



*Charity Thomann, MA, MAT*

**Application to Internship – When Geography Does Matter**  
Feminist Parenthood Column

by Charity Thomann  
Clinical Psychology PhD Student, Fielding Graduate University

“You will likely need to move for an internship,” was the preparatory advice shared with my cohort during orientation. At the time, my girls were in preschool and elementary school, and we had just moved to California in search of a diverse space where our multiethnic and religiously diverse family might thrive. As an echoing wishful thought, for me, *likely* also meant I might not need to move. My wishful thinking ended as I prepared to apply to more than the recommended 15 internship sites across the United States. The possibility of family separation and, in our current political climate, the safety of my children who identify as people of color and members of a religious minority group played a heavy role in where I applied and the programs that I ranked.

The literature that explores the experiences of mothers of diverse children participating in the match processes is almost non-existent. LaFollete (2016) noted in her dissertation that as the field of clinical psychology begins to take more of a social justice approach in examining power structures that disenfranchises individuals, we must also examine the match process beyond a supply and demand approach. Asked to choose between their studies and families, mothers and their children are uniquely disenfranchised by the match process (LaFollete, 2016). After interviewing eight women, LaFollete found when mothers geographically limited internship applications they experienced microaggressions framed as career advice or were directly shamed for risking their institution’s reputation and accreditation.

While mothers are urged to not limit themselves geographically, LaFollete (2016) also found that mothers were commonly left to figure it out on their own and told “it is only a year.” This is disheartening for a field that is keenly aware of the enormous amount of cognitive and social development that happens in the year of a child. The platitude also ignores the knowledge in our field about the effects of parental separation and loss of support systems both for the student and her children. This additionally overlooks the more logistical considerations such as housing, childcare, schooling, afterschool activities, and other factors that must be considered on a very limited intern stipend.

There are differences in perceived geographic safety that mothers of ethnically diverse children must also consider (Hazelbaker & Mistry, 2021). As a Muslim, I have learned there is no geographic location that will keep my children safe from microaggressions or systemic bias. In rural Missouri, my older daughter ate cheese sandwiches for a week before I was alerted that pork was frequently the only option on the school lunch menu. In California, my daughter was “teased” and called a terrorist by another child. The microaggression prompted her to complete a class project comparing ideologies of Muslims and terrorists. She was only in seventh grade. However, geography does hint where they may feel more welcomed, and where they might find social connection and support (Lowenhaupt et. al, 2021). With this realization in mind, I applied to many internships near my home, even if they did not align with my career goals or would require substantial driving time. I also consulted my daughters where they might like to live for a year if I needed to move. Based on their input I applied for internships where my children would have social support from extended family or friends, and geographic areas where they would not be the only ethnically diverse children in their classes.

I did match to an APA accredited program that aligned with my career goals. While not near our home in California, my site is near my parents' home in Missouri. As we participated in back-to-school activities, my younger daughter asked her new school principal about lunch and asked her teacher if anyone else spoke Arabic. My eldest daughter has also completed an informal demographic census, determining where she might fit in and actively weighs what to disclose to classmates and teachers. Social support from their grandparents and cousins helps, and my spouse does his best to visit as often and as long as possible.

Wilhelmi et al. (2019) investigates institutional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal needs. However, further research needs to explore how student mothers might be supported when geography does matter. It helped that my faculty advisor and more senior classmates were also mothers. I understood there was no “right” path, and I applied what I learned in my program to give my children a sense of control in a seemingly uncontrollable experience of being separated from their father and community. I also cognitively reframed our experience (e.g. I asked them “Where shall we go on our “girls only” adventure). During the application process, I highly ranked sites that included local school district information in interview invitations, provided access to speak with parent interns, openly discussed life-work balance as a parent intern, offered clear DEI support, and validated the upcoming difficulty and stress that would occur due to family and community separation.

Rather than expecting mothers to “figure it out,” mothers need systemic support from their training programs and internship sites during the application process (Wilhelmi et. al., 2019). In

a wishful thinking paradigm, there would be a weight in the match formula of National Matching Service (NMS) for student parents, just as there is for partners entering the match together. Mothers applying for internship need to be viewed beyond a peg that fills an open slot in the match process. They need to be viewed and supported as humans that live within a contextualized system so that their career aspirations are better supported.

*Note:* The Feminist Parenthood Column is edited by the Feminist Parenthood Committee. If you would like to submit, please email Lauren Mizock, PhD at [lmizock@fielding.edu](mailto:lmizock@fielding.edu).

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