

**HOW CAN MEDIA SERVE AS A
CATALYST FOR CHANGE
FOR STUDENTS WITH
DEPENDANTS?**

Written by

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NOTE ON WORD COUNT

The requirements for this critical report are a total of 5000 words, with an allowance of 5% over or under this limit. The word count for this critical report is: 5031 words.

Please note that the following sections are excluded from the word count:

- Language and Representation Disclaimer
- How to Read My Thesis in Screenwriting Format
- Sluglines (Scene Headings)
- Action Blocks
- Table of Contents
- References

LANGUAGE AND REPRESENTATION DISCLAIMER

I use the term "student mother" to refer to all students with caregiving responsibilities, including not only mothers but also other caregivers. My goal is to use inclusive and non-prescriptive language, allowing each participant's unique story to be accurately represented. Although I use specific terms like "mother" for clarity and focus, I recognise that our study population is diverse and includes many student caregivers.

How to Read My Thesis in Screenwriting Format

I have chosen to present my thesis in the form of a screenplay inspired by my accompanyingP project—a short documentary film.

This format allows me to convey my experiences and research in a dynamic and engaging way. Here's a guide to understanding this format and how to read my thesis:

KEY ELEMENTS OF THE SCREENWRITING FORMAT

1. Sluglines (Scene Headings): These will guide you through different settings and times, giving you context about where and when each part of the thesis was written.

Purpose: Indicate the location and time of each scene.

Format: Written in all caps

Example: INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

2. Action Blocks: These blocks provide a vivid description of my surroundings and activities while I was writing my thesis, immersing you in my personal and academic life.

Purpose: Describe the visual and situational context of the scene.

Format: Written in present tense, providing a narrative of what is happening in the scene.

Example: In the living room, at the table, my newborn sleeps peacefully in the stroller

3. Narrative:

Purpose: Present the main text of the the critical report, conveying key ideas, analysis, and insights in a structured format.

Format: Centred left text

IMPORTANT NOTE

This screenplay does not include any images, as per the conventions of traditional screenwriting formats. Instead, the focus is on the text to convey all necessary details. The document uses the standard typeface for screenplays, Courier Prime.

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KEYWORDS CRITICAL REPORT

Student Parents, Documentaries, Challenges, Feminism, Inclusivity, Participatory Design, Intersectionality, Policies, Storytelling, Empowerment

FADE IN:

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

In the living room, at the table, my newborn sleeps peacefully in the stroller while my other two kids are busy making drawings. Children's songs play softly on the radio in the background, creating a warm and lively atmosphere.

ACT ONE: Introduction

WHAT?

The idea of an inclusive and empowering academic environment is appealing. It emphasises the values of diversity, equity, and human rights. However, despite the best intentions, inclusivity efforts can sometimes fail or be undermined. Despite decades of efforts to increase inclusion and access, student parents are often overlooked in policy and university spaces. They face stigma and a lack of support while trying to balance parenting

with academic demands.

The project addresses the significant challenges student parents, particularly mothers, face in higher education institutions. These challenges range from a lack of childcare support and inflexible schedules to unsupportive attitudes and financial difficulties. As noted by Yakaboski (2010), Brooks (2012), and Moreau (2014), these issues continue to undermine students' ability to complete their degrees.

The project intends to raise awareness of these barriers and amplify the voices of student parents themselves.

INT. UNIVERSITY LIBRARY - DAY

Sitting at a small table in front of a big window, I look out at the fountains in front of the University. Outside, children play and laugh while mothers chase after them to keep them dry on this cold day. The quiet library is a contrast to the lively scene outside.

WHY?

As a student mother who became a mother three times during my bachelor's, I have faced several challenges while balancing the responsibilities of being both a parent and a student. These barriers include finding affordable childcare, dealing with time constraints, and

managing the financial cost of higher education. These difficulties have influenced my approach to this project and have made me more empathetic towards other student parents facing similar challenges. Drawing from my own experiences and challenges, I believe in the transformative power of art and design to amplify diverse voices and foster positive social change.

