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<http://chronicle.com/weekly/v49/i16/16a00801.htm>**Papers and Pampers****The challenges of attending a scholarly meeting, children in tow**

By ROBIN WILSON

New Orleans

As professors from the University of New Orleans laugh and talk over sandwiches, potato chips, and wine in a suite at the Hyatt Regency Hotel here, Danielle F. Wozniak sits in a darkened room next door with her shirt pulled up, nursing her year-old son to sleep.

"I want to wash my forehead," whines Ms. Wozniak's 3-year-old daughter, Eliana, who is supposed to be settling down on the king-size bed next to Ms. Wozniak's husband, Jeffrey C. Bendremer.

It's 8:15 on the opening night of the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association. After a nine-hour trip and a quick dinner with the family that left her with chocolate cake stuck to her corduroy pants, Ms. Wozniak, a research scientist at the University of Connecticut, is nearly as weary as her preschoolers. Unlike in years past, when she and Mr. Bendremer presented papers, the couple will be spectators at the meeting this year.

"I can produce a baby and a book in a year, but not a baby, a book, and a scholarly paper," says Ms. Wozniak, who this year published *They're All My Children: Foster Mothering in America* (New York University Press).

Before children, Ms. Wozniak would have been pleased to join a party like the one going on next door. Instead, she and Mr. Bendremer, an archaeologist with the Mohegan Tribe of Connecticut, are afraid the noise will keep their kids awake. As most of the other academics gathering here prepare for an evening of socializing with friends and colleagues, Ms. Wozniak and Mr. Bendremer lie whispering "it's night-night time" in their room overlooking the city.

Of the 5,000 academics who have come to the anthropology meeting here, the couple is among a tiny proportion attending with children. Almost all who brought kids are women. They steer unwieldy strollers through the publishers' exhibit hall, dig graham crackers out of their bags, hold toddlers close on the escalators, and hover near the door, infant in arms, during scholarly presentations.

To anthropologists, the presence of children here is more than just personal. After all, they study reproduction and the ways societies raise their young. The meeting features several sessions on childhood and parenting, including one called "Changing Visions of Mothering and Motherhood" and another on "Constructing the Future: Anthropology and the Global Politics of Childhood."

The anthropology association is more child-friendly than most academic organizations. Not only does it offer on-site day care at its annual meeting (a practice it began about a decade ago), it allows all participants to tack \$2 onto their \$130 meeting-registration fee to help defray the cost. Numbers for this year aren't available yet, but last year, 1,400 of the participants contributed the child-care surcharge. Still, day care is a pricey \$9 per hour for each child.

As a rule, only the largest academic organizations -- such as the Modern Language Association and the American Educational Research Association -- offer on-site day care at their annual meetings. Professors who bring children to the meetings of the American Psychological Association and the American Historical Association, for example, are on their own. Members of the National Women's Studies Association created a stir last year when they signed petitions complaining that off-site child care at the annual meeting was inconvenient.

Louise Lamphere, the immediate past president of the anthropological association, says it is important for the organization to offer child care, in part because its membership is now slightly more than half female. "The majority of students going to graduate school now are women. We're turning into a female-dominated profession," says Ms. Lamphere, a professor at the University of New Mexico. And the concern isn't just a practical one, she says. Anthropologists do fieldwork in places where children are accepted into their parents' public lives more than they are here, and it is "a political concern that women and men be able to integrate their family and professional roles," says Ms. Lamphere.

Over the course of the five-day meeting, a total of 30 babies, toddlers, and older children played in two rooms at the end of a hallway under the careful watch of women in red smocks who work for Accent on Children's Arrangements, a day-care company. Most of the academic mothers who brought their offspring to the meeting are breast-feeding or couldn't arrange to leave their children at home.

Some -- like Ms. Wozniak and Mr. Bendremer -- brought friends or au pairs to spell them, instead of using the conference day care. ("I don't ever leave them by themselves with people they, and I, don't know," says Ms. Wozniak.) Others brought nonacademic spouses along to care for little ones.

Even though children are officially welcome here, combining professional obligations with family life can be tricky. Before a scheduled job interview, a young anthropologist runs into her interviewers in the lobby. Typically, she would see the chance meeting as an opportunity to make a good impression. But she is with her husband and 1-year-old son, and can't help feeling as if she has been caught.

