take on educational roles. They felt poorly prepared to supervise their children's learning, leading to a relationship strain as they took on the roles of full-time mother, entertainer and teacher. One mother wrote: "Online school is a strain on parent-child relationship." Those respondents with children with special needs who relied on caregivers or schools were especially stressed, "One child has severe special needs and the mental break I got with her [in school] made me a better parent. Now I'm exhausted and stressed all the time."

Women also commented on missing the entertainment and the occasional education provided by socializing with peers. A single mother who lived alone with her kindergarten twins described her dilemma this way: "While they can't express it yet, I have realized that they really miss social interactions. I also miss interacting with other parents. I feel very isolated from other

mothers.” She, like many others who commented, found the intensity of parenting without a break exhausting.

Identities at Odds. Women were acutely aware that their sense of well-being rested on a compartmentalization of home and paid work. Work time was not solely for earning a living; it also gave them a space to pursue a distinct element of their adult identity. For instance, one woman in a single-adult household wrote about how her sense of self felt compromised:

There is a physical and emotional space that I get for 8 hours each day. I can run an errand without a kid, go grab lunch and have a phone call that is uninterrupted. When I go to work, I feel more connected with my first self—the individual that I was before becoming a mom. With the current situation, all of that has dissolved quickly. With home life and work life residing in the same physical space, my emotional capacity to attend to my kid [because of the stress I am under at work] is less and I find myself less patient and attentive to her needs as I normally would be. I posted on social media last month that it has been 840 hours since I've had a break from my kid, not even a walk around the block by myself.

When denied personal time, their identities as workers and mothers were no longer “mutually supportive” (Garey, 1999, p. 79). These women felt they were better mothers before the pandemic because they retained professional lives—“her first -self”—that gave them time away from their child. Karen Christopher (2012, p. 86) also found that single mothers unapologetically said they needed the “breaks” from children that employment provided; time away was necessary to their well-being. Similarly many of our respondents had never embraced the importance of spending huge amounts of time with children; instead, they expected to build and use an extensive strategic village. The shutdown tested their “patience” and “attentiveness” to their children from whom they had no escape. Only a few women wrote comments that constructed their children’s return to home as a “welcomed time” for mother-child bonding. This is not to diminish the relationships these mothers have with their children; but rather it highlights the reliance upon a separation of production and reproduction for these employed single mothers.

When paid work suddenly became “visible,” mothers reported that children expressed their anger with this competitor for their time. This woman elaborated on the way her son let her know that he did not want to share her:

My child is with me at home 24 hours a day while I still have to work from home. This is an impossible situation and not sustainable. In the last few weeks he has regressed in toileting behaviors (peeing on the floor, having bowel

movements outside the toilet) when I spend too much time on the computer, or when I'm not in the midst of playing with him or allowing him to play with neighbors outside.

Another woman wrote that she escaped her child's demands for her attention by inventing a separation: "I hide in the RV in the yard and pretend I leave to go to work. My son would not leave me to work if he knew I was still there." She needed to limit her interactions with her child to get her job done. But the majority of women framed the shutdown around stretching themselves often to meet their concerns about their child's welfare.

One adaptation that respondents converged on was trying to slice the day into segments—turning the antagonism between paid work and home into shift work. Women, especially in single-adult households, tried to meet the demands of parenting and jobs by offloading some work tasks to hours when their children would not miss them—creating time segments that focus on work tasks so they could attend to their children when they were awake. Women who worked remotely talked about suddenly having two or even three jobs. One woman explained: "Have to take meetings spaced out during the day and do work after bedtime and early morning before my child wakes. It is exhausting and not sustainable." Women who were expected to be in virtual meetings all day tried to do both while still working late into the night while their child slept. For example, one respondent said:

I am working full time and my work has been very busy so the time I have to spend with her at home has been minimal so she is often left to fend for herself while I'm in very long virtual meetings. Once her school went virtual it gave her more to do but also made it harder for me to balance work, becoming a kindergarten teacher to her and staying on top of her school assignments. I also can't concentrate on complex issues with constant interruptions, so I frequently work all day, get her to bed and then go back to work until late into the night.

This woman went on to describe herself as both "absent and present": when kindergarten moved online, she needed to help her child with her assignments; to do so she relegated her own job assignments to hours when her child slept.⁸

When broken down by household composition, single-adult household mothers were more likely to provide educational help to their children by comparison to mothers living in a multi-adult household (36.2% vs 22%; data not shown). The latter tend to share the task of education with other adult members in the household, including parents and nannies. But carving the day into chunks did not create any sense that remote work was personally beneficial. Instead, the hours of focused time for employment were squeezed

around children's waking hours. As a result these single mothers experienced the personal stress that occurs with fewer resources, and a lack of personal time important for well-being (Dugan & Barnes-Farrell, 2020). With the pandemic production and reproduction are left fighting for a woman's time. The upheaval of parenting life caused by COVID-19 has placed children at center stage, leaving women feeling more accountable to their children's needs than ever before.