My work provides a platform to share their stories, find support, and inspire others towards a more inclusive and equitable future. The research on student parents in higher education has found a significant need to raise awareness and initiate dialogue about their needs. The studies suggest that such measures could be instrumental in addressing the challenges faced by student parents in their academic lives.

Additionally, there is a need for visibility and advocacy for student parents to ensure their unique challenges are recognised and addressed.

Moreover, my participation as a Guest Speaker at the All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPG) on inequalities in Infant Feeding has reinforced my conviction that the challenges faced by student parents are not merely academic or personal but political. This experience highlighted policy-making's critical role in shaping the educational and social landscapes that student parents navigate.

HOW?

My project and this critical report examine the experiences of student mothers in higher education and explore how documentary filmmaking can be a powerful tool to support, empower, and unite them. I aim to create a visual archive that will

showcase the resilience and determination of these mothers as they balance family life and studies. By bringing these stories to light, the project seeks to inspire, empower, challenge societal perceptions, spark conversations, and advocate for necessary support.

INT. UNIVERSITY CLASSROOM - DAY

The classroom is filled with the talk of students getting ready for lunch. For me, it's a reminder to express milk. My breasts ache from hours without pumping. As I continue to write, I use my breast pump, knowing I still have an hour before I need to catch the train to be home before the nanny leaves.

ACT TWO: MAIN BODY

FINANCIAL CHALLENGES

Student mothers' challenges are just one manifestation of the broader pressures mothers face in contemporary society. The cost of living, particularly the expense of childcare, can make motherhood feel like "financial suicide" (Sky News. (2024a). mThe Government's Money Helper website says the average price of sending a child under two to nursery full-time

is £14,030 a year, leading many parents to take on debt to pay for childcare (Sky News, 2024a). This financial burden adds to the stress and difficulty of balancing parenthood with education or career.

There are many sources of support to alleviate this. The Government has a tool that helps parents find available options by asking questions about their situation (Childcare Choices, 2018). One of the most popular options is the Childcare Grant (GOV.UK, 2024a), through which eligible student parents can get 85% of their childcare costs. Unlike the Student Loan, another excellent resource for securing funding for living through student life, this grant does not have to be paid back. Similar to the Childcare Grant is the Parents' Learning Allowance (GOV.UK, 2024), which can provide students up to almost £2000 a year to help with learning costs. However, accessing financial aid for student parents can be challenging due to the restrictive eligibility criteria.

The most limiting requirement is the household income, which disqualifies student parents from receiving such aid. Even if a family earns above the threshold, they may still face difficulties in covering the cost of childcare and dealing with the higher cost of living.

This is something which I have personally experienced. My household income was above the qualifying thresholds for any Government Grant, so I could not benefit from this aid. However, I would still struggle to face childcare costs due to the higher cost of living.

Besides the financial burden, another source of pressure is the overwhelming expectations placed on mothers in today's society. There is still an assumption that once a woman becomes a mother, she must put everything else on hold to prioritise

childcare. This narrow view needs to recognise the diversity of motherhood experiences and the immense value that student and working mothers bring to their families, communities, and society.

Mothers in professional sports, for example, face enormous obstacles in balancing family and their athletic careers. Melanie Leupolz, a professional footballer, faced questions and doubts when she decided to start a family before retiring, with many suggesting waiting until after her career ended (Sky News, 2024b).

ADVOCACY AND REPRESENTATION

In 2024, it is unfortunate that motherhood is still seen as incompatible with education and career advancement, requiring continued advocacy for student parents and challenges to these assumptions. The pressure to choose between family and study/career persists, rooted in generalisations about motherhood that fail to account for individual circumstances and aspirations.

Elisabeth Perez states, "If mothers are the vehicles for the future, why am I the only mother-student enrolled in a graduate program that serves as an incubator for designers and technologists?" (Place, 2023).

Student mothers are often seen as distracted, less dedicated, and less capable than their peers without children (Sheppard, 2022). Their parenting responsibilities are viewed as a liability rather than a strength. These attitudes can result in discrimination in both obvious and subtle ways. As a result, student mothers may be overlooked for opportunities and given less demanding tasks. They may also face intrusive

inquiries or critical remarks regarding their personal lives and decisions (Crenshaw, 2021). Like many student mothers, I have faced the scepticism and inflexibility of academic culture. I have navigated the impossible balancing act of parenting and studying, constantly feeling like I am coming up short in both roles. I have faced the financial strain of affording childcare while living on a student budget. However, I have also experienced the transformative power of connecting with other student mothers and finding solidarity in our shared struggles. I have seen how small policy changes, like designated lactation spaces or flexible attendance policies, can make a difference in a student mother's ability to thrive.

