

THE COLLEGE STUDENT AS MOTHER: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL
EXAMINATION OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENT EXPERIENCES

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ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION PROJECT: The College Student as Mother: A Phenomenological

Examination of Community College Student Experiences

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The purpose of this study is to identify how low-SES women who are providing primary childcare for children ages 0-10 experience higher education. In-depth phenomenological interviewing combined with document analysis were the methods utilized. This exploration used a purposive/ snowball sample of low-SES mothers who were making satisfactory progress toward a degree. Participants were screened using the following inclusion criteria: enrolled at least half-time, degree-seeking, minimum 2.5 G.P.A., Pell eligible and first-generation, had one or more children ages 0-10 living in the home. There were seven total participants in the study. Five themes emerged from the participant data: support systems, lack of college preparation, family as a priority, education as self-fulfillment, and balance.

The themes were consistent with the findings in the literature. Each of the participants had full and busy lives with multiple responsibilities necessitating, for the most part, a part-time schedule as a student. None of them had entered community college directly out of high school and if they had attempted higher education immediately following high school at another

institution, they were unsuccessful.

Independent students are most clearly different from their dependent counterparts in their family and work responsibilities and this was found to be absolutely true for the participants in this study whose primary responsibility was to their family and that their pursuit of higher education was something they were doing to further their family's future. While participants indicated that education was partially for self-fulfillment, they viewed this as an almost unexpected positive side effect of the path to a better job, higher income and benefits to themselves and their children. The "good mother—bad mother" dualism that is a part of our cultural script was evident in the self-sacrificing long-term goals and daily routines of the participants.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to husband, best friend and partner in life, Jeremy Erk, who supported me from beginning to end and who made great sacrifices so that I could pursue my dream. I also dedicate this dissertation to my daughters, Faith and Lillian, who are growing each day into talented young women and who inspire every achievement I accomplish, and to my parents whose support and assistance with childcare made all of this possible

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
DEDICATION	vii
Table of Contents	viii
CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION	1
Problem Studied	3
Significance of the Problem	4
Research Questions	6
Conceptual Framework	6
Subjectivity Statement	7
Definition of Terms	10
Summary	10
CHAPTER TWO Literature Review	12
Socioeconomic Status	12
Profile of Low Socioeconomic People	18
Summary of low SES status.....	21
College Factors	22
Summary of higher education literature.	27

Education and Low-Income Mothers.....	27
Summary of education and low-income mothers.	29
Chapter Two Summary	29
CHAPTER THREE Methods	31
Selection of Participants	34
Informed Consent	37
Data Gathering Procedures	37
Tools and Procedures	38
Data Analysis.....	38
Limitations of the Study	40
Summary.....	41
CHAPTER FOUR RESEARCH FINDINGS.....	42
Profile #1 - Whitney	42
Profile #2 - Gail	46
Profile #3 - Jessica.....	51
Profile #4 - Kim.....	57
Profile #5 - Haley.....	62
Profile #6 Sarah.....	66
Profile #7 – Robin.....	73
Themes	78
Summary.....	87
CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	88

Expectations and Reflections 88

Conclusions..... 90

Implications 93

Recommendations 95

Summary..... 97

References 98

Appendix A 105

Appendix B 106

Appendix C . Informed Consent Form 108

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Open access to education is imperative to a fair and equitable society (Freire, 1997; 2002, hooks, 1994). Community colleges exist to actualize that vision. Uniquely American, open door community colleges became popular across the country in the 1960s as part of a social movement for open access to higher education (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Community colleges are intended to be open admissions, affordable, offer vocational and technical training and offer transferable credit to four-year institutions as well. The common perception of community college students is that they are less prepared or less capable than their four-year counterparts (Becker, Krodel, & Tucker, 2009). In many cases, community college students have received less college preparation and are more likely to come from minority and low-socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Becker, et al., 2009). The open access mission positions the community college to serve as the great educational equalizer to which Freire (2002) alludes. As a direct result of the open access mission, the institution does not have the control over the characteristics of its student population that other institutions do. Therefore, community colleges disproportionately serve students with learning disabilities, those who need remedial instruction, and those who qualify for federal financial aid.

Community college students face significant barriers to academic success within the institution of higher education (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Becker, et al., 2009). By design, community colleges attract and open their doors to students who require more remediation, come from a low socioeconomic status, and are non-traditionally aged. Nationally, the majority (57%)

of community college students are women (CSSE, 2009). At the Community College, the system in Indiana, 46.2% of students are first-generation and while 42% had one or more dependent children, only 25.2% were married (Ivy Tech Community College, 2010). Therefore, a significant number of students enrolled in community college face multiple and significant barriers to academic success, not the least of which is single parenthood.

Single mothers enrolled in college face significant barriers, in addition to the barriers their peers face, to success in college including access to quality, affordable childcare. The barriers indicate that women of low socioeconomic status who are raising children are unable or less likely to pursue higher education while their more affluent counterparts can rely on assistance from family (Brown & Amankwaa, 2007). More than 67% of students enrolled at this community college are Pell eligible, meaning that they meet the federal guidelines for living in poverty and qualify for federal financial aid assistance in the form of grants (A. Roha, personal communication, February 1, 2012). Further, 37.7% are both Pell eligible and first generation, meaning that they are the first person in their family to go to college.

Research suggests that low SES students face a virtual minefield in navigating the middle class system of higher education (Becker, et al., 2009). Often trapped in the tyranny of the moment, students living in poverty are in constant survival mode in a world that operates on formal structure and long-term planning. Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs suggests that in this constant state of survival, students would not be able to attain higher levels of thinking required to complete a college education.

Despite these astronomical odds, females are graduating at disproportionately higher rates than men at the Community College (Ivy Tech Community College, 2010). Caring for a child or children is often perceived as a full-time job in and of itself, and the perceived societal

expectations of mothers lead to significant feelings of isolation and guilt towards pursuing a college education (Brown & Ankwaa, 2007; Warren, 2007). Social mobility and the acquisition of the American dream are core components of the community college mission (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Capturing the lived experiences of those who have succeeded in the pursuit of these ideals while facing significant obstacles is critical to the support of this mission.

Formal education, and specifically higher education, has an ingrained culture of silencing the voices of those marginalized by poverty and those who do not fit in the mold of the traditional student (Freire, 1997; 2002, hooks, 1994). Classroom structure is based on middle-class values and methods of communication where silence and obedience are valued. Outbursts of laughter, storytelling, and interruptions of others' speech with comments or questions are a daily part of communications in poverty culture (Payne, 1996) . Students in poverty enter the classroom in a learning deficit because in order to communicate effectively, they must learn and use a second language, the language of the dominant society.

Problem Studied

This study will focus on the relationship between childrearing and academic success by highlighting the strategies utilized by academically successful student mothers to overcome the unique barriers that they face on a community college campus in a small city in the Midwest. Student success will be defined as satisfactory progress toward graduation in a degree-seeking program. Student success is a field of study in its own right, with a wealth of data indicating what does or does not predict the success of a student.

According to the 2008 CSSE survey, 41% of community college students are male and 59% are female, confirming that the majority of community college students are female. Community college students, on a national level, also face specific barriers to academic success

and timely completion of a degree: 33% are first-generation college students, 57% work 21 or more hours per week, 23% care for dependents between 1 and 10 hours per week and 69% of students spend between 1 and five hours per week commuting to and from class. It is the purpose of this study to identify the essence of the experience of academically successful low-SES mothers enrolled in community college.

While there is significant research to indicate that these students are not likely to succeed in college and/or incapable of critical thought and analysis, there are few studies that capture the experiences of the women who transcend these obstacles to become successful in their pursuit of a college education and how this success affects their lives. Thus, the motivation of this research is to further explore under investigated areas of poverty and women's lives, with a focus on the impact of childrearing on the community college experience. By providing a more thorough examination of the experiences of women living in poverty, raising children and going to college we can more accurately develop our understanding of the impact of childrearing on low SES college students' experiences.

Significance of the Problem

Access to education is an area of great concern nationally. The purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of how members of the identified population experience higher education. Through this process a phenomenological approach will be used to guide research by looking specifically at the perceptions of women who are living this experience order to better understand the worldview of this population through using their own voices and stories. By interviewing low SES college students who are mothers, I seek to strengthen current poverty research in higher education by increasing the exposure, awareness and understanding of higher

education administrators and policy makers to the barriers and successes of women living in poverty and succeeding in college.

Low-SES parents are less likely to encourage their children to explore and enhance creativity, and they are more likely to emphasize behavioral characteristics like cleanliness and obedience, which is attributed to having a low level of authority within their own workplace (Berk, 2003; Kerbo, 1991; Payne, 2005; 2001). Working class parents or parents living in poverty often have little control over their own lives and rarely have the opportunity to think independently or work with abstract ideas or symbols (Kerbo, 1991; Payne, 1995, 2005; 2001; Ehrenreich, 2001). Living in poverty is living in the tyranny of the moment, moving from crisis to crisis with little room for long-term planning or goal-setting.

Much has been written across several fields of study regarding socioeconomic status and the impact it has on an individual's chance at success in America. Pern and Thomas (2008) found that articles that examined the issues of social class or SES and its impact on student success had been examined within the fields of psychology, sociology, economics, and education. In their four-layer conceptual model of student success based on the research of multiple disciplines, "the conceptual model assumes that student success is influenced by multiple layers of context, including the internal context, the family context, the school context, and the broader social, economic, and political context" (Pern & Thomas, 2008, p. 32).

By utilizing the phenomenological interview technique I seek to minimize the marginalization of women in poverty by capturing a rich description of their lived experiences. Furthermore, by examining the lived experiences of the women in this study, I have gained a rich insight into their personal successes and opinions.

Research Questions

The research questions that will help to frame this study include:

1. Describe the lived experience of community college students who are mothers with low socioeconomic status.
2. What does success in higher education mean to a mother of low socioeconomic status who lives that experience?

Conceptual Framework

In this study, I examined the perceptions of women raising children and pursuing an associate's degree at the Sunnydale campus of Whedon Community College campus (pseudonym). Through qualitative, phenomenological interviewing of these students, I sought to capture the lived experiences of their successes and their struggles in the pursuit of higher education. Field observations in the women's classrooms helped me to create portraits of the success strategies and daily struggles of this group of women.

This study was deeply grounded in real experiences of people in the identified population. The in-depth, phenomenological approach to framework served to derive meaning from the context of people's lives, their worldviews and the events they describe or experience (Seidman, 2006; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). My understanding of this worldview is grounded in personal experience from my childhood grounded in working class values in a post-manufacturing economy. This personal perspective and understanding was essential to capturing that experience accurately from the women in my study.

While the demographics of the campus in this study may not be formally identified as that of abject poverty, it is largely comprised of low-SES students. Socioeconomic status (SES) impacts many facets of life, all of which can impact an individual's access and success in higher

education in the United States. Individuals in low-SES families have fewer resources in health, mentoring, income, role modeling and support systems that provide the necessary acumen to succeed in higher education (Payne, 1996; 2005; Kerbo, 1991; Berk, 2003).

Subjectivity Statement

I am a working professional in the area of Student Life at the campus of study. My educational background includes undergraduate work in English Literature and Women's Studies. I hold a master's degree in Adult and Community Education from Ball State University and am currently pursuing an Ed.D. from the same institution in Adult, Higher and Community Education. Much of my research has focused on low socioeconomic status and its impact on access and success in higher education. I am also a student and the mother of two small children.

I was raised in a working class home and never wanted for anything. We had what we needed and it was understood that I would go to college from the time I was in kindergarten. I went to public school in a rural county and was in the middle, socioeconomically, of my peers during my K-12 education. I was aware that we were not poor, and we were not rich. It was my parents' expectation that I would live at home while in college and that they would support my education financially, while I also held a job.

I know now from my research that my parents valued higher education in the abstract, but they lacked understanding of the traditional college experience in practice. This is indicative of their socioeconomic status and life experiences. My father went to a Vocational Technical College while working two jobs directly out of high school. My mother became pregnant with me during her junior year of high school and also went to the Vocational Technical College where she met my father, who later adopted me.

I did not understand what it was like to live in poverty, and I may never have understood if I had not been evicted from my parents' home at age 17. I was neither pregnant nor a juvenile delinquent; however, my mother's untreated mental illness caused her to be erratic and abusive. One particular day I reached my breaking point. I grabbed my car keys and my purse and left. I learned more about poverty in the subsequent three days than I learned from all of my academic studies of class constructs and the impact of socioeconomic status during my formal education. I had one work uniform in my car and I went to the Laundromat to wash it, so that I could go to work the next day. I slept in my car. I washed up and brushed my teeth in the Village Pantry bathroom. It made me feel like scum. It made me realize that I was alone in the world, and my future depended on my own determination to succeed.

I was filled with a blinding rage at my lot in life in comparison to my peers who had also been admitted to Ball State University. Like my peers, I waitressed when I was not in class. Unlike them, I worked for basic necessities, not beer money and concerts.