Conclusion

We began this research with the hypothesis that working single mothers would be especially vulnerable to the privations associated with an event—in this instance, a pandemic—that heightened the tension between production and reproduction, between work and family. Our survey, complemented by the opportunity for respondents to elaborate, allowed us to compare the perceptions and reactions of single mothers in two different types of household—single-and multi-adult. It was our hope that the combination of quantitative and qualitative data would yield deep yet timely insight.

We sought to answer three core questions by means of the project. Our first question focused on the impacts of the pandemic on paid work and productivity. We found that single mothers in single-adult households experienced and reported greater stress associated with managing competing demands for their attention. They found it harder to do their jobs and to care for or supervise learning for their children than single mothers in multi-adult households. In this view, the absence of boundaries between paid work and family had a direct and negative impact on their productivity and their engagement in employment. They also described their inability to make and enforce boundaries as a personal problem—not a structural one. This “introspective” view perhaps explains the seemingly herculean efforts many made to segment time and space in their households. Perhaps the most insidious of the stresses they described had to do with worries that lagging current performance/productivity might have negative consequences for their jobs or careers and even their immediate employment.

The strategic villages/networks that were so important in helping single mothers choose that route to motherhood—and to accomplish continued employment and delegating their care to care providers once offspring arrived—were only partially successful in helping women adapt to the pandemic. Women in single-adult households experienced tremendous pressure and were haunted by the fear that they were failing in all the roles they had taken on. Women in multi-adult households fared better insofar as they had more hands to help them; but they, too, felt at a loss when they realized that

many of their former helpers—parents, in particular—were at risk if they stayed part of the care giving family. Absent accessible, reliable, and safe resources outside the boundaries of the family, the village may no longer suffice.

Our second question focused on the unprecedented crisis of child care caused by the pandemic. Again, the survey results suggest that single-adult households were impacted more negatively by the pandemic, underscoring the fragility of the relationships essential to allowing single mothers to be employed. A unique feature of COVID-19—the greater risk for older people—restricted the creation of more multi-adult households as a strategy for single mothers. Single mothers in multi-adult households fared somewhat better when they lost access to their networks; but when the other household members were older relatives who were less likely to become more active participants around helping with children or tasks, the benefit was only modest.

Our third question focused on the antagonism between production and reproduction and its future. It would not be overstatement to suggest that the situation experienced by single mothers is “pandemic exhaustion.” However, treating it as an unfortunate but temporary episode would overlook several critical dimensions of the situation.

Single mothers felt tired, stressed and guilty because they were unable to compartmentalize paid work and family. In quotes throughout earlier sections of this paper, women talked about a dramatic increase in time they spent “doing things”—for example, running to get a child something, playing with their child, and helping with homework—that were central to their identity and performance as mothers. They restructured their day so that their work obligations would not compete with their children’s demands, especially when they lived alone with their children. They constructed motherhood as providing a safe place for their children to be cared for; sometimes that was in daycare for essential workers but other times they delegated the care of their children to their parents. Not all women were successful at compartmentalization. In this regard, the pandemic also exposed how employment was not just about a paycheck but also a way to retain an independent life as an adult. Overwhelmingly, women’s well-being suffered as the most difficult part of the shutdown was the lack of personal time or space that both employment and social networks provided.

While not an explicit focus of this research, the survey revealed that few employers were compensating for the added burdens single mothers faced. Presumably, the pandemic will recede; but it has revealed to employers multiple ways to lower operating costs by pushing work to home—or at least to locations less expensive than urban skyscrapers. Savings in rent,

travel expenses, discretionary costs like meals and parking, and the eventual reduction in insurance premiums due to fewer employment-related accidents will be an incentive that few companies will ignore. In a world of ubiquitous computing, widely available broadband connectivity and apps that work on virtually any device, “home” is quickly becoming the go-to workplace.

Nonetheless, the institutions through which reproduction is accomplished—namely, family, education, and childcare—show every sign of having reached the limits of their adaptability and resilience. Single mothers in single-adult households do not have the resources or the family to call upon in times of need. Heroic measures such as we saw in their efforts to shore up their families will not suffice for long. Indeed, these survey results suggest that exhaustion and strain are likely to be cumulative from one pandemic or systemic shock to the next.