Most importantly, I have understood that my experience as a student mother is not just a personal challenge but a political issue. The barriers I face are not just a result of my circumstances but of larger systems and attitudes that devalue and exclude parents, particularly mothers.

INT. HOME STUDIO - NIGHT

It's a quiet night in my home studio. Everyone else is asleep. I'm bundled up in layers of clothes and a blanket to stay warm. The bright light from my computer screen keeps me awake as I type, with a hot chocolate beside me. The room is silent except for the sound of my fingers tapping on the keyboard and the occasional sip from my mug.

DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKING AS ADVOCACY

This understanding has fueled my commitment to using documentary filmmaking as a tool for change. By amplifying the voices and experiences of student mothers, we can challenge the myths and misconceptions that hold us back. By showcasing our resilience and determination, we can inspire future aspiring student parents, specifically mothers, to advocate for more inclusive and equitable academic spaces. As a student and mother, I reflect on mothers' challenges in art and society. I am amazed by the countless projects, exhibitions, and works created by mother artists.

However, despite the progress made in the past, we still need to be where we should be. It is frustrating to think that this issue has been campaigned for decades, yet mothers are still excluded from society and the arts, even in arts schools. For example, the University of the Arts, Central Saint Martins, informed me verbally and on their website that they have designated well-being rooms or quiet spaces for breastfeeding mothers to express milk. However, when I searched for these spaces, I found they were unsuitable for breastfeeding. It is a small private space for expressing milk; this place has no windows, a room with no internet connection and where a cleaner comes once in a while. I tested this by simply leaving an empty chips sack. The most important thing to note is that the room unfortunately does not have a sink, which is a basic requirement according to UNICEF (www.unicef.org, n.d.).

The isolation I felt in this room was quite sad. When I explained this to people, their response was and still is, "At least you have a room to express milk now".

Ultimately, this project is deeply personal for me, but it is also about something much more significant. It is about recognising that the personal is political and that our individual struggles are connected to broader patterns of marginalisation. It is about using the power of storytelling to shift narratives and spark change.

This project is inspired by feminist activism from the 1980s, which is concerned with childcare and representation in higher education (Estes, 2011). Three critical studies from that time include Butler (1990), Hooks (1984), and Lorde (1984). Butler's work "Gender Trouble" is foundational in gender studies and feminist theory. It discusses how language constructs and reinforces gender norms and binary categories. In the context of my project, Butler's ideas support the notion of using the term "mother" as a symbolic representation of all students with caregiving responsibilities. This aligns with Butler's argument for deconstructing traditional gender categories to accommodate diverse experiences.

Despite progress made by feminist activists in the 1980s, student mothers today still struggle with inflexible policies, lack of resources, unsupportive attitudes, and invisibility in academic culture (Yakaboski, 2010; Brooks, 2012; Moreau, 2014; Dhillon & Francke, 2016). The research by Dhillon and Francke (2016) was particularly relevant to my project. Hence, I contacted Dr Kim Dhillon to request an interview, and she kindly agreed.

During our interview (held via Zoom meeting on March 18th) I posed several questions to her, and one of her responses stood out. Dr Dhillon expressed that she was not surprised that we are still advocating for improved support and emphasised the importance of continued advocacy.

We also discussed the challenges student mothers face, who encounter both attitudinal and practical obstacles that hinder their ability to balance their studies with their parenting responsibilities. One primary practical challenge is the lack of affordable and easily accessible childcare. The cost of full-time childcare for young children is often extremely expensive, exceeding the cost of tuition. This creates an impossible burden for student mothers who are already financially stretched. Many student mothers are forced to take on substantial debt, reduce their course load, or even pause their studies altogether to cope with these costs.