I failed at my first semester of college and spent some time scraping by as a full-time waitress and becoming increasingly aware that education was my only way out of that life. I worked two jobs, one on second shift and one on third shift and I went to class during the day. One morning, after three days with no sleep, I sat in my English class and hallucinated from sleep deprivation. I left class, my car broke down, and I had a hysterical meltdown and ultimately withdrew from all classes.

I also met and married my husband of 15 years during this first year, thus becoming a non-traditional student. My separation from my peers and the experiences that I had with other women who were career waitresses raising children, some trying to pursue an education are what initially sparked my interest in this research topic. Yet, it was not until I was a college graduate,

pregnant, working two jobs and still struggling even with some public assistance that it became a burning issue. It remained a burning issue as I worked on my master's degree while caring for an infant and beginning my doctoral studies with a three-year-old child and a new infant.

I currently work with students in their co-curricular experiences as the Regional Director for Student Life. I see many students who are mothers struggling, but somehow managing to be successful in their academic endeavors. My interactions with students are outside of the classroom, which gives me a different perspective than that of a faculty member. This role is more focused on their lives and development rather than required classroom competencies.

I bring to this research project some basic assumptions about poverty and the middle class system of higher education. I will make an effort to extrapolate these assumptions from data collection and analysis as I interview women of low socioeconomic status who are raising children and going to college.

- Living in poverty is an almost constant state of crisis.
- Being successful in a college environment generally requires masking the fact that you live in poverty from your peers and your professors because it is not the social norm. The professors are typically from a middle class background and simply do not understand or become uncomfortable with the topic of the constant pressures and anxiety associated with navigating poverty while pursuing an education
- Living in poverty is exhausting and induces anger, particularly when you are working to better yourself and feel that you are fighting an unceasing uphill battle.

I also bring to this study one basic assumption about being a wife and mother while pursuing an education:

- There is a constant guilt associated with not being able to meet societal expectations for all of these roles.

Definition of Terms

For the sake of this study, a college student is defined as a student who is enrolled at least half-time, have a G.P.A. of 2.5 or higher and are pursuing an Associate of Applied Science or an Associate of Science degree. Satisfactory academic standing is defined by the Community college as a G.P.A. of 2.5. In order to have a G.P.A., each student will need to have completed at least one semester toward her degree. By ensuring half-time status, student status will be considered a prominent role in each student's life.

Low socioeconomic status (low-SES) is defined economically and educationally for these purposes. Students who are Pell eligible are identified as living below the poverty level and in need of federal financial grants to continue their education. In addition to meeting federal poverty guidelines, students will self-identify as being first-generation, or the first in her family to pursue a college education.

Primary childcare responsibility is defined as having one or more children ages 0-10, who live in the home with the student.

Summary

The purpose of this study is to examine how mothers of low socioeconomic status who are successfully pursuing an associate's degree at Whedon College describe their experiences; to discuss what barriers exist to academic success; to identify how these barriers are overcome; and to see what women identify as the benefits, rewards, challenges, and/or sacrifices related to pursuing an associate's degree. Ultimately, a collection of sensitizing themes and descriptions emerged that can add depth and breadth to the literature. Many studies examine poverty and

access and success in higher education, but they do so with limited qualitative data. This study and its phenomenological approach served to make real the lives and actual experiences of low-SES women with children participating in a Midwestern community college setting. Through the use of their narratives, I crafted profiles that iterate the concrete barriers these women face to succeeding at earning a college degree.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I present a review of literature in alignment with the research questions and purpose of the study. The subsections of this chapter are organized as: definitions and explanations of socioeconomic status, profile of low socioeconomic people, college factors impacting the success of people of low socioeconomic status, and a review of studies relating to mothers attending college. The literature review represents the context of the study and identifies the gap that this study intends to address.

Socioeconomic Status

Socioeconomic status (SES) impacts many facets of life, leading to diminished access and success in higher education in the United States. Individuals in low SES families have fewer resources in health, mentoring, income, role modeling and support systems that provide the necessary acumen to succeed in higher education (Payne, 1996; 2005; Kerbo, 1991; Berk, 2003). The American dream of social mobility has become increasingly difficult to attain as the gap between the rich and the poor has widened and the middle class continues to shrink (Ehrenreich, 2001; Kerbo, 1991; Keller, 2005). A careful examination of the specific barriers to success for low SES individuals can increase the chances for access and success in higher education.

Socioeconomic status (SES) is a lens that can be used to examine human beings in the industrialized world. Pern and Thomas (2008) found that articles that examined the issues of social class or SES and its impact on student success had been examined within the field of

psychology, sociology, economics and education. In their four-layer conceptual model of student success based on the research of multiple disciplines, “the conceptual model assumes that student success is influenced by multiple layers of context, including the internal context, the family context, the school context, and the broader social, economic, and political context” (p. 32).

Psychology. “Socioeconomic status is commonly conceptualized as the social standing or class of an individual or group. It is often measured as a combination of education, income and occupation” (American Psychological Association, 2012). The 2003 Report of the APA task force on socioeconomic status acknowledges the absence of research from the field of psychology on socioeconomic status and that much of the work that has been published is interdisciplinary. The APA also finds that “living in the chaotic environments more typical of lower SES settings undoubtedly affects cognitive functions, including problem solving and memory, among children, adults and elderly people” (American Psychological Association, 2012, p. 18).

Educational psychologist and author of the textbook *Development Through the Lifespan*, Laura Berk (2003) identifies many ways in which SES differences can impact education, including family values, time available to spend with children and material resources that can be devoted to development, noting that, “as early as the second year of life, SES is positively correlated with cognitive and language development” and that higher-SES youngsters “attain higher levels of education...researchers believe that differences in family functioning have much to do with these outcomes” (p. 60).

Sociology. The field of sociology examines social class in the United States as a system of complex social stratification, yielding multiple classes and substrata (Brantlinger, 2003; Foley,

1997; Gilbert, 2003; Grusky, 2001). “Social stratification means that inequality has been hardened or institutionalized, and there is a system of social relationships that determines who gets what, and why” (Kerbo, 1991, p. 12). Kerbo further clarifies by stating that institutionalization means that a system of hierarchy has been established. Gilbert (2003) provides a class analysis of the United States in which approximately 12% of Americans are “underclass”, 13% are working poor, 30% of the population is categorized as working class, another 30% are middle class, and 1% are considered capitalist class.

Differentiating classification from stratification, Kerbo (1991) further explains that the term stratification inherently implies inequality. Even grimmer for the prospect of access and success to higher education for those lower on the ladder of social stratification is the acceptance of barriers to social mobility. “Such inequality may or may not be accepted equally by a majority in the society, but it is recognized as the way things are” (p. 12). Thus, people on the whole are aware of the class system, and their born place within it, and most accept it as unchangeable.

Kerbo (1991) breaks down the class structure in the United States into five groups: the upper class, the corporate class, the middle class, the working class and the poor. Working class people occupy mid-level to low positions with a low level of authority within the occupational structure, holding jobs with relatively low skill level, lower educational requirements, and a lower degree of complexity and perform manual labor.

While poverty is a relative term, with definitions of poverty varying dramatically depending on culture, there is absolute poverty (a lack of basic necessities which is life-threatening) in the United States (Kerbo, 1991). He explains that a poor person in the United States would not be considered poor by Chinese standards, for example, but emphasizes that

“poverty cannot be considered relative to the material existence of people throughout the world; in many ways it is relative to the society in which the poor find themselves” (Kerbo, 1991, p. 305). Kerbo (1991) found that the presence of the enormous disparity in the United States, being situated amongst those with much greater wealth, adds a psychological element of poverty that does not exist in developing nations. Kern (1991) defines poverty as living at the bottom of the economic stratification system and having limited economic resources to meet family needs.

Social work. Nationally recognized author and groundbreaking researcher on the hidden rules of social class, Ruby Payne (2005) defines poverty much more simply. “Poverty is the extent to which an individual does without resources” (p. 11) with those resources being broken into the following categories: financial, spiritual, emotional, mental, physical, support systems, relationships/role models, knowledge of hidden rules, and coping strategies. What distinguishes Payne’s work, both singly and with DeVol and Smith (2001), is the frank discussion of the hidden rules in the American class system and the workbook-style approach to teaching practitioners how to apply the framework to working with clients.

Payne (1996) illustrates how each dimension of poverty: financial, spiritual, emotional, mental, physical, support systems, relationships/role models, knowledge of hidden rules and coping strategies contribute to impeding social mobility. Each of these areas must be developed, strengthened and nurtured for social mobility to occur. Without an understanding of the way that complex bureaucratic systems function, the possibilities for higher education are limited. Further, a lack of knowledge of the hidden rules of the middle class can contribute to making the transition from poverty to middle class a confusing and isolating experience.

Payne’s work has drawn significant criticism from academe (Smiley & Helfenbein, 2011). Bomer, Dworin, May, and Semingson (2008) conclude that Payne’s work represents a

“classic example of what has been identified as deficit thinking. We found that her truth claims, offered without any supporting evidence, are contradicted by anthropological, sociological and other research on poverty” (p. 2497). Further, Dr. Paul Gorski (2008) iterates that Payne’s work blames victims of poverty for their plight and reiterates stereotypical notions of people living in poverty. Nevertheless, Payne’s (2001) work cannot be discarded because it is widely used in K-12 and higher education settings as a tool to educate middle class student teachers on how to related to their students living in poverty (Smiley & Helfenbein, 2011; Bommer, et al., 2008).

Feminism. The institution of motherhood (Rich, 1977) has historically been, and continues to be a hotly debated topic within multiple feminisms (Chase, 2011; D’Arcy, Turner, Crockett & Gridley, 2011; Kinser, 2008). A paradigm that consistently emerges from our socially constructed narrative of motherhood is that of the “good mother” and “bad mother”. The “good mother” ideal describes a level of perfection that is virtually unattainable for all women, but especially so for women who are not White, married and middle class.

We all know the ideal of a good mother. Above all, she is selfless. Her children come before herself and any other need or person or commitment, no matter what. She loves her children unconditionally, yet she is careful not to smother them with her love and her own needs. She follows the advice of doctors and other experts and she educates herself about child development. She is ever present in her children’s lives when they are young, and when they get older she is home every day to greet them as they get home from school. If she works outside the home, she arranges her job around her children so she can be there for them as much as possible, certainly whenever they are sick or unhappy. (Chase, 2011, p. 30)

The inherent barriers of poverty run contrary to the cultural ideal of the “good mother” leading to feelings of guilt and inadequacy for individual failure to overcome systemic barriers (D’Arcy, Turner, Crockett & Gridley, 2011; Fouquier, 2011). Women in poverty often lack the freedom of choice with regards to paid work outside the home. Rather, it is often an economic necessity for survival. Decisions about childcare must weigh the best interest of the child against the economic necessity of the pursuit of higher education and/or paid work outside the home. The “good mother” construct tells us that good mothers stay home with their children when they are young. If they cannot afford to do so, they are considered “bad mothers”, even if they are pursuing a way out of poverty. Women who have “too many” children or have their children “too young” are perceived as bad mothers because they are perceived as having created a situation, which they cannot master as individuals (Chase, 2011; D’Arcy, Turner, Crockett & Gridley, 2011; Driver-McBride, 2008; Kinser, 2008). What is missing, then, is an understanding of where the individual responsibility ends and societal responsibility begins in order to eliminate systemic barriers to economic mobility and educational attainment for low-SES mothers.

Summary of the **academic literature**. As I have demonstrated through a review of literature in the fields of psychology, sociology, social work and feminism, the women in this study have transcended a multitude of barriers by enrolling in college and persisting. Social stratification indicates that there are hardened, institutionalized barriers prohibiting people of low socioeconomic status from entering, succeeding and completing college. Further, the concept that most Americans accept the way things are in terms of stratification and classification is contradictory to what these women are trying to accomplish. Psychologically, these women are likely to be less prepared for or have a frame of reference for college. Payne’s work, with all of

its flaws, identifies strategies through which individuals can make their way out of poverty.

Contemporary feminist literature highlights the inherent inequality of the “good mother” ideal and the resulting individual blame for the institutionalized barriers of poverty.

Profile of Low Socioeconomic People

Financial resources and behaviors. The most obvious financial barrier for working class individuals and those living in poverty is having less money than their middle and upper class counterparts. The New York Times compilation *Class Matters* (The New York Times Correspondents, 2005) personalizes this barrier in a way that reveals the full impact of having less financial resource. In Leonhardt’s (2005) “The College Dropout Boom”, the ethics and attitudes behind work and money of working class people are illustrated through the stories of two people—one who succeeded in her quest for a higher education and one who did not. These examples illustrate the challenges that people of low socioeconomic status face when pursuing higher education.

First-generation college student Andy Blevins overcame the access barrier to higher education and successfully completed one year of college, but dropped out at the end of that year (Leonhardt, 2005). Working over the summer, Blevins, like many of his working class peers, had trouble seeing the benefit of losing wages to continue with his studies. Though more Americans are earning four-year degrees, poor and working class people are falling further behind in getting bachelor’s degrees in an economy where increased education is needed for secure, higher-paying jobs (Leonhardt, 2005). Despite the shrinking opportunities for a living wage through factory jobs, the value system and perception that reinforces manual labor as real work and higher education as abstract, overpriced and unattainable remains a barrier to low SES people (Leonhardt, 2005; Borkowski, 2004; Payne, 1996; 2005).