Acknowledgments

We thank Robert J. Thomas for editorial and substantive comments.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iD

Rosanna Hertz  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9954-5611>

Notes

1. The outsourcing of childcare does not resolve the tensions of parenting and paid work because of the continued high costs of childcare (Herb, 2018). COVID-19 and the shutdown of daycare centers illustrates the contingent nature of “outsourcing” and how the loss of these caregivers poses challenges to mothers’ work hours but not fathers’ (Collins et al., 2020).
2. Single motherhood is the term used in this research project to refer to women who do not have the support from another parent. Researchers cited refer to these women as “single mothers,” “solo mothers” or “single mothers by choice.” Since we are not interested in how women came to parent alone, nor in female empowerment/agency, the use of “choice motherhood” is limiting or contested (Bock, 2000; Hertz and Ferguson 1997; Hertz, 2006; Holmes, 2018; Jones, 2008;

- Mannis, 1999). See Weinraub and Kaufman (2019) for an examination of the heterogeneity across single-parent families.
3. See Stone (2007); Lovejoy and Stone (2019) whose empirical research on dual-career professional women emphasized these goals until they lost their nannies and since their husbands made significant earnings they could become intensively involved in their children's lives. Single mothers also delegate care of their children to other people or institutions. But unlike married professional women they do not have the luxury of a partner's paycheck, their employment is economically essential even if they limit career advancement (Hertz, 1999)
 4. For instance, Collins et al (2020) found that mothers with young children were 4 to 5 times more likely to reduce their work hours than fathers not unlike the scaled back hours of mothers with young children other researchers found prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (Young & Schieman, 2018).
 5. See <https://www.singlemothersbychoice.org/>The active membership is approximately 5, 000.
 6. See Pew comparison, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/07/23/are-you-in-the-american-middle-class/>
 7. A growing share of the U.S. population resides in multigenerational family households. That is, by 2016, 20% of Americans lived in a multigenerational household, up from 12% in 1980, partly reflecting the country's increasing racial and ethnic diversity according to Pew data <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/10/01/the-number-of-people-in-the-average-u-s-household-is-going-up-for-the-first-time-in-over-160-years/> Race does not matter in living arrangement for respondents in this study. Among those respondents who live in single-adult households 89% are White and 11% identify as either Black, Asian, Latinx, indigenous or mixed race. Among those respondents who live in multi-adult households, 85% are white and 15% identify as another race.
 8. While splitting hours under COVID-19 appears similar to other research on shift-work or working non-standard hours to accommodate either mothers or fathers availability to children (Garey, 1999; Lowson & Arber, 2014; Weinschenker, 2016) this strategy rests upon an in-home division that reinforces the cultural view that the home belongs to children. Under the COVID-19 pandemic women found themselves with new worries about the kind of mothers they were now expected to be especially by their own children.

References

- Acker, J. (1990). Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: a theory of gendered organizations. *Gender & Society*, 4(2), 139–58.
- Blair-Loy, M. (2003). *Competing devotions*. Harvard University Press.
- Bock, J. (2000). Doing the right thing? Single mothers by choice and the struggle for legitimacy. *Gender & Society*, 14(1), 62–86.
- Boca, D.D., Oggero, N., Profeta, P., & Rossi, C. M. (2020) Women's work, housework and childcare, before and during Covid-19 [*CESifo Working Paper Series*. No. 8403].

