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Introduction: Organizing the Family

This section of *Workplace*, which aims to address some of the many questions facing academic workers who have significant family commitments, began in the late 1990s as a conversation on E-grad, the Graduate Student Caucus email discussion list. On the list, many graduate students voiced their concerns about the difficulties of simultaneously fulfilling the demands of a humanities PhD program and the demands of family. The concerns were multiple and serious, ranging from the struggles of parents of young children to arrange affordable childcare on an adjunct or TA salary, the need for graduate student housing that accommodates family, the need for reasonable health benefits that can cover family members, and the unique pressures of the double-grad student marriage and job search. The online conversation continued and sharpened in a Graduate Student Caucus panel at the 2000 MLA in Washington DC, where several academics and graduate student activists joined to discuss these issues in greater depth.

In this section of *Workplace*, MLA panel presenters and activists Brian Kennedy and Andrew Gross write about their experiences representing the needs of graduate students with families in public institutions. Kennedy, as the president of the GPSF Student government at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, helped graduate student TAs and Fellows in the entire UNC system successfully lobby the State legislature for full tuition remission and for affordable family health benefits. Gross, as a member of the UAW-affiliated bargaining team that negotiated the system-wide contracts for graduate student TAs and tutors in the University of California, spoke about the successes of the current UC system contract as well as the goals the union will set for future contracts, including affordable dependant health insurance coverage and university-provided space for a graduate student child care cooperative. Both of these pieces provide a valuable record of the ways that graduate students with families have used organized collectives--both union and non-union--to negotiate for a fairer workplace.

Also in this section, Rachel Riedner, a recent PhD and union organizer from The George Washington University writes about the ways in which the traditional patriarchal division of labor within families continues to have a strong impact on the positions women, as well as men who are committed co-parents or primary caretakers within their families, hold in higher education. Riedner's analysis is strongly supported by the results of a nationwide faculty survey released in May 2002 by Pennsylvania State University's Robert Drago and Amy Varner. The "[Mapping Project](#)," an extension of the "[Faculty and Families Project](#)" uses data gathered from over 5000 academics to show that women on the tenure track are much more likely to delay starting a family and to have smaller families than their male colleagues. Additionally, Drago and Varner argue that many women who do have families to practice "bias avoidance"; they avoid taking tenure track jobs or avoid making use of family-friendly policies such as stopping the tenure clock because of a perception that family commitments are basically incompatible with the pervasive demands of academic jobs.

The fact that many women faculty members (as well as men who are committed co-parents or primary caretakers within the family) become marginalized into positions with lower pay, lower professional respect, and fewer opportunities for advancement is closely related to the issues NYU graduate student and union organizer Kitty Krupat discusses in her interview with Kathleen Iudicello in this section. As Krupat argues, the need for unions in "glamorous" and intellectual industries like publishing is as strong as the need in the manufacturing industries. Krupat discusses some of her own experiences as an organizer in forming a Women's Committee to specifically address the concerns of women workers in female intensive fields, work that expanded to include the concerns of workers of the LGBTQ community. Krupat, in her discussion of "the stirrings of scholar-activism that we are observing on some university campuses today" demonstrates that those who feel marginalized within the academic community and yet stay to do the hard work of organizing for change are by their lived experience reshaping the academy for the better.

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