Many poor and working class parents are also unaware of financial resources available to them and how to navigate through obtaining scholarships and grants to finance higher education despite the existence of many need-based scholarships and grants for college (Rowan-Kenyon, 2008). Perceptions of the cost of higher education as unattainable combined with other factors, present a barrier to parental involvement in college preparation (2008). Compounding the problem, people living in poverty approach money as something to be spent and used up, with little or no interest and experience in saving (Payne, 1996).

Perceptions of formal education. In poverty, situations are dealt with in constant crisis mode with individuals continually solving one immediate problem after another to survive (Payne, 2005; 2001; Ehrenreich, 2001). Parents living in the poverty culture understand that education is important in the abstract, but do not fully understand how to support educational success (Payne, 1996). One wryly amusing portrait of this disconnect is David Borkowski's (2004) recollection of his mother sending him a newspaper clipping advertising the upcoming test to become a sanitation worker in his hometown, sent to him just weeks before defending his dissertation in English. Borkowski reflects on his mother's love and pride for him, but a lack of understanding of the value of a Ph.D. and her embarrassment of his choice to not become a 'real doctor'.

Borkowski's (2004) loving and genuine narrative stands in contrast to most tales of those who have successfully made it to the middle class from a working class or poor background. Unlike the many other published narratives of gifted students who rose above and disconnected from their families, Borkowski writes about living comfortably in both worlds. Contrary to the well-respected advice of Payne (1996), Borkowski did not have to give up family relationships in order to succeed in academia, but, in fact, joyfully goes home to enjoy doughnuts and coffee

with his aunt and mother regularly and merely smiles when they disparage his chosen occupation. Borkowski (2004) attributes the differences in his experience to being an average student rather than an incredibly gifted one as a child.

Borkowski's (2004) story is an exception to the rule of published research on parental involvement in attainment of higher education in low SES families. In a study of parental involvement in college going by socioeconomic class, Rowan-Kenyon, Bell, and Perna (2007) found that while multiple factors influence parental involvement in attaining access to higher education, that the understanding of college as an abstract concept, but a lack of knowledge of the concrete steps necessary to achieve success held true. One study participant described her parents as frequently discussing college, but when she asked her parents more specific questions about how to get into college, their only response was that she needed to go.

Academic Preparedness. “If college attendance were based primarily on intellectual skills there would be much less class inheritance than exists today. But class inequality operates to retard the relationship between intellectual ability and college attendance” (Kerbo, 1991, p. 375). Academic preparedness begins at birth, and research indicates a disparity amongst children living in poverty as early as the first two years of life in terms of essential development factors (Berk, 2003). The key factor is the difference between intellectual ability and the availability of resources to cultivate that ability.

Payne (1996) notes that entertainment is highly valued in generational poverty and that books are rare and not viewed as a part of that entertainment. Young children in poverty often have less conversational stimulation with their parents, and subpar or no preventive healthcare leading to developmental deficits that impact the individual over the course of the lifespan (Berk, 2003). Kerbo (1991) notes that teachers have also been found to expect higher levels of

achievement from higher class students and that lesser expectations of lower class students lead to diminished motivation for success.

Extracurricular programs such as athletics, trips to the opera or museum and musical enrichment cost money and parents living in poverty often do not have the resources to give these opportunities to their children. In Barbara Ehrenreich's (2001) experiment to live as a member of the working poor without public assistance, despite working two jobs in various locations in the United States, she was able to just barely cover basic necessities for herself without the added burden of caring for children. College preparatory exams such as the PSAT, SAT and ACT are costly. While middle class students can often afford to have tutoring and opportunities to take these exams once or more to obtain the desired score, these hurdles are difficult to maneuver for those in poverty (Rowan-Kenyon, et al. 2008; Payne, 1996).

Poverty affects all aspects of life and makes the playing field uneven from birth for American children. Socioeconomic status is an elusive and emotionally charged term defined differently by different academic disciplines (Keller, 2005; Berk, 2003; Payne, 1996; 2001; Kerbo, 1991). Key elements emerge, however, that challenge traditional stereotypes and reveal specific barriers to access and success. Intentionally-developed programming that includes an understanding of poverty culture and the constraints in the lives of children and parents living in poverty in mind can reduce the things that make success in college especially difficult for those determined to live the American dream and fulfill the American promise of social mobility for themselves and their descendants.

Summary of low SES status.

People of low socioeconomic status are impacted by their family lives in their pursuit of a college degree. Family attitudes about manual labor having more value than abstract work can

affect the decision to stay in college and can shape their career choices. As I examine the lived experience of women who are living within this family context, I will collect information about family attitudes and selection of major.

College Factors

This section of the literature review examines research related to factors of the higher education environment important to this study. Relationships between socioeconomic status, parenting and traditional outcomes of higher education such as persistence and graduation rates will be the focus.

In a multiple case study approach to understanding institutional influences affecting the college-going decisions of low-income mothers attending a rural Midwestern community college, Wilson (2008) examines twelve studies related to typical outcomes measures “persistence, associate’s degree attainment, transfer, and baccalaureate degree attainment” (p. 13) as they are associated with socioeconomic status. Across these twelve quantitative studies, including three nationally representative databases from the student perspective, one database from the institutional perspective, and one database from a state perspective, Wilson (2008) finds that each of the individual characteristics listed below can be found in one or more of the twelve studies and is an indicator of the individual’s likelihood to persist, transfer, earn an associate’s degree, or earn a baccalaureate degree than is an individual without the characteristic: initial enrollment at a community college, delayed enrollment, non-traditional age, parental status, less prepared for college, few financial resources, and part-time enrollment.

Almost half of all undergraduates are community college students (Knapp, Kelly-Reid, & Whitmore, 2006). Studies correlating degree attainment to this characteristic indicate that students beginning at a community college are less likely to persist and graduate than students

beginning at a baccalaureate institution (Alfonso, 2006; Stratton, O'Toole, & Wetzel, 2007). Research indicates that larger community colleges have lower graduation rates (Bailey, Calcagno, Jenkins, Leinbach, & Kienzl, 2006). As well, community colleges with larger proportions of female students and larger proportions of part-time students have lower graduation rates (Bailey, et al., 2006). Berkner, He, Mason, and Wheelless (2007) found that of students entering postsecondary education at a community college first 21% had not attained a degree and were not enrolled in another institution after three years, while, in the four-year sector, only seven percent of students had not attained a degree and were not enrolled in another institution after three years.

Delayed enrollment, age, and parenting. Working adults represent one-third of the undergraduate population (Berkner & Horn, 2003). Adults delay enrollment for various reasons, including child care, financial resources, and academic weaknesses (Bozick & DeLuca, 2005; Horn, Cataldi, & Sikora, 2005; Rowan-Kenyon, 2007). One-fifth of students who delayed college no more than one year, and one-third of those who delayed college enrollment between two and four years had child care obligations (Horn, et al., 2005). Second, students who delay enrollment have fewer financial resources (Bozick & DeLuca, 2005; Rowan-Kenyon, 2007), and third, students who delay enrollment are less prepared for college (Bozick & DeLuca, 2005; Horn, et al., 2005; Rowan-Kenyon, 2007) as measured by high school coursework and test scores. Half of all independent students are parents, and one-fourth of all independent students are single parents (Wei, Nevill, & Berkner, 2005). Being a parent and a student is negatively associated with persistence in the community college sector (Berkner, et al., 2007) and persistence in higher education generally (Stratton, et al., 2007). A parent's college commitment is often secondary to family and work (Berkner & Horn, 2003; Wassmer, Moore, & Shulock,

2004). Wei, et al. (2005) noted that although it is often age that determines independent status, independent students are most clearly different from their dependent counterparts in their family and work responsibilities.

As well, independent students often struggle with finances. Of all independent students enrolled in a community college, 24% live below 125% of the poverty threshold, yet only 1.8% received cash welfare payments and only 2.5% received food stamps (Wei, et al., 2005). In addition, of single parents enrolled in a community college, 43.3% lived 125% below the poverty threshold, while 17.4% of married parents lived 125% below the poverty threshold (Wei, et al., 2005). In the community college sector, many parents enrolled in college have significant financial strain.

Researchers have also demonstrated that adult students form their educational commitments based on their interactions with the institution and form their self-concept as a student through interactions in the classroom (Gigliotti & Gigliotti, 1998; Graham & Gisi, 2000; Kasworm, 2003). As such, understanding students' self-concept and descriptions of interactions in the classroom was critical to a phenomenological understanding of their experiences in the community college setting.

Less prepared for college. Being less prepared for college is most clearly correlated with delayed enrollment (Bozick & DeLuca, 2005; Horn, Cataldi, & Sidora, 2005; Rowan-Kenyon, 2007). Further, Attewell and Lavin (2007) specifically countered the argument that those students who are less prepared are not benefiting from community college education. They wrote, "[i]f admissions policies had reflected that viewpoint, nearly half of the men and a third of the women who actually attended community colleges in the national sample would not have been able to do so" (p. 188). In short, being less prepared for college, may mean starting at a

community college and pursuing a vocational degree, but these choices may also translate into increased earnings for those at the low end of the socioeconomic scale, further indicating that higher education degree attainment can be a way out of poverty for low-SES mothers.

Fewer financial resources. Not surprisingly, having fewer financial resources is negatively correlated with delayed enrollment (Bozick & DeLuca, 2005; Rowan-Kenyon, 2007). In addition, students with fewer financial resources are more likely to drop out of higher education (Stratton, et al., 2007). As well, students from low-income families have fewer study groups, spend less time studying, have a lower grade point average, and work more hours (e.g. Walpole, 2003). As a result, researchers often question whether offering more or different financial information would increase enrollment or retention among those with fewer financial resources.

Specifically, Dynarski (2003; 2002) has used the elimination of Social Security student benefits and data from the Georgia HOPE program to study the effect aid has on the decision to enroll in college. In both studies, she concluded that aid does positively impact enrollment; however, the impact of the aid does not always benefit low income and minority students. Seftor and Turner (2002) used data generated through the Current Population Survey (2010) administered by the U.S. Census Bureau to consider how federal aid impacts older students' decision to attend college. They found federal aid has a significant impact on the enrollment decisions of older students.

Paulsen and St. John (2002) used NPSAS data to consider class reproduction versus educational opportunity by analyzing persistence. For adult students in poverty, they concluded that women are less likely than men to maintain continuous enrollment. The authors speculated that this result is due to family responsibilities, which take precedence over school. Paulsen and

St. John (2002) conclude that for low-income women, especially mothers, the postsecondary system functions as a "class-based constraint" that discourages educational attainment.

In general, the research suggests that enrollment, persistence and graduation are impacted by the type and amount of aid. In a qualitative study on the impact of grant aid to low-income students, St. John (2006) wrote that "the consequences of unmet need are serious, potentially inhibiting preparation as well as enrollment and persistence" (p. 1616). This quote points to the intertwined nature of preparation, financial resources, enrollment and persistence.

Part-time versus full-time enrollment. Being enrolled part time has been negatively correlated with transfer (Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006) and degree attainment (Bailey, et al., 2006). Stratton, et al., (2007) sought to separate the effects of part-time enrollment from the effects of full-time enrollment. They found that while persistence was negatively impacted by delayed enrollment, academic performance, parental education, and income for full-time students, the impact of these characteristics on part-time students was much smaller. Specifically, part-time student persistence was not impacted by delayed enrollment. As well, "marriage and child related factors are much more closely associated with attrition for full-time as compared to part-time students" (p. 477). Likewise, using a thirty-year time frame, Attewell and Lavin (2007) found that graduation rates among low-income mothers were much higher than is often suggested by research over a six year or ten year time frame. This leads to a need for further exploration of the experiences of low-income mothers attending college to deepen our understanding of how to measure their successes.

Researchers studying poverty commonly note that poverty runs along race lines: African American, Latino Americans, and American Indians are more likely to be in poverty than other races; however, no causal relationship exists between race and poverty. A thorough examination

of race and poverty would reveal a complex interaction of holistic life experiences of the individual that contributes to poverty. In higher education research, the same can be said of being older and a parent. Mothers do not drop out of college because they have children; rather, a convergence of social, emotional and institutional influences impacts a parent's opportunities to be successful in college. Higher education research has demonstrated that students who are older, parents, and low-income are more likely to drop out, but research has not adequately described the convergence of influences that allows parents to remain in school and remain successful academically.

Summary of higher education literature.

In this section of the literature review, I examined research related to factors of the higher education environment important to this study. Relationships between socioeconomic status, parenting and traditional outcomes of higher education, such as persistence and graduation rates were discussed. The research has reflected that students who are parents, who enroll half-time and who are of low socioeconomic status are less likely to persist and graduate. A careful examination of the school context in relationship to these women's lives will shed light on why and how these factors impact the pursuit of higher education.