"I'm worried because I want a job and I don't want [motherhood] to be a factor that says I'm not committed to academia," says the woman, a lecturer at a research university who asks not to be named.

The Pitfalls

On the first full day of the conference, 5-year-old Ramona Rosenthal and her mother, Diane E. Weiner, trudge into the child-care center a little after 10 a.m. "I thought we'd be here an hour ago, but she wanted a bus ride," says Ms. Weiner, who adds that a miscommunication with the bus driver resulted in a 45-minute ride. "I'm trying to keep my sense of humor," says the assistant research professor with the College of Medicine at the University of California at Irvine.

Before leaving home, Ms. Weiner carefully chose the sessions she would attend according to how much day care she could afford. Now, she's already missed part of a session on reducing the incidence of diabetes. This evening, she and her daughter are going to have dinner with an anthropologist and his wife and little girl. "I'm gonna need a glass of wine," Ms. Weiner says, as Ramona settles in and begins drawing a red flower on blue

paper.

Next door, Christiana Bastos sneaks quietly into the baby-and-toddler room to check on 1-year-old Frederico. When she dropped him off earlier, she forgot to tell the baby sitters that he likes to rub a cloth diaper between his fingers. "It calms him down," she says. But she needn't have worried. The day-care providers have already located the treasured object.

Ms. Bastos, a senior research fellow at the University of Lisbon's Institute of Social Sciences, says Frederico's father, Jorge Rivera, is attending a meeting in France. Bringing Frederico to the anthropology meeting - - complete with an eight-hour plane ride -- "was the only solution" if she wanted to come.

Donna Harel Kirschner has a quick answer when asked what it is like bringing a toddler to an academic meeting: "It's hell." She has stopped by to check out the day-care rooms for 22-month-old Ella. While Ms. Kirschner talks in a corridor outside a meeting room, the little girl with big brown eyes takes glass teacups off a nearby hotel cart, upends her mother's tote bag, and tries to stick her fingers into an electrical outlet. Her favorite activity, though, is using her mother as a human jungle gym, climbing in and out of the purple-and-blue sling that Ms. Kirschner wears around her shoulder.

Ms. Kirschner, a graduate student in anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania, has just taken Ella to a session on medical anthropology. But not for long. "People want to see babies around, but they don't," says Ms. Kirschner, whose dissertation is on home schooling. "They don't want the low-grade baby noises in the background. Once there was a little peep, we had to get out of there."

As a result, anyone who tries to attend an academic meeting with children "is neither here nor there," Ms. Kirschner says, because she is acting as both a scholar and a mother and is stuck somewhere in between. Many mothers at the meeting believe that, in spite of their association's public commitment to parents here, there is still an unspoken hostility to scholars who bring children along. "There is a feeling you're not totally committed to the scholarly enterprise," Ms. Kirschner says.

To some professors at the meeting, the invitation to bring children sounds more like a punishment than an opportunity. It is nearly noon, and Daniel M. Goldstein, an assistant professor of anthropology at the College of the Holy Cross, has spotted a friend and his little girl in the hotel lobby. He stops to say hello, but makes it clear he is glad he has left his two young boys at home. "They are just terrible in public spaces, and I would spend all of my time running after them," he says. "I'm a parent 361 days of the year. This is work for me, but it is also social time," he adds, before hurrying off to lunch with a friend.

Is It Worth It?

At 1:30 p.m., Monica J. Casper arrives at the day-care center with her 1-year-old daughter, Mason. Both of them look bleary-eyed. They caught an 8 a.m. ferry to Seattle from their home on Whidbey Island, then two flights before arriving in New Orleans at 9 p.m. the night before. The two fell asleep in their hotel room shortly after arriving, but Mason woke at 4 a.m. and didn't fall back to sleep until three hours later. "Bad idea. Shouldn't have come," were Ms. Casper's thoughts.

Now she is faced with the prospect of leaving Mason with unknown adults. Mason has been in day care for only two months back home, and has spent most of her time with an undergraduate baby sitter and her mother, an associate professor of sociology on leave from the University of California at Santa Cruz.