Even for those who can afford childcare or have access to it, the inflexibility of many childcare arrangements can pose challenges. For example, most nurseries do not accept babies under three months old, and no nurseries accept babies under six weeks old (Keren's Nursery, n.d.; Shine Childcare, 2017; Willows_Farm_Day_Nursery, n.d.).

However, as a student mother, you cannot take six weeks off from university without the benefit of maternity leave. In an academic year, parents and carers can take up to four weeks of authorised absence. Two weeks of absence are mandatory for those recently giving birth due to safety reasons (UAL, 2023). Therefore, you must either take a whole year off or rely on a family or friend's support system who can help you during those six weeks. This can be even more challenging for international student parents who often lack family support.

Moreover, in my experience, many university buildings lack basic amenities like lactation rooms, changing tables, or stroller accessibility. Campus events and programs are often held at times that are

impractical for parents, and few offer childcare. This can leave student mothers feeling excluded and unsupported.

Similarly, *Mothers in Ballet* (www.roh.org.uk, n.d.) by Eliza Schroeder, whom I was honoured to see at the Royal Opera House, was a profound experience. The film reveals the intricate balance required of ballet dancers who are mothers. This documentary resonates with themes in Suzanne Moore's article (Moore, 2024), which exposes the art world's neglect and under-appreciation of mother artists. Moore highlights how systemic barriers persist, preventing mothers from thriving in creative fields.

Additionally, my thinking has been shaped by the insights of several vital feminist thinkers and activists. Lola Olufemi, a prominent feminist writer, emphasises that feminism is an aspirational and forward-thinking political project. She suggests that feminism encourages us to imagine and strive for a future that is not yet realised, in which the impossible becomes possible. This idea has inspired me to view this project as a contribution to envisioning and creating a more equitable and inclusive future for student mothers. Roland Barnett, a philosopher of higher education, argues that we are witnessing a profound shift in how individuals understand themselves and their place in the world (Roland Barnett, 2004).

This insight has led me to consider how the experiences of student mothers reflect and contribute to this broader transformation of identity and self-understanding in contemporary society.

PARTICIPATORY DESIGN

These perspectives have shaped my participatory design philosophy, which

centres on collaborating directly with student mothers to amplify their voices, challenge stereotypes, and drive institutional and cultural change.

The project brief is focused on representing the experiences of student parents in higher education through media. The purpose is to empower, inspire, and promote positive change towards inclusivity and advocacy in academic communities.

Using the Double Diamond (Design Council, 2005) the project brief involves discovering the stories of student parents and defining the most authentic ways to communicate them. This process includes identifying challenges, establishing connections between stories, and developing and delivering a platform to showcase their experiences.

In my unit 9 project, I collected the 24 hours of student parents and created a publication from all these student parents and students with caring responsibilities. Two of them decided to collaborate with me further in my unit 10 project.

With unit 9, I experimented with different mediums such as publication, type, and ceramics to find a suitable medium to represent those stories of the 24 hours of students with caring responsibilities. Reaching the audience with these mediums was limited.

For the unit 10 project, I wanted to explore a straightforward medium to share on the media; I thought about film, photography and audio. However, I wanted to explore more than just audio or photography; I wanted the whole picture, so film was the best medium to hear and see who those student parents were.

The project does not aim to produce the best cinematic or quality film. Still, it

is to share their experience and to promote a positive and supportive environment for student parents. It is to inspire and create a community for current and future student parents. The audience is the student parents, future student parents and policymakers.

This project will use documentary filmmaking to capture and convey the stories of student mothers. It will follow a collaborative, participatory approach and engage student mothers directly in the creative process by blending empowering personal narratives.

The short documentary films produced is designed to raise awareness about the experiences and challenges of student mothers while also challenging the misconceptions and stereotypes surrounding motherhood and higher education. The film aims to be emotionally resonant and thought-provoking.

In feminist film theory, the concept of the "gaze" is critical, which refers to how viewers perceive characters. For my project, I presented these women in a way that subverts the traditional "male gaze" by avoiding objectification and portraying them as complete, nuanced individuals. This approach ensures the audience sees them as complex subjects with agency and dignity rather than objects within their educational and familial roles.