Education and Low-Income Mothers

This section of the literature review discusses research related directly to the population under study: low-income mothers in postsecondary education. In 2006, the United States poverty threshold for a mother and two children was 17,098 dollars a year (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Twenty-nine percent of single female householders live at or below the poverty threshold (CPS, 2010) and the United States has the highest childhood poverty rate of any industrialized country (Coleman & Kerbo, 2007). Low-income mothers in higher education comprise a fairly

large group. Wei, Nevill, and Berkner (2005) reported that 24% of independent students at community colleges reported living below 125% of the U.S. Census Bureau poverty threshold for a family of four (\$21,286). One of the many purposes of higher education attainment is gainful employment and, for those in poverty, stabilization of their lives.

Pandey, Zhan and Youngmi (2006) sought to study the impact of education on poverty for mothers, both single and married. They used the 2000 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY79). The survey began in 1979 and interviewed participants thereafter in 1994, 1996, 1998, 2000, and 2002. The dependent variables used were income-to-poverty, and the independent variable was educational attainment. The 2001 poverty rate for single householders with no high school diploma was 56.4% with a high school diploma was 56.4% with a high school diploma but no college was 33.6%, with some college but no bachelor's degree was 21.6% and with a bachelor's degree or more was 10.1 percent. The authors found that having a degree reduces the likelihood of poverty for both single and married mothers with statistical significance. The authors further concluded that poverty among women with children can be reduced through the attainment of higher education, particularly by those women that are motivated to pursue their education.

While these findings are promising for raising the socioeconomic status of women pursuing higher education, Bullock and Limbert (2003), in their mixed-methods study of 69 low-income women enrolled in a voluntary educational training program purposed to help women form educational goals, found that these women expected college to result in a middle-class status, but did not feel that postsecondary education was open to them and their children. Yet several studies suggest that despite having doubts about their ability to complete a postsecondary degree, low-income women are strongly motivated by the desire to be a good role model for their

children (Attewell & Lavin, 2007; Haleman, 2004; Jennings, 2004; Luttrell, 1997). Research clearly demonstrates that earning a degree will raise low-income women out of poverty (London, 2006; Pandey, Zhan & Youngmi, 2006); however, this group of women characteristically feels unwelcome in the environment of higher education (Bullock & Limbert, 2003).

Several studies have examined socioeconomic status and higher education outcomes (Alfonso, 2006; Stratton, et al., 2007; Walpole, 2003). Walpole (2003) examined socioeconomic status as it pertains to higher education, but specifically and intentionally excludes community colleges. Wilson (2008) examined the institutional factors affecting the college-going decisions of low-income mothers at a community college. What is lacking, then, is the Pern and Thomas (2008) multi-layered approach to discerning the full context of the lives and experiences impacting low-SES mothers who are pursuing higher education.

Summary of education and low-income mothers.

The evidence suggests that attaining a college degree does raise the standard of living for women of low socioeconomic status raising children. Further, an identified barrier to success is a feeling of being unwelcome in colleges and universities and the idea that college is unavailable. This study, therefore, is critical to the understanding of how to fulfill the mission of the community college by not only keeping the doors of open access open, but how to effectively invite the intended demographic in the door.

Chapter Two Summary

Socioeconomic status and its impact have been examined across several fields of study. Many quantitative and some qualitative studies have examined the impact of socioeconomic status and parenting and their impact, both separately and together, on higher education experiences and outcomes. There is a consensus that low-SES negatively impacts outcomes for

students pursuing postsecondary education. Given the nature of poverty and its permeation of all aspects of life, a phenomenological examination of the lived experiences of low-SES mothers pursuing higher education can shed light on additional contextual factors contributing to academic success in a community college setting.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

This study identified the essence of the experience of academically successful low-SES mothers enrolled in community college. The research was guided by the following research questions: 1) Describe the lived experience of community college students who are mothers with low socioeconomic status. 2) What does success in higher education mean to a mother of low socioeconomic status who lives that experience?

Qualitative research methods allow for significant depth and breadth in the exploration of the given participants' experiences and will be used as a guiding framework for this study. The underlying assumptions that are specific to quantitative research are control and reality (Merriam & Simpson, 2000; Johnson & Christensen, 2008; Burgess, 1995). Qualitative researchers assert that no such control is possible and, further, that there are multiple realities (Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

Patton (1990) identifies twelve major characteristics of qualitative research: naturalistic inquiry, emergent design flexibility, purposeful sampling, qualitative data, personal experience and engagement, empathic neutrality and mindfulness, dynamic systems, unique case orientation, inductive analysis and creative synthesis, holistic perspective, context sensitivity, and voice, perspective and reflexivity (pp. 40-41). Common techniques of qualitative inquiry are interview, observation, document analysis, and historical analysis. A key concept of qualitative data analysis is triangulation and the use of multiple data collection methods (Seidman, 2006).

Merriam and Simpson (2000) indicate that qualitative research is an overall term for five types of inquiry: biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study.

The methodological approach for this study is phenomenology.

Phenomenology is the study of the lived experiences of people and an attempt to derive meaning from those experiences (Bogdan & Biklan, 2007; Schutz, 1967; Seidman, 2006). At the root of this approach is a commitment to entering research without an assumption of what particular events in a participant's life mean. Phenomenological inquiry seeks to capture the lived experience of the participant through careful research (Seidman, 2006). For this study, the in-depth, interviewing process (Seidman, 2006) was combined with a life history interview (Bertraux, 1981) focusing on the phenomenon of balancing the responsibilities of motherhood with being a community college student (Seidman, 2006; Schutz, 1967).

Phenomena that exhibit characteristics of social relationship and interaction, of individuals taking the role of actors in relationship to their personally constructed life-world and social environment, provided rich possibilities for phenomenological study. Studies of low-SES mothers' higher education experiences have been framed several ways. However, phenomenology provided a method for this study that gave voice to a shared experience of mothering while pursuing higher education. It also provided an opportunity to identify the essence of the experience, thus revealing common struggles and common strategies.

In this study, the philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology addressed issues of being, "otherness," "subjectivity," and the understanding of collective and individual consciousness. Essences of a studied experience were revealed through the examination of individuals' encounters with and of that experience. Phenomenology shaped a "return to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for a reflective

structural analysis that portrays the essences of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13).

Phenomenology provided a way to capture and reduce to its core elements the lived experience being studied through the descriptions of the participants. I utilized the phenomenological method to critically examine given descriptions to understand how we experience, to find what it is that makes the phenomena itself in our experiences. Critical to phenomenology were the concepts of intentionality, horizon, epoche or bracketing, and noema and noesis.

Polkinghorne (1989) clarified intentionality when he discussed the distinction between inquiry into objects and inquiry into “descriptions of experience” (p. 41), and explored how one experienced an object or event, rather than focusing on the cause of the experience. According to his descriptions, phenomenological methods are appropriate when a researcher would explore the activity of human consciousness as it experiences an object or event. This emphasis on examining and understanding individuals’ perceptions and intentionality regarding their own experiences adds a somewhat practical dimension to the theoretical emphasis of philosophy. The methods for studying another’s life-world “are intended to study the meanings of human experiences in situation, as they spontaneously occur The emphasis is on the study of lived experience, on how we read, enact, and understand our life-involvements” (von Eckartsberg, 1998, p. 3). The purpose was to understand people’s experience of a phenomenon in order to gain a fundamental understanding of the essence of the phenomenon itself.

Husserl considered the “freedom from supposition the Epoche” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85), meaning to avoid exclusive reliance on preconceptions and assumptions. So that one might see another’s experience clearly, I engaged in epoche, or bracketing, during the study, the intentional act of reserving and critically reflecting on one’s own assumptions and beliefs about the lived experience of those who provide descriptions. I recognized that my personal experiences with

similar phenomena as a mother and student affect the questions that I ask and the way that I ask them. Although bracketing requires reserving one's own knowledge, prior knowledge held by the researcher and understood through deliberate and careful reflection can be considered necessary to a thorough interpretive analysis. In fact, the main role that the researcher's own experiences have in phenomenological studies is characteristic of the topic of study, and necessary to understanding the universal "essence" of the subject (Bodner & Orgill, 2007, p. 98). Regardless, strategies to bracket by making bias as transparent as possible were necessary to phenomenological study. I asked the participants to conduct member-checking by presenting transcripts and analyses of each interview to the participant for verification that what I understood and interpreted accurately reflects the participants' experience.

Phenomenology explores the experiences of life-worlds through first-person accounts as a way to distill the essence, the true nature of what is the experience. It is grounded in the assumption that the way to understand the meaning of a phenomena is through description (Van Manen, 1990) and observation. In this instance, the description was provided through the words of the participants' in a series of interviews. This framework provided the philosophical position and theoretical framework through which to explore the research questions central to this study.

Selection of Participants

Purposive sampling (Patton 1990) was used to select seven participants as co-researchers for this study. Identifying the appropriate number of participants for in-depth, phenomenological interviewing was based on two criteria as identified by Seidman (2006): sufficiency and saturation of information. In order to establish sufficiency, participants reflected the broad age range of students ranging in age from 18-34, accounted for variations in academic or technical programs with representation from students who intended to pursue a technical certificate in

health care to students who intended to pursue graduate studies. The study was not representative of the range of race and ethnicity that defines the campus population, being limited to the participants who responded to recruitment materials who were primarily Caucasian.. Saturation of information occurred when no new information was reported from participants. Moustakas (1994) advised that participants must have met the following criteria:

Has experienced the phenomenon, is intensely interested in understanding its nature and meanings, is willing to participate in a lengthy interview...grants the investigator the right to tape-record, possibly videotape the interview, and publish the data in a dissertation and other publications. (p. 107)

Criteria for identifying study participants was be defined as:

- Students who are enrolled at least half-time, have a G.P.A. of 2.5 or higher and are pursuing an Associate of Applied Science or an Associate of Science degree.
Satisfactory academic standing is defined by the community college as a G.P.A. of 2.5. In order to have a G.P.A., each student will need to have completed at least one semester toward her degree. By ensuring half-time status, student status will be considered a prominent role in each student's life.
- Students who are Pell eligible are identified as living below the poverty level and in need of federal financial grants to continue their education will be considered as low-SES. In addition to meeting federal poverty guidelines, students will self-identify as being first-generation, or the first in her family to pursue a college education.
- Students will qualify as mothers, for the purposes of this study, by having one or more children, aged ten or younger, living in the home with the student.

In order to identify participants who overcome barriers to success, they must be currently successful in their academic endeavors. In order to be mothers, they must be female. None of the participants withdrew from the study, but all were advised that they could do so without penalty. During the course of the study, none of the participants withdrew from school or were placed on academic hold. Students were recruited from a campus wide e-mail (See Appendix A). Participants were further recruited using the snowball method.

Each woman agreed to participate in a series of three interviews lasting approximately sixty minutes each. They were asked to share documents/artifacts that supported their self-stories and information about their attitudes and behaviors in the classroom. This study was phenomenological in nature. I attempted to understand the experience of students who are mothers, with dependent children living in their home for whom they provide direct childcare. The three interview series, designed by Dolbeare and Schuman (Schuman, 1982) and discussed at length in Seidman (2006) served as the basis for this study. These components are a life history interview, an interview in which the details of the experience are described and a reflective interview (Seidman, 2006).

The purpose of this study was to capture the lived experience of women living in poverty who are mothers and college students. Therefore, the interview series will include a: 1) One-hour life history interview in which the participant describes her life history as it pertains to education providing a foundational context for educational experiences and attitudes, 2) A second interview in which she describes her current lived experience as a mother, providing a foundational context for experiences and attitudes towards mothering, and 3) A third interview in which she describes her current lived experience as a student to allow the student to describe her experiences and allowing for reflection from the previous two interviews. Poverty is not isolated

as a separate interview because it permeates every other aspect of an individual's life (Payne 1996; 2005; Kerbo, 1991; Berk, 2003).

While I am professionally employed at the campus identified for the study, subjects do not have a direct faculty/student relationship with me. I have no power to make decisions about grades or financial aid for these participants.

Informed Consent

In accordance with moral and ethical practices, the Institutional Review Board at Ball State University and the Community College reviewed all procedures and protocols (See Appendices D and E). No portion of this project is designed with ill intent. An informed consent document advised participants of the timeline and potential risks of the study, as well as their obligations and their right to discontinue participation at any time. Participants' identities were kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms and the removal of or disguising of personally identifying components from the interview transcripts prior to submitting them to co-researchers. As co-researchers, the participants were responsible for reflecting on what they had shared for accuracy and depth. Further, the participants reviewed the transcripts and profiles to ensure that their stories had been accurately portrayed. Information with identifiable characteristics was secured digitally or physically until which time they can be deleted or destroyed.