- Briggs, L. (2018). *How all politics became reproductive politics: From welfare reforms to foreclosure to Trump*. University of California Press.
- Carlson, D.L., Petts, R.J., & Pepin, J. (2020, May 20). Men and women agree: during the pandemic men are doing more at home” Brief reports, *CCF News*. <https://contemporaryfamilies.org/covid-couples-division-of-labor/>
- Christopher, K. (2012). Employed mothers construction of the good mother. *Gender and Society*, 26(1), 73–96.
- Collier, J., Rosaldo, M.Z., & Yanagisako, S. (1982). Is there a family? New anthropological views. In B. Thorne & M. Yalom (Eds.), *Rethinking the family: Some feminist questions*. Longman, Inc.
- Collins, C., Ladviar, L.C., Ruppanner, L., & Scarborough, W.J. (2020). Covid-19 and the gender gap in work hours. *Gender, Work and Organization*.
- Damaske, 2011. *For the family? How class and gender shape women’s work*. Oxford University Press.
- Dugan, A.G., & Barnes-Farrell, J. (2020). “Working mothers second shift, personal resources, and self-care” *Community, Work and Family*, 23(1), 62–79.
- Garey, A. I. (1999). *Weaving work and motherhood*. Temple University Press.
- Glaser, B., & Amselm, S. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory*. Aldine.
- Guendouzi, J. (2006). “The guilt thing”: Balancing domestic and professional roles. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 68(4), 901–9.
- Hartley, D. (2017). “Slavery to an assembly line is not a liberation from slavery to the kitchen sink”: Assessing social reproduction theory’s challenge to liberal-feminist and classical-Marxist paradigms. In G. Olson, D. Hartley, M. Horn, & R. Schmidt (Eds), *Beyond gender: An advanced introduction to futures of feminist and sexuality studies*. Routledge.
- Hartmann, H. (1979). The unhappy marriage of marxism and feminism: toward a more progressive union. *Capital and Class*, 3(2), 1–33.
- Hays, Sharon. 1996. *The cultural contradictions of motherhood*. Yale University Press.
- Herb, C. M. (2018). The rising cost of childcare in the U.S.: A reassessment of evidence. *Economics of Educational Review*, 64, 13–30.
- Hertz, R. (1999). Working to place family at the center of life: Dual-earner and single parent strategies. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, 562 (March): 16–31.
- Hertz, R. (2006). *Single by chance, mothers by choice: How women are choosing parenthood and creating the new American family*. Oxford University Press.
- Hertz, R., & Ferguson, F. (1997). Kinship strategies and self-sufficiency among single mothers by Choice: Post modern family ties. *Qualitative Sociology*, 20(2), 187–209.
- Hertz, R., & Ferguson, F. (1998). Only one pair of hands: Ways that single mothers stretch work and family resources. *Community, Work & Family*, 1(1): 13–37.
- Hertz, R., Rivas, A.M., & Jociles, M.I.R.J. (2016). Single mothers: A comparison between Spain and the United States. In Constance L. Shehan (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of family studies*, edited by Constance L. Shehan. Wiley-Black & Sons, Inc., 1–5.

- Hertz, R. (2020). Single mothers as bricoleurs: Crafting embryos and kin. *Journal of Family Issues*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X20910767>
- Holmes, S. (2018). The solo mum, feminism and the negotiation of 'choice.'" *Women's Studies International Forum*, 69, 40–48.
- Jociles, M.I., Rivas, A.M., & Poveda, D. (2012). Single parent on-line forums as learning communities. In S. Marques da Silva & P. Landri (eds) *Rethinking education ethnography: Researching on-line communities and interactions*, (pp. 33–44). Centro de Investigação e de Intervenção Educativas/Faculdade de Psicologia e de Ciências da Educação da Universidade do Porto.
- Jones, S. (2008). Exercising agency: becoming a single mother. *Marriage and Family Review*, 42(4), 35–61.
- Lowson, E., & Arber, S. (2014) Preparing, working, recovering: gendered experiences of night work among women and their families. *Gender, work and organization*, 21(3), 231–243.
- Lovejoy, M., & Stone, P. (2019). *Opting back in: What really happens when women go back to work*. University of California Press.
- Mannis, V. (1999). Single mothers by choice. *Family Relations*, 48(2), 121–128.
- Manzo, L. K., & Minello, A. (2020). Mothers, childcare duties and remote working under Covid-19 lockdown in Italy: cultivating communities of care. *Dialogues in Human Geography*, 10(2), 120–123.
- Moen, P., Fan, W., & Kelly, E.L. (2013). Team-level flexibility, work-home spill-over, and health behavior. *Social Science and Medicine*, 84, 69–79.
- Perry-Jenkins, M., & Gerstel, N. (2020). Work and family in the second decade of the 21st century. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 82(February), 420–453.
- Stone, P. (2007). *Opting out? Why women really quit careers and head home*. University of California Press.
- Van Gasse, D. & Mortelmans, D. (2020). With or without you – starting single-parent families: A qualitative study of how single parents by choice reorganize their lives to facilitate single parenthood from a life course perspective, *Journal of Family Issues*, 41(11), 2223–2248.
- Williams, J. (2000). *Unbending gender: Why family and work conflict and what to do about it*. Oxford University Press.
- Williams, J. C., Blair-Loy, M., & Berdahl, J. (2013). Cultural schemas, social class, and flexibility stigma. *Journal of Social Issues*, 69, 209–234.
- Weinraub, M., & Kaufman, R. (2019). Single parenthood. In Bornstein, M. H. (Ed), *Handbook of parenting: Vol. 3: Being and becoming a parent* (3rd Ed.). Routledge.
- Weinshenker, M. (2016). Non standard parental employment schedules and father involvement. *Community, Work and Family*, 19(4), 396–413.
- Young, M., & Schieman, S. (2018). Scaling back and finding flexibility: gender differences in parents' strategies to manage work-family conflict. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 80(1), 99–118.