The baby room is quiet for a while after Ms. Casper drops off Mason, but eventually there are sounds of wailing. As Ms. Casper stands outside the door, another mother comes out of the room. "Someone's crying for

her mommy," she reports. "What is she wearing?" Ms. Casper asks with a wince before acknowledging that those are her daughter's cries. She checks with a day-care worker before turning to leave. What will Ms. Casper do for the four-and-a-half hours that Mason is in day care? "Walk around in a daze," she predicts.

As the afternoon wears on, the older children are getting to know one another and having a good time. They play musical chairs and have relay races. When one father comes to pick up his 7-year-old girl and 3-year-old boy, they don't want to leave. "They'd be happy to stay in there all day, but the amount you have to spend is ungodly," says Jon, a visiting professor at a small liberal-arts college who doesn't want his last name used. He and his wife, an assistant professor at a university near his college, are paying \$18 an hour here for day care.

As Jon stops to chat, his kids take the opportunity to hit, kick, and tease each other. Clare silently points her finger at her brother, William, which makes him scream. "I'm going to give the whole root beer to William if you don't stop it," advises their weary father. He has brought along a can of Mug, which -- as every parent knows -- is a root beer without caffeine.

At 3:30 p.m., Susan Bibler Coutin, an assistant professor in the department of criminology, law, and society at Irvine, rushes to the day-care room to breast-feed 10-month-old Raphael. She's got a paper on migrant workers to deliver in half an hour. This is the third time she has been back to feed Raphael, who nurses every three hours. Ms. Coutin kneels on the floor, holding Raphael on her lap, but he is more interested in what the other babies in the room are doing. "I'm getting milk all over my shirt," laments Ms. Coutin.

She had her doubts about bringing Raphael. "You always wonder if you're violating some horrible norm if you show up with a baby," she says. Still, she's glad she did. "He took his first three steps last night in the hotel room."

Meanwhile, Ms. Casper has stopped back to check on Mason. Every time someone opens the door to the baby room, Mason cries. Ms. Casper decides to breast-feed Mason to calm her down, but she doesn't have much time. It is 3:50 p.m., and she is due to present a paper at a panel on women's health issues at 4. She makes it in time, but "my stomach was churning," says Ms. Casper.

Pizza Instead of Cocktails

As evening approaches, parents come to collect their children. With the day-care center closed at 6 p.m. each day, most of those with little ones skip the schmoozing with colleagues over cocktails and dinner.

"Lunches and coffees are great, but I'm not going to be doing the dinner thing unless he can throw food around," says Susan D. Mazur, who earned her Ph.D. this year from the University of California's Riverside campus and has four job interviews here. (She and her husband, Markus Stommen, and their 2-year-old, Nicholas, end up lounging in the hotel room over pizza that evening.)

What to feed kids, and where, is a chief concern among parents at a scholarly meeting. A meal out with young children can be particularly difficult, and sometimes expensive. The first thing Karen-Sue Taussig does after arriving at the meeting is to walk five blocks to a convenience store to buy bread, peanut butter, and jelly for her 4-year-old daughter, Emma. Ms. Taussig, an assistant professor of anthropology and medicine at the University of Minnesota's Twin Cities campus, doesn't think Emma will like the pizza that the day-care center plans to serve for lunch the next day.

One young couple contacted the Hyatt two months ago to ask for a crib, a refrigerator, and a microwave oven. They planned to bring along homemade bean-and-vegetable dishes for their 10-month-old son, André. But none of the appliances were in their room when they arrived. Joao G. Biehl, André's father and an assistant

professor at Princeton University, argued with the hotel over the \$50 it wanted to charge him for the microwave, a cost he says he wasn't told of in advance. Once everything arrived, the room was crowded - even more so because Mr. Biehl and his wife, Adriana Petryna, an assistant professor at the New School University, brought along a family friend to watch André. She slept on a cot in their room. "We couldn't afford a suite," reports Mr. Biehl.

In the end, in spite of the difficulties, some of the parents with children pronounce the meeting a success. Ms. Wozniak did choose a press she wants to work with on her next book project, an ethnographic study of female sexuality. And she gathered new material for courses she teaches on parent-child relations and the anthropology of gender and sexuality.

But having children along gave Ms. Wozniak and her husband an excuse to do more than work. "In the past, we have spent all day going to sessions and have seldom seen the cities we visited," she says. In New Orleans, the family visited the zoo and the aquarium, and took a boat ride on the Mississippi River. "The children's museum," she says, "will have to wait for another trip."

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