Data Gathering Procedures

Eligibility criteria were confirmed utilizing the Whedon Community College student information systems database. Confirmation was initially sought through email or verbally over the phone just prior to planning the date, time, and location for the in-depth interview. Upon first meeting with each participant, I confirmed that each participant understood the purpose and

intent of the study and will have her sign informed consent documentation, IRB acknowledgement, and disclaimer confirming that the participant may willingly cease to participate at any time without cause, justification, or question. As a part of this introductory protocol, I also confirmed willingness to have in-depth interviews recorded and transcribed. All interviews occurred either in my office on the Sunnydale campus or over the phone. Lastly, participants were asked to share documents for analysis that might include copies of their personal calendars/weekly obligations, children's schedules, and/or other personal documentation that would further deepen the exploration of the essence of her experience.

Tools and Procedures

Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and submitted to the respective participant as a means of member checking. Participants' comments were minimal and limited to adding that they enjoyed participating in the study and learned from it. No substantial changes were made. Field notes captured by the researcher were also used to add details, context, and further external interpretation where relevant.

Data Analysis

Bogden and Biklen (2007) defined data analysis as "the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, fieldnotes, and other materials that you accumulate to enable you to come up with the findings" (p. 159). Reducing the text from multiple transcribed interviews to single units of significant meaning, inductively rather than deductively were the tasks of the qualitative researcher. Further, I, as the researcher, must use my judgment to make decisions and extrapolate meaning from the text (Seidman, 2006). The research questions guide the analysis of the data.

In light of the research questions, methodology, and purpose of this study, I believe that Moustakas (1994) delineates the most apt coding strategy for this study. Phenomenal analysis includes

Horizontalizing the data and regarding every horizon or statement relevant to the topic as having equal value. From the horizontalized statements, the meaning or meaning units are listed. They are then clustered into common categories or themes, removing overlapping and repetitive statements. The clustered themes and meanings are used to develop the textural descriptions of the experience. From the textural descriptions, structural descriptions and an integration of textures and structures into the meanings and essences of the phenomenon are constructed. (Moustakas, 1994, p. 119)

Additionally, I relied on my experiences, intuition and the literature to identify and acknowledge emergent themes. Analysis was interwoven throughout the research process as I observed, recorded, and made decisions about areas of focus, emphasizing reduction to the essence of the experience of low-SES mothers successfully pursuing a higher education. Consistent with traditional coding strategies, I relied on themes to emerge throughout the data collection and analysis process.

I reviewed each interview transcript and analyzed each one to develop textural descriptions of the experience and structural descriptions of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). Information collected from each participant was then reviewed as primary data. The transcribed interviews, artifacts, documents and elements from observation were coded and categorized based on emerging themes until saturation is reached.

Limitations of the Study

Due to the nature of the small sample size (seven mothers) and limited geographical location of the study (in one small region of the Midwest), the results of this study are not statistically generalizable. However, generalizability was not the purpose of this study. As with any qualitative research study, it was more important to examine a topic in great depth. The researcher in a qualitative study provides a thick description of the process utilized and data gathered, thus engaging the reader to determine applicability of the information gathered in specific studies. Furthermore, the qualitative data gathered in this study will add a description of the phenomena observed in seven to ten different women's lives. This research also shed light on previously unidentified issues, providing further support to previous poverty research and suggesting further research questions.

Furthermore, due to the short duration of time spent with the participants of this study, I was not able to fully immerse myself in the lives and communities of each participant. This became amplified as during the data collection process as I was transitioning from my position at Sunnydale campus to a new position in another region of Whedon. The three-interview series for all participants was conducted over a ten-day timeframe. Mothering and socioeconomic status are highly sensitive and personal topics. However, I was amazed at how open and generous each of the participants was with her story. Further, childcare needs preempted the need for a one-on-one environment for the interviews, and concessions had to be made to accommodate participants. Some interviews were held over the phone, and many were held with small children present. Rather than deterring from the data collection process, I used this as an opportunity to more fully sketch the lived experience of these women.

Summary

In Chapter three, I outlined a qualitative plan for conducting in-depth, phenomenological interviews for an examination of the lived experience of low-SES student mothers successfully pursuing higher education at a community college. Every attempt was made to represent the broad range of age, majors and ethnicities of the community college campus. A wide array of majors and a broad age range were reflected. However, the participant group was primarily Caucasian, thus not accurately reflecting the racial and ethnic composition of the campus.. This exploration used a purposive/ snowball sample of low-SES mothers who are making satisfactory progress toward a degree (Patton 1990). Phenomenology guided the research process. This process included the use of in depth interviews and document analysis.. Following the interviews, I analyzed the transcripts to create profiles of each participant. Each participant reviewed the interview transcripts and the profiles as a means of member-checking and ensuring content validity.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter presents participant profiles of a series of phenomenological interviews conducted with seven participants. The participant profiles are followed by a description of emergent themes. Each of the participants' profiles emerged through a careful examination of the interview transcripts, which were reduced to meaning units framed by the research questions. Moustakas (1994) concept of bracketing was used heavily as the researcher gleaned the text for relevant meaning and identified and discarded presuppositions of meaning of experience amongst the participants. Some participants provided documents that were indicative of their family routines or strategies for success. Documentary analysis of these schedules, planners and menus is integrated into the participant profiles.

Profile #1 - Whitney

Whitney is a bright, motivated and energetic young Caucasian woman in her early twenties. Her commitment to her education is evident. She is highly motivated to attain her goals and utilizes the resources available to her to effectively achieve those goals. She is very proud and happy to be a mother of an infant daughter. She juggles multiple responsibilities including full-time work, motherhood, coursework and extracurricular activities. Whitney is also responsible for the majority of household chores in her home. She sticks to a rigid schedule and gets little sleep in order to make it all work. It is very important to her to set a good example for her daughter and to spend as much time as possible with her daughter, even if it means

sacrificing time for herself. She recognizes and is proud that she is successfully managing her many responsibilities and making progress towards her goals.

Whitney came to college with a true, deep passion for learning. “I was always the nerd, I liked to read. I was always, and I still do it to this day, um, you never, ever, ever find me without doing something, reading a book.” She mentioned several times how much she loved learning and described it as “fantastic” and as a driving motivational force in her pursuit of higher education. Her love of learning is evident in her daily schedule, which includes reading to her daughter and teaching her letters and numbers each night.

Throughout her education, Whitney was highly engaged in extracurricular activities as well. Whitney followed a traditional path to college, graduating from high school and then attending a private four-year institution until she could no longer attend because “the tuition was insane.” She transferred to Whedon College to save money and when she completes her degree, she plans to go to a local satellite campus of the state’s flagship institution to complete her bachelor’s degree.

She will be the first person in her family to complete a college degree. Neither of her parents completed college. Her mother became pregnant and had to withdraw from college. This, combined with her mother’s financial struggles as a single mother, became critical influences in Whitney’s life that drive her to be successful in college. It is very important to Whitney that she set a positive example for her daughter by finishing school. She says simply, “I am pretty determined.”

Whitney’s determination and self-discipline are evident through her daily actions. She describes herself as a very organized person again and again.

I have a system, I have calendars, I have lists, I have everything laid out, so that I know what I have to do, and being having a child half way through college was rough, but I because I am so organized, I think that helped, because I literally had to lay out my plans, ok, I have to here this day, I have this homework to do, so he has to work here, I have to work here, okay, who is going to watch the kid... there is not a moment in my day that doesn't have something planned.

Her grueling daily routine is jam-packed. Her typical day starts off with feeling exhausted.

Oh goodness, I wake up at about 5:30 every morning, I get out of bed, I let the dogs out, I start a pot of coffee, let the dogs in and feed them, I shower and get ready for work, I get my daughter up and we are ready and out the door by 7:00. She is to the baby-sitters by 7:30, I am at work by 8:00 and I see patients from 8:00 to 5:00, sometimes 5:30, it's all day long, its non-stop, go go go. Sometimes, I barely have time to eat lunch, I have literally ran to the cafeteria, got lunch for everybody, bring it back so we can eat and continue to work at the same time. I get my daughter after work, I go home, if it's a semester I do homework, or I clean my house, most of the time it's homework, clean house, give her a bath, I somehow manage to cook dinner in there somewhere, I eat dinner, I read a book and I am in bed by 11:30, midnight. And I am back up at 5:30.

She describes her class time as calm and relaxed; her "me" time when she has the luxury of taking courses face to face. Whitney is tired and excited when she is in the classroom. She likes to sit in the back so that she can see everything and she consistently engages in discussion. She typically takes her classes online so that it is easier to juggle childcare and work schedules. When taking online classes, she does not distinguish between class time and homework time.

Her determination shined through again when she discussed managing conflicts between home and school or work. She explains that she always has a plan for everything. Specifically, she iterated that she has family support for childcare even when her children are sick and that her family has two vehicles, providing her with alternate transportation if necessary.

Whitney's standards for success are high. She expects to get straight A's and to be learning something new every night. This requires "a lot of studying...I work on homework every single night." At the time of the interview, classes were not in session and Whitney was studying daily for the courses she was about to take in the Fall. She places equally high demands on herself as a mother, indicating that it is essential that she make time for her daughter on a daily basis and that she be at home with her each night.

Whitney's biggest challenge is not having enough time. She expresses that her involvement and success in higher education are important to her own self-development and self-worth. She wants others to know that they should pursue their educational goals regardless of age or family circumstance and that achieving success is possible. She advises other students who are mothers to work hard, plan well, and to utilize tools, resources and support systems to ensure success.

Profile #2 - Gail

Gail is a twenty-nine year old Caucasian woman from Richmond, Indiana. She grew up in poverty, the only child of two illiterate parents, one suffering from bipolar disorder and schizophrenia, and the other suffering from mental retardation. Gail overcame tremendous obstacles to complete her high school education and pursue a college degree including managing her own learning disability and raising a child with severe ADHD as a single parent.

From her elementary school years, she remembers feeling like she did not belong in the educational environment and still struggled with the feeling of belonging at the time of this interview. At an early age, school “meant nothing to me. Because I would go to the school and of course my parents were poor, so I didn’t have nice things, didn’t have nice clothes, so I never felt that I belonged. I was always picked on, I was always...I didn’t have the help at home so most the times when I went to school, my homework wasn’t done.” Gail credits good teachers early on for ensuring that she had additional resources in her journey through the public school system, such as all-day kindergarten and an early diagnosis of her learning disability in first grade. She felt like she didn’t belong in school and her academic performance worsened as she got older, escalating to the point of having 250 missing assignments in fifth grade, but she emphasizes that she would not even consider skipping out on homework now. She describes having big dreams of becoming a nurse as a child, but cited feeling repeatedly beaten down as part of the reason her education was derailed for a time.

Her parents were highly discouraging of learning and any kind of structured pursuit of education. Not only did her parents fail to provide educational support, they actively engage in name-calling and disparagement of her commitment to higher education. As a child growing up, Gail’s mother told her that she would be nothing more than a high school dropout. Her parents

attitudes about and perceptions of education continue to be a complication in her life. Gail, in addition to her other myriad of responsibilities, must also provide care for her illiterate parents by reading their mail to them regularly. Though she has tried to teach them learning strategies, they resist, afraid that if they learn how to read themselves that they will lose their disability income.

Gail chose to participate in this interview series because she wanted to share her inspirational story to motivate others who might not otherwise pursue higher education. A lifetime caregiver, Gail withdrew from high school to provide care for her grandmother who suffered from Alzheimer's. Years later she found herself a single mother and working two dead-end jobs to make ends meet. When she initially began her GED courses, she had been evicted by her parents and was caring for her ailing grandmother. "I had to work, I had to make money. It was never really a "want to thing"; I had to work to survive."

Becoming a mother was a critical moment in Gail's life and it motivated her to pursue first her GED and then a college education. She continued to struggle, working and taking GED classes until one day she reached her limit.

My boss was standing there cussing at me, I was listening and I am trying to be respectful and listening, and so our lunch hour, I left; I called work and told him I would not be back. I left from there and came straight here to Whedon College .

The verbal abuse from her manager triggered memories of childhood abuse and she had an epiphany that she had the power to change her life and the responsibility to change her life for her son. In one day, she quit her job, came to Whedon College, completed a FASFA and took the required assessment exam.

Building a better life for her son and setting a good example for him are strong motivators for her to persist.

It makes me have to. It's not a matter of want now, not that I want to do it, it's a matter of I HAVE to do it. I have to show him that education is highly important. It is something that you have to have, not only makes your living better, your, you feel better. Education is not something that can ever be taken away from you...and I want to instill that in my child, and if he sees me doing it...I know he's going to do it. Um, also give him a good, a good life. He can have things that I did not have as a child; it's up to me to work for those. So I have to go to school and do well, get good grades and supply for him!

Gail's typical day is filled with responsibility from the moment she wakes to the moment that she sleeps. Due to the nature of her son's disability, ADHD, and the fact that his medication does not begin to work until after their morning routine, she must dress her son and tie his shoes each morning. They must adhere to a very strict routine and plan each meal one week in advance which they keep posted on a brightly colored poster board. After school, each day is a hurried rush to complete her son's homework before his medication wears off and he can no longer focus.

Although she lives with her significant other, Gail describes herself as a single parent because her significant other is not the father of her child, and the father of her child is not in the picture. Gail credits her significant other with tremendous help, but reiterates that she is the one responsible for all childcare and household tasks. Her primary barriers to education were childcare or babysitter issues and unexpected illnesses of her child conflicting with work or school. Her general feeling is being rushed and feeling unappreciated for all that she does.