Intersectionality in feminist theory examines how various identities, such as gender, race, and socioeconomic status, influence experiences. Student mothers face challenges related to their gender, parental responsibilities, and student status. Applying an intersectional lens helps me understand these multiple identities and how they impact their academic experience. To achieve this, I have used the following techniques:

- I have conducted interviews to allow the mothers to share their stories in their own words
- I have structured the documentary to show both challenges and triumphs

The project's approach is centred around participatory design. This includes a workshop and feedback sessions where participants share their stories and discuss themes and messages. This approach aligns with the principles of Fourth Wave Feminism, which emphasises the value of marginalised voices and the importance of inclusive, grassroots knowledge production (Munro, 2013). It also draws on the traditions of feminist documentary filmmaking, which has long sought to challenge hierarchical modes of representation and amplify the voices of women and other underrepresented groups (Wang, 2020).

Incorporating participatory design into this project has proven to be a vital strategy in ensuring that the content reflects the actual experiences of student mothers and is directly beneficial and empowering to them. This methodology engages the participants actively in the creation process, allowing them to have a say in how their stories are portrayed, thus fostering a deep sense of ownership and contribution. For instance, during the creative workshop and interviews, student mothers were directly involved in discussing themes and shaping the narrative, ensuring their perspectives were accurately and respectfully integrated. This collaborative approach enriches the content and empowers the participants, who see their input valued and their experiences validated.

Furthermore, such an inclusive design

process encourages sustained engagement from the participants, who will likely continue advocating for the changes discussed in the documentary. Engaging student mothers and representing their stories on screen raises important ethical considerations that the project navigates carefully. At this is a commitment to informed consent, confidentiality, and participant well-being. All student mothers involved in the project were fully briefed on the film's goals, process, and potential impacts. They could ask questions, raise concerns, and set boundaries around their participation. Consent was an ongoing dialogue, with participants having the right to withdraw or modify their involvement at any stage. Care was taken to protect the participants and their families' privacy and safety. The editing process also involved participant review and approval to ensure they felt reasonable and accurately represented.

INT. UNIVERSITY LIBRARY - DAY

Sitting at a desk with small plastic walls on the left and right, and a solid wall in front of me, I find the perfect place to concentrate. This spot, tucked away on the third floor of the university library, offers no distractions. When I choose to sit here, I don't need to watch the clock, knowing my husband is with the kids all day to give me as much time as I need to write.

DOCUMENTARY CONTENT AND THEMES

The final characters of my documentary are:

- **Chui Man Chan:**
BA Textile Design year 3
Age 31
One child
International student
Married
- **Tweary Peaster:**
Architecture M Arch year 2
Age 26
One child
Single mother
- **Poppy Kanu:**
BA Graphic Communication Design
Year 2
Age 22
Expecting her first child.
Married.
- **Ruby Gamman:**
BA in
Graphic Communication Design
Alumni, Class of 2023,
Age 27
One child lives with a partner.
- **Ahmira Calandra Achode:**
Age 16
She grew up with her dad as a
student parent

The documentary film highlights the importance of time management for student parents. During the interviews, participants emphasised the need to manage their time carefully, a strategy they referred to as "clock watching." The participants agreed that balancing these roles is not only feasible with the right skills but also requires resilience and determination. The name of the documentary is inspired by this concept of clock watching and is titled "Clock Watching: Mothers in Academia"

The documentary aims to convey a message of empowerment and feasibility, encapsulating the essence of their daily reality. I initially had a set of written questions prepared during the interview process. However, I soon realised that relying solely on those notes prevented me from fully connecting with the person before me. To address this, I decided to change my approach. I put aside my notes and consciously looked directly at the person, made eye contact, and engaged in a more natural conversation as if no camera equipment were present. This shift in approach helped the interviewee feel significantly more relaxed during the interview. To further increase their comfort level, I informed the participants that they could look into the camera, at me, or anywhere they preferred during the interview. I set up the equipment during the workshop and left it in place, allowing the participants to become accustomed to its presence.