Gail describes herself as rushed when she enters the classroom. She always makes a point to sit in the front row of the classroom because of her learning disability she needs to avoid distraction. The biggest lesson she has learned to be successful in the classroom is to “leave everything outside the door when I walk in, and that has been a learning experience because, I have always you know, I am thinking about Mason.” She has learned to shut out the worries of the world during class, in part, because that is her “free hours” to take time for herself.

Homework time is consistently noisy in Gail’s household, and she cited an inability to concentrate in the quiet for this. She proudly shared a testament to her strong work ethic as it pertains to her education. “I turn in every assignment; I’ve never had a missing assignment. And I only have four classes left. So I am very, very proud of that...I never had an F, not one F in all of my education, I’ve not had one F.” Gail’s commitment to scholarship includes her initial semester in which she was not receiving any accommodations for her learning disability. She defines success as a student as getting your work in on time, getting good grades and knowing what she has learned in her classes.

Gail advises other mothers to

Be involved with your child’s school, their education, know what’s going on in their lives, I know my son’s favorite color, I know who my son’s best friend is, I know what show he likes that week, you know, I know those things, and that’s, that’s important. If you don’t know this, you don’t know your kid. And those are the things that are important to your child. Even if they are small details...

Against significant barriers to success, Gail was, at the time of this interview, successfully navigating higher education and motherhood and she had the self-awareness to recognize that fact.

Right now? I think I am successful, you might ask me that tomorrow, but this morning I got up, everything was ready, and everything flowed well. Right now, I do, I see myself as successful, I have made a huge decision about my education that I think was a smart choice.

This success does come with a price, though. One of the compromises Gail makes is giving up sleep and time to socialize with friends. She feels that the sacrifices are worth it because she believes she will be able to build a better life for herself, make a higher income and set a good example for her son. Her son makes his own sacrifices for her to be successful as a student as well. He has had to give up some extracurricular activities because it is not possible for Gail to take him to those activities while balancing a full work schedule and her course load.

Gail advises other student mothers to have a schedule, a strong support system and, above all else, balance. She reiterates the importance of communicating with your child what you are doing and why you are doing it so as to instill educational values. For Gail, higher education has been truly life changing. She has worked very hard to achieve success and is committed to her future.

Profile #3 - Jessica

Jessica is a twenty-four year old Caucasian mother of three children ages five, three, and one. She is originally from Fredericks, Maryland and moved to Richmond, Indiana just after her high school graduation. At the time of this interview, none of Jessica's children had started school yet. Her life was poised for significant change. "One kid starts pre-school next week, another starts kindergarten, and I start school right after, and I am going to have to unwind somehow I guess. I don't have much time left." Since completing high school in 2005, she had been a stay-at-home wife and mother to her three children. Jessica grew up knowing that she had a high IQ and was a bright and talented woman who wanted more for herself, prompting her pursuit of a college education.

When Jessica described her upbringing, she recalled a lack of access to technology, but otherwise she describes her childhood home as fostering learning. Her social and emotional experiences complicated her experiences with education prior to college.

It's pretty much common knowledge that my mom sent me to kindergarten a year early because I tested at a very high IQ, um... she wanted to get rid of me. And so... I knew I had a feeling that I was going to school just because I was in the way. So that had a bit to do with how I felt about school, like it was useless, that type of thing...I moved from one part of Maryland to another and switched schools, I moved from a not very affluent area to an affluent area and that was a bit of a culture shock!"

Jessica's childhood was marked by instability and tragedy. She recalled her mother being transported to the hospital after a suicide attempt and how her father shaped that into an experience of learning about helicopters to soothe her and her sister. She was forced to take on adult roles as a child in caring for her younger sister due to her mother's instability and later

absence. She describes high school as “a series of miserable generally, unrelated to school experiences.” Her younger sister began to get into trouble and Jessica became the point of contact for the school and was responsible for her younger sister.

Jessica did not respond well to the rigid learning environment of school. She heavily emphasized her father’s commitment to her learning as a child, describing him fostering creativity by putting paper on the walls for them to draw on. She recalled not watching television. “I have never seen a Disney movie”, but rather was being encouraged to read. Further, her father encouraged her to make things rather than buy them and discouraged her from consumerism of brand-name clothing, which she felt further distanced her from her peers at school. Her father did encourage her to go to college, offering her a car if she went, but she also recalls observing that her father was able to provide for them without having gone to college himself.

A defining moment for Jessica was when a close friend committed suicide, after which “yeah, yeah I decided that school was pretty much pointless at that point. Um, cause the school didn’t help her and uh, the school could have, but didn’t.” Jessica was raised in an environment where the authority figures in her life did not protect her or guide her with the exception of her father, who did provide learning experiences for the children recalling him getting encyclopedias and kids games for her and her sister.

Jessica’s perceptions of the social environment of college discouraged her from attending.

I didn’t particularly like the cliqueiness and from what I heard about uh like colleges that have sororities and stuff...I think, I think it’s stupid to get that drunk...I don’t do any of

the things that it seemed that college was all about...So it just seemed like a waste of my time and money!

In addition to feeling socially ill-equipped for college, Jessica was unfamiliar, as a first-generation college student, with administrative processes of attending college such as admissions and financial aid.

She became pregnant at age nineteen, just after graduating high school. "After I got pregnant, uh, we moved out here because it's a much better area, plus I was miserable in my school years, except band, I just wanted to leave town. So, um, I did." As an adult and a young mother, Jessica took control of her life and relocated to find a better life for her child. She recalled wanting her children to take school seriously and wanting to go to college, but childrearing kept getting in the way.

And I wanted to be a paramedic since I was um, seven. And then I realized I want my kids to actually take school seriously. So when Whedon College started the paramedic program, which I was waiting for, but it seemed every time I would have an opportunity, (inaudible) drive to Indianapolis, Dayton, Terre Haute to take the paramedic classes, I would get pregnant again. We had decided since we had the one, and we were relatively financially set, that we would just go ahead and have the next two, so we wouldn't have a giant gap.

Jessica decided to pursue an education at Whedon College mostly because she could take courses online and avoid the social interaction all together. Her father has raised some concerns about this, thinking that no one will take it seriously because it is an online program. She had reached the point in her curriculum, at the time of this interview, where she would be required to take some face to face classes. She had some reservations about this, but at one point in the

interview, shared “I am not entirely sure, why I know this, there is a part of me that wants to go out and interact with other kids.” She is also motivated by her strong desire to set an example for her children and she wants them to know that college can be a “great experience.”

As a college student and a mother of three young children who have not yet entered school, the typical day that she describes is erratic and busy. As a stay-at-home mother, she is responsible for all childcare and household chore responsibilities. As a result of this, her three children were physically present for two of the three interviews, one of which was conducted over the phone. Not confined by work or school schedules, her typical day revolved around her children’s needs rather than a strict routine. At the time of the interviews, Jessica was trying to develop a plan to manage her new schedule with her oldest child starting school and she starting evening classes.

I am still trying to work it out for in the mornings. I have to get up around 6:30, get him up, showered, dressed, and what not, and then get them up, figure out how I am going to get him breakfast, get them breakfast, dressed, get lunches packed, I have got to take my husband to work, I have to take him to school by 7:30 and my husband to work by 8. And, we only have one car, and then I will have to take her to school at 11:50, [child talking in background, conversation with child] and go back and pick her up at 2:30 and him at 2:40, fortunately at the same school. And then I go back home, then pick my husband up around 5, unless a truck wrecks or catches fire, which it always happens, but we hope he gets off at 5. I then come home cook dinner, do that, my husband puts them to bed, I put him to bed, because he’s still little [child talking in background] and then I do schoolwork. And then also starting on the 20th, on Mondays and Tuesdays, from 5 to 9:30, I have class on campus; I am taking seventeen and a half credits this semester...I

thought about getting poster board and putting my routine in writing...I'll probably do that.

As she works through the process of figuring out how to complete all of her tasks, she admits that she and her husband have not quite figured out who will take on her responsibilities while she is in class. For now, she describes homework time as feeling "pretty overwhelmed" with the children needing her while she's trying to focus. Jessica indicated that she was trying to get more help from her husband, but that "he's convinced I don't need to go to work or anything, he wants me to stay at home...but he needs to realize that it is something that I actually want to do and he's been a whole lot more cooperative and helping out." She has about two hours a day to devote to homework and gets an average of six hours of sleep daily. She does have a good friend who provides a support system and who sometimes helps with household chores so that she can complete coursework.

She describes being successful as a mother as "raising children who are not criminals and who still like me" and as "not freaking out, spending a lot of time counting to ten! And deep breaths and whatnots, making sure that they go to school and do well in school, to instill that there are rules for a reason." As for whether she is successful as a mother,

I think it kind of depends on the day, like today nothing seems to be going right. So I don't feel successful, I got the house cleaned so it is kind of successful. I think if you keep thinking about if you are successful or not, you can end up kind of a wreck. So, it depends on the situation, I guess.

Jessica frequently referred to balance as a struggle. She identified, "not being able to go out and not have my kids with me or doing school work" as a compromise. However, providing a good example to her children that education is important was a significant benefit to her of

being enrolled in college. Yet, even prior to the start of the Fall term, she was contemplating taking the Spring term off because balancing the needs of her children with the attention required for coursework was taking too great a toll.

I am thinking about it so I can spend some more time with the kids. Also, I have to get my EMT basic, certification, after this semester, so I can take the paramedic classes, I don't want to rush it before I register for the next semester of classes. I want to be able to do it right...We will see how this semester goes, and then I'll make that decision. I don't want to jump into it; it's taken me a long time to get to this point! It'll be better for everybody!

Jessica remains positive, advising other mothers, "You can do it. At least that's what I've been telling myself! Just put your mind to it! Kind of corny but it's true. Just have the right mind set to it, don't go into it thinking you are going to fail! Do the best you can!"

Profile #4 - Kim

Kim is a thirty-four year old Caucasian mother of two children, ages eight and ten. She is originally from a suburb near Indianapolis and now lives in Richmond, Indiana. Kim completed high school in 1996 and went to a four-year institution immediately following high school. She works part-time outside the home at a work-study position on campus. She has a strong support system that keeps her motivated and focused and allows her to balance her home and school life.

Kim's early experiences with education were impacted by a move that involved changing from one school system to another. She transitioned from a predominantly White, middle class environment to a predominantly African-American, low-income school system and "it was for me socially a shock." She recalls a strong focus on mathematics and science and considers that to have been a double-edged sword in terms of learning and preparation for college. Kim scored very high on the mathematics portion of her SATs and feels confident in her math skills, but she still struggles somewhat with reading and comprehension. She never enjoyed reading for pleasure and admits that she did not really focus on reading until she became a mother and began reading to her children. She now has increased confidence in her reading skills.

Neither Kim's parents nor her husband attended college. Her parents did not place an emphasis on college or prepare her for college until her senior year of high school. In high school, Kim felt "lost in the shuffle." At that point, they strongly encouraged her to attend IUPUI and live at home. Wanting to be on her own, she insisted on going away to college.

She described her first college experience at Ball State University as difficult. "I don't think I was prepared for that scene at all. Um...because I was not ready for the amount of studying, um... I was not prepared for just the social climate, um...." She goes on to explain

that she had a hard time making friends and that when she did, she placed too high an emphasis on those relationships over her studies.

I had a hard time making those goals and finding that focus of what I needed to do. Some of this was because I had just done high school, I had just graduated high school, I was tired of working, studying, and I just didn't have the ambition to complete a degree and finish school then. So I decided, I took the year off and try to figure out what I wanted to do and one year turned into ten years.

Although her parents had not placed a heavy emphasis on higher education early on, they reacted negatively to her withdrawal from Ball State.

Um... I think that they knew at that time that I probably wouldn't go back to college for a very long time if ever. Um...so they were very highly disappointed with me when I did that. Um...they never said anything, but I knew it, I could tell and when I told them that I was going to go back to school they were just ecstatic

She now counts her parents as part of a strong support system, "our parents now live in Florida but can't help out as much but they offer a lot of support on the phone, I call them...they support me and you know it's exciting to hear that they are happy that I am doing something I enjoy."

Kim was motivated to go back to school and pursue a college education after her husband lost his job, forcing them to relocate from Florida to Indiana. She wanted to contribute to her family's stability and set an example for her children. So, once her husband found a new job, she enrolled in school.

Kim works on campus in a work study position Monday through Friday from 12:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. and, at the time of the interviews, she was also filling in on evenings and weekends

on a temporary basis. She describes the evenings as “difficult” but explains “once you get used to it, we’ll be fine, just change your routine that’s all.” Her typical routine is busy as it is.

I am waking up usually about a quarter to 5, gives myself a little bit of time in the morning. I can get myself ready before I have to get everybody else ready. And I can take my time, it’s worth it, we are done and ready to head out the door around 7:30, 7:45, they have to be at school between 8 and 8:15. And then after that I have my time to study for classes. Since the mornings are free, I would study until I have to go pick up the kids, which is I usually get there by 2 because I have to get in line to pick them up by car.

Then when we get home, sit down by 3:30, have their snack and then get started on homework, we sit down together and get started on homework! Then I start prepping for dinner at that same time. If it’s a night that I have night classes, I need to have dinner done by 5:30, my husband gets home at 5:30, I say hi to him and pretty much walk out the door, so I can get to Whedon College in class in the evening. So when we get home we do get to rest for a little bit, before the madness begins all over again! Bedtimes, depending if I have classes or not, my husband and I take turns, I help my daughter, and he helps our son. We have a tag team, the kids are at a point where they can do this on their own, but we just supervise to make sure they wash behind their ears, that kind of stuff.

Homework time is completed together as a family. While her children are doing homework, she is doing homework alongside them. She has about three hours each morning to devote to her studies,

But I know on Saturdays and Sundays I am going to have to spend some dedicated time to studying. I have to read something more than once, I have to take notes, I have to

highlight, I do a lot of things to understand a subject. On weekends, we have games, family life, birthday parties, but I know I can put in enough times usually early morning, wake up earlier, it is part of what it is if I want to be successful. Because I want those higher grades, I will get up an hour or two earlier if I must.

In addition to maintaining this routine, Kim uses advanced meal planning as a tool to keep things on track. She and her husband plan their dinner for the entire month ahead of time. This was an important piece for her because it saved time on making decisions for what the children would have to eat each night. Kim provided a colorful menu for the month of August that included various home-cooked meals and even identified what nights the family would be eating leftovers.

Kim is able to navigate conflicts because of her strong support system. She explains that she and her husband take a “tag team” approach to running their home. She and her husband take turns staying with their children when they are ill. Evening classes do present a greater challenge, but she adjusts her schedule accordingly. This interview occurred prior to the start of the Fall semester, when she was set to be facing more online courses due to scheduling conflicts. Her preference was to take face to face courses, but that was not an option to obtain the courses that she needed.

She is successful as a student, defining success as “having a great GPA and knowing the material.” Kim is committed to learning on a deep level from her coursework. According to Kim, this takes “a lot of studying. You have to put in the time; you have to read the material! You have to test yourself! You have to the homework!”

Kim is also thoughtful, loving and successful as a mother, but the formula for that success is not as simple. She emphasizes organization, balancing being loving and a

disciplinarian and allowing her children to grow and learn from their own mistakes as critical to successful parenting. She emphasizes how important it is to set the example of placing a high value on education for her children and reiterates how critical her support system is to her success.

Higher education was not important or necessary to Kim prior to becoming a mother. She now places a high emphasis on completing college and plans to go on for first a bachelor's degree at Purdue and then a master's degree. She wants for her children to see her complete her degrees, but she also wants them to see the struggle and understand how much easier it is to complete college right after high school. Her family is top priority and although she places a high emphasis on education, she was careful to explain that this is something she does for her family and because of her family.

Profile #5 - Haley

Haley is a twenty-four year old Hispanic mother of one three-year old son with ADHD. She is originally from Tampa Bay, Florida and relocated to Richmond, Indiana when she was in the third trimester of her pregnancy with her son. Haley grew up in a military family and relocated frequently during her childhood. She graduated early from an alternative school with her GED at age sixteen. Haley values her education and recognizes the benefits she has reaped from it.

Neither of Haley's parents graduated college, but they had big dreams for her when she was a young child. She was bright and did well academically, but began to struggle behaviorally in her middle school years. "I was kind of letting people get to me; I use to get picked on a lot...So I, so about half way through the year, I didn't want to go to school... I didn't want to deal with people."

She went to a large school where there were at least one thousand students in her grade. She was bullied by other students, and she did not get along well with her teachers.

My personal opinion is that if you are going to teach then you need to have, if your kids have questions, then you know even if you feel like it is ridiculous, they are kids, they don't know what you are teaching them, but because they probably don't know any better, then they are probably going to ask you about God knows what. And being a teacher you need to learn how to be okay with it.

After repeated instances of altercations with other students, Haley was facing expulsion. She was directed to an alternative school for girls by her anger management counselor where, The people there had similar stories like issues in their home, their high schools, everything else; you know a whole bunch of different things.

She thrived in the alternative school and graduated early, at age sixteen, but it was not until she discovered she was going to become a mother that she decided to go to college.

I do want to continue going to school, especially getting ready to have a baby you know, I needed, I felt like college would help me to be able to get a better job, provide better for myself, provide for him, and things would be a little more stable for me.

Haley is not employed outside the home, but she and her husband receive government assistance. She learned about the availability of resources such as Medicaid from her classmates at the alternative school. Her experience with the Impact program led her to volunteer at the Salvation Army. She had been provided with free childcare before she got married, but “I got married and they took it, even though I didn’t have any money.” This lack of childcare presented a major barrier to success for Haley and her husband. She was unable to work outside the home and was struggling to find childcare during her class sessions. Her son was present at each interview as she was unable to take her child to daycare.

Haley is the first person in her family, on either side, to graduate from college. Both of her parents attended college, but did not finish. Her parents encouraged her to complete her education once she began college.

They regretted not finishing. Because they told me that if you are going to do this, you are going to finish, we don’t care how much of a pain in the butt you think it is.

Haley found being pregnant at a young age challenging and overwhelming at first. “This is, this is probably one of the hardest jobs anyone could possibly have is being a parent.” She struggles to maintain a routine with her son and reveals that he’s been falling asleep later and later and that they are “getting him on some kind of schedule thing.” Homework time happens when her son “every once in a while, he’ll decide that he really wants to take a nap.” She has

time to herself in the mornings and late at night. Haley did not have a specific routine or provide any scheduling or planning documents. She did, however, provide several examples of working on homework with her son.

I color code pretty much about everything and I actually had him help me do color code sheets. (inaudible) And I've been getting my homework done, if there is any off the wall assignments that I can do, (inaudible), I try to get him involved. I had a poster board presentation that I did, [background noise] that I did last semester, that I had him help me with; he put like stickers and stuff on it. [child yelling] (inaudible)

Haley defines successful mothering as just doing what you can do and asking for help if you need it. "I know what I deal with every day; I try to relax without stressing out all of the time. And I am pretty healthy, my son is healthy." She tries to remain relaxed, but she does want to push herself academically. "I have freaked out over getting a "C" in a class, maybe it is passing, but I want better...I don't want to just pass." Her biggest challenge to success in school is childcare.

If you are able to, get your kids in day-care. He went for a while, that is when I was having all kinds of scheduling problems, if I had class, then one of use would pick him up for the day. If you are able to get it paid for somehow

Haley is positive about her experiences in college, and reflects, "It has done nothing but help me, personally and professionally. In a professional sense, I have more contacts and my personally and socially, and communication skills have gotten better, a lot better...I'll probably end up going until I can't go anymore." Haley is trying to change her life to build a better future for herself and her family, "Yeah, I just can't sit on my ass forever, I just couldn't do it. He [my

son] deserves better, he you know (inaudible) makes it a million more times important than in the first place.”

Profile #6 Sarah

Sarah is a quiet, reserved 27-year-old Caucasian mother of two children, ages eleven and three. She is married and lives fifteen minutes outside of Richmond, Indiana in Fountain City, Ohio. She graduated from Union County High School in 2003. Sarah pushes herself to be the best student, mother and wife that she can be and explains that balancing those roles can be very challenging. Her early experiences with education were very positive and she has particularly fond memories of elementary school. “I loved music class and I loved gym class and I loved science, I can remember doing star labs and that was always so much fun.”

Sarah recalls things changing for her in school when she started high school, when “my freshman year I joined the color guard and got in the wrong crowd. My grades got worse and I was trying to find friends, hung out with the wrong crowd and so um... that is when I started having problems with my grades.” After that, she explains, her parents became divorced and she relocated from a small rural school to a large urban school. She found what she describes as “another rough crowd” to socialize with and soon became pregnant at age fifteen.

Concern for her safety and the safety of her unborn child led her to an alternative school, I was walking in the hallway and someone went to punch someone else and I got punched in the stomach while I was pregnant, and I got really nervous being there and so I ended up leaving there and going to the F.I.N.D. Center...I just concentrated on school, actually I did way better after having my daughter.

Sarah’s parents supported her education verbally, but she did not have any examples of people pursuing higher education in her life. Her parents would tell her how to do her homework, but did not sit down with her and provide support. She describes them as very busy

and not having a lot of time and also that by high school they were struggling with the material that she was studying.

Sarah was one of four children and she is the only one who finished high school. She wanted better for herself. "I definitely didn't want to be like my brothers; I always wanted to be a step above and made a point that I wasn't going to do that." Sarah did attempt college immediately following high school. Her parents "didn't really talk about college, um my parents didn't have a lot of money growing up so it was better if they just didn't talk about it." However, when she got older and became a mother, she recalls her mother encouraging her to take classes. So, Sarah came to Whedon College just after graduating high school,

I was trying to juggle a full-time job and raising my daughter and it just wasn't a good situation and I didn't continue. The day-care center I took her to at the time, I'd go straight from work to class and she'd be in day-care from like that whole entire day, couple of times a week and I sometimes would leave class and it'd be like 9:00 at night and I'd go to pick her up and they weren't even at the day-care. That happened liked two or three times, she wasn't there, and I couldn't find her and I had to call them to try to figure out where she was.

Sarah got married in 2009 and had another child in 2010. When her husband lost his job, she re-evaluated her life and decided that she wanted to be able to contribute more financially to their family and decided to go back to school. Her choice of program is dictated, in part, by childcare restraints.

I wanted to do radiology, and because I want to call it an internship, but there is like a two-year program, after you get done with your pre-requisites, so with my son being so young, I thought I don't think I could do that, not work, come here and pay for day-care,

so I kind of changed back to respiratory care, and I was going to try that also, but a couple of classes would have to be in Muncie, and from Eaton to Muncie, it's kind of a long drive in the winter time. So, if it was really something I'd want to do, I would have to sacrifice to do that, so I kind of then decided on general studies, is what I am in right now. Um, at least if I get that done, I'll have that experience so that I can go on to the next level.

Sarah is a hard worker and a good student and has had to pass on many opportunities because of her taking on adult responsibilities at such a young age.

One of the hard things was that I got accepted into the "American High School" students, and I didn't really put my picture in the book and stuff, and they had um. I am not sure what it is called now, kind of a National Honor Society, for high school, and um, with that you got an opportunity to go to Washington, DC, to attend the Congress and do different things, and I really wanted to go, but I couldn't because I had a daughter to think about. I just couldn't leave her, take her with me, and there are just a few things that I had to miss out on.

Sarah provides childcare for two young girls in addition to her own children each week day. She juggles schoolwork, involvement in church and her children's athletics, housework and parenting each day. Her young son, at the time of this interview, was also seeing a speech therapist and she was responsible for getting him to his appointments.

A typical day is to get up between 6:45 and 7:15, right now I am not in school, so I try to get up and get all of my projects done. If I am in school, then I am organizing my file box, and (inaudible) and then I try to make sure I have dinner ready by 4:30 or 5, that's about the time my husband gets home from work. By the time we get baths done, we

don't have a whole lot of time to do a whole lot. The kids go to bed, I try to get stuff done, I didn't have time to do during the day. This past summer while I was in school, I have two little girls that I sometimes babysit for, they will sit and play, with my little boy and girl. I will sit on the couch with my laptop and try to do homework because my class is online. When they first came, I would fix a little breakfast, then cleaned up, they will play or watch a movie and then I would work on my laptop. Then after that, around 11:00 I would fix lunch, feed them, sometimes after lunch we would do crafts, once a week I would try to take them to the pool, from noon till about 2:00. Have them do a quiet time, the girls were older and they didn't like to call it "nap" time, my son would take a nap, I'd put a mat on the floor and they will lay there and watch a movie and get my laptop and work on school work. And after quiet time and my homework, I would fix them a snack, then it would close to time for them to leave. I try to keep my evenings open, that way I am not on the computer the entire day.

Sarah's days are very full, but she says, "I don't work well under pressure so I try to get my work done early. There has been a couple of times I had to stay up late, but I try not to do that, so I can spend time with my family." She works hard all week long to ensure that she has no homework on the weekends so that she can spend time with her family, in the community and at church. Her hard work has paid off and she is close to graduating. At the time of this interview, just prior to Fall 2012, Sarah was planning to graduate in Spring 2013 and was already thinking about what she needed to do to transfer to a four-year institution. "Yeah, I try to plan everything. I just always have to be busy, I am use to it. So if I do sit down I find a project to do, so I am just not sitting there." Sarah provided copies of her day planner that she used as an

organizational resource. Her planner included class times, soccer practice schedules, speech therapy appointments and assignment deadlines.

Sarah is engaged in class, but quiet. She prefers not to ask questions, but waits to see if others will ask the question she has and listens intently. The social situation of the classroom still gives her some anxiety and she is nervous going into each new class.