Furthermore, meeting the participants without equipment helped us get to know each other better, fostering a sense of familiarity and trust. In preparation for the interviews, I gave the participants a paper listing the topics I wanted to discuss. This gave them time to reflect on the questions and formulate their thoughts. I emphasised that they should speak from the heart, as their stories were precious and could help other student parents. I reassured them that their stories were important and genuinely wanted them to feel comfortable sharing their experiences.

Using these strategies, I aimed to create an environment where the participants felt at ease and could openly share their narratives without feeling constrained or intimidated by the interview process or equipment. What was important for me was that the narrative

style allowed the characters to share their stories in their own words. I ensured that they had an understanding of what was happening, why I had chosen to shoot them in that position or in that environment, and also important to me that they had a look at the camera position, so before starting to start the recording, I sat in the seat where they supposed to be site to be interviewed and asked the interviewee to see if they liked how the camera would frame them. And together, we adjusted the position of the light and seat or even the environment. I did this as a natural thing to do. I set myself in their shoes, and if I were them, I would be much more comfortable, aware, and in control of what was happening.

INT. STUDIO AT HOME - DAY

The studio is filled with sunlight. I can hear my children's laughter and occasional cries drifting up from downstairs, but I refuse to let anything distract me. I remind myself that my work is for their future, and I re-focus on my project.

CREATIVE WORKSHOP

Another very crucial aspect of my unit 10 work is the creative workshop I held during the easter break at university; the aim was to build a community for student parents with their families and to create art to express their experiences; it was

exciting because it showed that there is a need to form community and come together and going through this journey together, the student felt supported they all wished those workshops existed already, I created the collage workshop for the student parents to offer a safe space to share, learn, and inspire one another, and also because I believe that collage is a powerful medium that allows to blend textures, colours, and images to create something new and personal. We explored themes such as Identity and Transformation, Balancing Acts and Redefining Motherhood. This workshop sparked fascinating and individual conversations. Most were about the importance of community and sharing our stories to inspire. From listening to the lived experiences of the student parents who attended the workshop, I learned that one of the words that came up the most was time management and finding the right personal balance. This workshop has been crucial in many aspects, from discovering my passion for holding creative workshops to supporting, connecting, inspiring and sparking conversations about the topic. Another aspect was the genuine feeling of belonging, connecting with this community, and creating a positive experience of being a student parent.

NARRATIVE AND AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

My focus for the short documentary film is on portraying these women as active agents in their lives. Moreover, I want to avoid framing them solely as victims of their circumstances. I want to highlight their decision-making, their educational pursuits, and the proactive steps they take to manage their responsibilities. This empowers the student mothers and inspires the audience. I want the audience to feel empowered and inspired and invite

empathy and understanding.

Different audience segments will bring their perspectives and biases to my film. For instance, people who have experienced parenting while in school may relate directly to the challenges shown, whereas others may have never considered these challenges before. I use feminist film theory to anticipate these varied reactions and craft the narrative to engage these diverse viewpoints thoughtfully. This documentary could be used as an educational tool that provides insights into the lives of student mothers.

This educational approach can help shift the audience from mere sympathy to a more profound, informed empathy. I want to encourage the viewers to think critically about the issues presented in the film. This is done through questions posed by the narrator (me) and the interviewees themselves, inviting the audience to reflect on how they perceive motherhood and education.

Based on my personal experience and involvement in this project, I want to convey the message that it is possible to pursue your studies while also having a family. It is achievable to follow your passion and maintain your educational journey. Women should take charge of their narratives and share them with those who are emotionally affected. The media has the power to drive change, awaken, and influence minds and that is what this project is about

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

In my bedroom, my newborn and second child are asleep beside me. My husband is reading quietly. I am lying on the edge of the bed, with my MacBook on my lap, surrounded by the peaceful atmosphere as I write a small piece of the critical report.

ACT THREE: LIMITATION AND FUTURE WORK

This short documentary film could be part of the UAL advertisement. It could go on the UAL website to promote access and inclusivity for future and current student parents. It could be in the archives of UAL and other universities. Because we need voices, we need the stories of students to promote and inspire future students. This is what my values are as a designer: supporting others, finding creative solutions to inspire change, promoting inclusivity and sharing stories to impact people's lives for an exciting and better future.

Unfortunately, due to the time constraints of this project, I could not experiment much further. Given more time to work on this project, I would like to experiment more with audio recordings, interviews, and film documentaries.

My ultimate goal is to create an online podcast that provides a platform for

student parents to share their experiences, connect with each other, and support each other.

INT. ST ALBANS LIBRARY - MORNING

In the back of St Albans Library, I hear children singing as the morning reading session begins. My kids are there too, with my husband. While they enjoy the session, I sit at a quiet desk, hoping my newborn stays asleep in her stroller beside me. They plan to walk through the streets of St Albans after the reading, waiting for me to finish so we can have lunch together. I focus on writing, appreciating the precious time I have in this peaceful corner of the library.

ACT FOUR: CONCLUSION

ADVOCACY, ETHICAL OBLIGATIONS, AND REDEFINING THE STUDENT

When I advocated for the installation of baby changing stations and breastfeeding accommodations on campus, I realised how these basic facilities can significantly improve the learning and participation of student mothers. Even small policy changes can have a meaningful impact. On the other hand, when I revealed my

pregnancy, being asked if I planned to take time off or defer my studies reinforced the notion that motherhood is viewed as an obstacle to academic progress rather than a valuable asset. Therefore, inclusive resources and representation are essential. Universities are ethically obligated to craft policies and a culture that welcomes student parents and values their life experiences. This includes promoting gender equity and socioeconomic mobility and supporting mothers' access to education. Institutions should strive to reflect the diversity of the real world. This requires fundamentally redefining our understanding of who a student is and what they need to succeed. It means challenging the archetype of the young, single learner and recognising that students come from all walks of life with a range of identities, responsibilities, and experiences.

For student mothers, this redefinition is particularly crucial. It means valuing the skills and perspectives they bring as parents and caregivers - skills like time management, empathy, multitasking, and resilience. It means understanding that their family commitments are not distractions from their education but central parts of their lives and identities.

Redefining the student in this way is not just about accommodating differences but about enriching the educational experience for everyone. Student mothers' insights and experiences can contribute valuable diversity of thought to classroom discussions and research projects. Their presence can create a more inclusive, relatable, and socially engaged academic culture.

Despite all the progress made so far, there are still many challenges. Why are we still in this situation despite the efforts made by women who have fought for

their rights, are now in leadership positions, and have accomplished significant work? Is it because we forget how difficult it is once we are no longer in that phase of life? Is it because we are told that there are not many people like us, so it is not worth thinking about? Or is it simply because people do not care about others?

Working on this project was a journey of self-discovery and personal growth. The impact of this work is exemplified by the words of Poppy Kanu, a student mother who shared her story in the short documentary film. During one of her first interviews with me, Poppy expressed, "The project's success is not measured in conventional metrics, but rather in its transformative effect on individuals and communities. The value of being seen, heard, and affirmed through these interactions cannot be overstated."

Engaging with the project empowers, validates, and inspires Poppy, me, and the other student mothers involved.

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

The garden is warm and sunny. Kids are bouncing on the trampoline, laughing and having fun. My newborn sleeps in the stroller nearby, and my dog sits next to me, enjoying the sun and hoping for a pat.

ACT FIVE:

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to the other student parents who supported me throughout this journey, especially Lorraine Gamman, a design professor at the Design Against Crime Research Centre at Central Saint Martins, for helping me when I was in the middle of my activism and feeling hopeless in 2023 because I was facing barriers as a student parent. She approached me and shared with me her own story and sharing with me a crucial article, "The C-Word: Motherhood, Activism, Art, and Childcare" She supported and advised me to channel my anger and sadness into a creative process. This led to the formation of the "baby change making" exhibition at Central Saint Martins, which I co-curated and co-created with Ruby Gamman.

I was also invited to the APPG at the House of Parliament to share my experience, advocate, and achieve many positive outcomes such as connecting with other student parents and changing university policies to provide better support for student parents.

However, the most important thing for me as a student parent has been finding

strength and support in other student parents like Ruby Gamman, who was a year ahead of me. This shows how important it is to share stories of our experiences. Unfortunately, the idea of a "village" to help raise children is not as prevalent in today's society as it once was. But by sharing our stories, we can build the support network we need.

FADE OUT.

THE END

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