I kind of sit in the middle, and then a lot of classes I will sit in the front because I am real “hands-on”, I like to be up there where I can see it all. I get easily distracted, so there I am not so distracted. If I am trying to read something and someone is talking, that is a problem. Or if someone behind me is talking, I am not trying to eavesdrop, but I can hear it [giggle] Kind of drives me nuts, so I try to sit in front so I have a focus on things. But um, I actually look forward to coming to class because it’s like “me” time.

Planning and staying organized is an important part of Sarah’s success in college. Her definition of success is to set goals for high grades and meeting deadlines. She really wants to get into Phi Theta Kappa, an international two-year honor society that requires a 3.5 GPA, for the scholarship opportunities.

She defines success as a mother as being active in her children’s lives and having time for them. For her, this is the purpose of going to college, to have career opportunities that allow her to spend time with her children rather than “bouncing around from job to job.” She describes her biggest challenge to managing these multiple roles,

Just to balance it out and that’s the biggest thing, just doing things with my kids. We don’t believe in spoiling them but I like to do little things, any time I find something to do I try to do it. If it is fun and they like it, they will want to do it again. So the big thing is just spending time with my kids. I want to financially support them too, but spending

time with them is important...I try really hard to try to be in two places at the same time, I think being a mom, it's really hard not to do that. I want to be more involved in church, but I've got soccer with my daughter, I've got homework, speech therapy with my son, being a mom you put way too much pressure on yourself. Trying too hard to be the perfect mom all the time, when you know you can't.

Sarah considers herself successful as a student and a mother. She knows that most teenage mothers do not finish high school and she is reluctantly proud of herself when she reflects on all that she has accomplished.

Um, yeah I think so um, I knew a lot of teenage moms, that either didn't finish school, you know, but it's not all their fault that they couldn't finish school. But I did. I have a lot of things that I never had growing up, a house, a car, you know. As a teenage mom, something I would never thought I'd have or do. I think I am pretty successful, from where I came from.

Sarah acknowledges that there are benefits to being a student and a mother and she appreciates the "me time" she gets from spending time in classes. She is proud that she is contributing to her family's stability by earning a college degree. She knows that she will be able to provide opportunities for her children that she did not have as a child.

I want to do the best I can, do as much as I can, to get to that point because I don't want to live my whole life, living pay check to pay check and living without things that I need, so to me higher education is an opportunity to me to better yourself, your family's lives and even better the economy...I now see how important it is, but I really didn't while I was in school...I can remember growing up our house went up for auction, and I don't

ever want my kids hearing that, you know? I just feel if I can get a better education I can prevent some of the problems that I had growing up.

Sarah understands how important background and upbringing is when it comes to pursue a higher education and when asked what her advice was for mothers in college, she said, “It’s a hard one, because a lot of them draw on different positions, different pasts, it’s hard to know what they think, in general, just don’t give up...But I just think, sticking it out, you are going to have trials and stuff, and things are going to get in your way. You just have to see what you can do.” Talking about her experiences in higher education caused Sarah to think, “I think it’s come to make me realize how important it is to me and why I don’t want to give up, even when it seems hard. I love going to school, it gets discouraging when you try your hardest and the grade is lower than what you are wanting. And you ask why am I even doing this? When you are done with that class, it makes you realize how important it was in your life. It seems like it is a long way away, but it goes by fast and it makes it worth it”

Profile #7 – Robin

Robin is a shy, soft-spoken twenty-two year old Caucasian mother of a fifteen-month old son. She graduated from Richmond High School and still lives in Richmond. She lives with her forty-one year old boyfriend, brother, four dogs and three cats. She is the primary caregiver for the child and all of the animals in the home. She went to a satellite campus of the state's flagship institution directly out of high school, but withdrew after one year. Robin faces numerous obstacles to the completion of a college degree, both in her background and her current living situation, but she remains positive and determined to provide a better life for herself and her son.

Robin is eager to learn and remembers being excited about “everything, the kids, reading, learning” when she was in elementary school. She always did well in school and always expected to go to college. When she was a junior in high school, she recalled becoming disengaged with school because it was “boring and just not challenging.” She dreamed of going to an out of state school and becoming a psychiatrist when she was younger. Her parents did not discuss college with her until she was a senior in high school, at which point they encouraged her to go to community college.

After entering college and taking a Psychology course, she felt that she could not practically become a psychiatrist because it would take too long to finish school and get a job. Her parents never attended college and had no information for her on college when she was growing up. She landed at IU East because of a College for a Day program that she participated in high school where she filled out the application for admission and toured the campus. Initially, she was excited to begin her studies, but ultimately was not successful.

Um, I really didn't know what was going on, like here I have an advisor, and at IU East, I didn't know even who my advisor was. So I wasn't connected like I am here. And so I was confused and I got frustrated, and I just quit going.

After withdrawing from college, she began working full-time, met her boyfriend and had a child. It was after having her son that she decided to go back to school. However, she maintained that she had always wanted to go back to school and that her boyfriend's preference for her to stay home with her son provided her the opportunity to go back to school. At the time of the interview, she was preparing for her first semester as a full-time student.

Her current schedule is full from the moment she wakes to the moment she goes to sleep. She is responsible for providing transportation to everyone who lives in her house and caregiving for her child and all the animals.

I take my boyfriend to work, and then I come back home and then I get on my computer and drink my coffee, and feed my dog because he is hypoglycemic; I have to feed her every three hours. In the mornings I have to put sugar in her food, a tablespoon of sugar in her food, so she doesn't have seizures. I have three dogs and two cats, three cats and three dogs. And my brother just moved back in and he has a dog, so, um, so I let them out, make sure they all get fed, and they are eating their own food and then at 8:30 I have to wake Lucas up and he takes his bottle and watches a movie for an hour. And I do dishes, I vacuum, and then at 10:00 we eat breakfast, and then I have to feed my dog again. Then me and Lucas watch Mickey Mouse Club every morning [giggle]. And then we have play time, and story time and then we have lunch, at 12:30, he takes a nap, I 1:00 I have to go get my boyfriend. At 1:30 I have to have my brother at work. And then when I get back home I usually have to do homework or housework. At 3:30 when

Lucas gets up and we have playtime, I have to feed my dog again, and let them out, then at 5:30 I have to pick Mike up from work. Then I cook dinner when I get home, then I play with Lucas in between cooking and letting the dogs out, then we eat dinner and I have to go get my brother from work and then at 8:00, we like just kind of play around. (inaudible) At 8:30, we have a bath and a story, 9:00 it is bed time, he's asleep by 9:30 and then it's my time, till 11:00 and then it's time to go to bed.

Robin provided a detailed listing of her schedule detailing her routine from the moment she wakes until the moment she goes to sleep. She had developed the list for herself and she also had a list that she created to provide to anyone who would be providing childcare for her son so that he can stay on schedule. Her responsibilities gave her very little time for homework and she had very little support in the home.

I only get like from 2:15 to 3:00 usually to do homework, because my boyfriend, he doesn't help me a lot, so he wants me to do everything until Lucas is asleep, like the housework. So like from 9:00 to 11:00 I would stay up and do homework or housework, if I didn't get it done.

She was concerned about success in the Fall 2012 semester because she was scheduled to take face-to-face courses and that impacted her schedule significantly.

In the fall, I don't know what I am going to do, because, on Mondays and Wednesdays I am in school, all day. Like Anatomy and Physiology, 8:00 to 11:45? And I will have, right now it is set up to where I have left Lucas with my dad, I go to class, so I will have to go get him, take him to my grandmas and be back here to school from 2:00 to 4:40 for micro-biology and then I have to get off school and go pick Mike up...so...then go pick

Lucas up. And then go home and cook dinner and then try to get everything done before I go to bed.

Robin was determined to succeed in spite of the barriers she was facing.

It's going to have to work, it would be ideal if I could find a good day-care that he could go to all day so I wouldn't have to run in between my classes and sit down and do homework and have that time to focus on it, without all of the chaos. I am not sure right now how it's all going to work out.

Chaos and stress were common themes for Robin in her life. Her homework time particularly was a source of stress.

It's stressful. Because there is so much of it and I feel that my boyfriend doesn't get, doesn't get it. Like he went to school and everything, but I don't know when he did his homework, because he doesn't fully understand how much I have and how long it takes. So I am having to try to get homework done in this little amount of time every day. So...he just doesn't get it, so sometimes I have to stay up until midnight just to get it done. And then he gets mad at me because he is wanting me to come to bed. And he's tired, and so...

Robin does not have support inside the home, but she does have some support from her extended family. Despite not being able to assist financially or prepare her for college, her parents are enthusiastic about her studies and provide childcare as they can in the mornings on weekdays and on the weekends so that she can work on homework. She is positive about the future, but the barriers were too great in previous semesters and she was unable to pass her courses because of a lack of childcare.

I had a baby-sitter lined up and the first day she bailed on me...And she didn't return my calls or anything. So I couldn't go to that class, so I switched to a night class so I wouldn't be dropped out. It was a week later that I got in that class and they had already gone through the first chapter and I was completely lost. And it was so fast paced from there that I didn't know what was going on and so...it just did not work.

To be successful in college, Robin thought it was important to focus and think about the future benefits of college once her coursework was completed. "I will have money to do stuff with Lucas. Like right now I don't have the money to take him anywhere, show him new things, I want him to see more...than he does right now...Try to teach him and work with him all day, and I want him to grow up with good morals and work ethic and smart, and I don't want him to get into trouble"

Robin identifies herself as successful because she has "completed what I wanted to so far." One of her biggest challenges was finding reliable childcare. She had called all of the advertised daycares in Richmond and they were full. She had other people in her life who offered to help, but with whom she did not trust her son alone. She was worried about her son's well-being while she was in class and "he can't talk, but I have to trust people" because her son was too young to communicate what was happening when she was not with him.

Setting a good example of a strong work ethic for her son was very important to Robin. She had high goals for herself and wanted to "Be a good mother and eventually I want to go further, I want to get through the nursing program and I don't want to stop. I would like to be a doctor."

Themes

Five themes emerged from the interview profiles: support systems, lack of college preparation, family as a priority, education as self-fulfillment, and balance.

Support systems. Varied support systems played a critical role in the academic success of the participants. Many of the participants did not receive assistance from their significant other with household or childcare responsibilities. With the exception of Kim, whose husband and she took a “tag team” approach to household chores, none of the women had significant assistance from their significant others with household or childcare tasks. They did often have support from their parents, friends or co-workers. This is in contrast with Brown and Amankwaa’s (2007) finding that women raising children who are of low socioeconomic status are unable or less likely to pursue higher education than their more affluent counterparts who can rely on assistance from family to do so.

The participants relied on the people in their support networks to provide childcare, assist with household chores, and provide encouragement. Whitney’s parents would watch her baby daughter when she needed to go to class in the evening or do homework on the weekends. Kim’s support network was very strong and even though her parents lived at a great distance, their involvement was important to her.

Our parents now live in Florida but can’t help out as much but they offer a lot of support on the phone, I call them...they support me and you know it’s exciting to hear that they are happy that I am doing something I enjoy.

Kim particularly felt that support systems played a critical role in her success as a student and a mother.

Biggest thing for me is to have a support system. Some don't have that support system, and I am lucky that I have a great support system with my husband and family. If it's finding another mom and campus, so if you have a class on campus and you know this woman and you need a sitter, and you trust your child with while you have class, you can be there and not miss out on your education. It is important, making connections with people, and building that support system. It is something that all moms need. I have absolute faith that in needing that time yourself to study, you don't need to worry about dishes, laundry, your education is more important than the laundry. They will get done; they will get taken care of.

Jessica's husband was not supportive in providing assistance with childcare or household chores and encouraged her to stay at home with the children. However, her close friend was an important part of her success as a student and a mother.

My friend usually handles that stuff, like if I need to do studying, she'll come over and knock out the housework and we do things like that for each other all of the time. I have a key to her house and she has a key to mine

Although the participants' schedules were grueling and their responsibilities were many, they did have emotional and physical resources to support their educational endeavors. Different people played different roles of support in the women's lives. Some had spouses who contributed heavily to household chores and childcare responsibilities, but most did not. Where there was a lack of support from a significant other, support from a friend or parent took its place.

Lack of college preparation. Each of the participants had a different path to college from their K-12 educational experiences. Some, like Whitney and Kim, went to a four-year institution

immediately following high school. What the participants shared was a lack of preparation for college prior to starting. Most of the participants indicated that their parents made no mention of college until their senior year of high school. This is consistent with the literature in that individuals in low SES families have fewer resources in health, mentoring, income, role modeling and support systems that provide the necessary acumen to succeed in higher education (Payne, 1996; 2005; Kerbo, 1991; Berk, 2003). For Kim in particular, the lack of preparation was too much to overcome in her first attempt at college.

I don't think I was prepared for that scene at all. Um...because I was not ready for the amount of studying, um... I was not prepared for just the social climate, um...I had a hard time making those goals and finding that focus of what I needed to do. Some of this was because I had just done high school, I had just graduated high school, I was tired of working, studying, and I just didn't have the ambition to complete a degree and finish school then. So I decided, I took the year off and try to figure out what I wanted to do and one year turned into ten years

Robin also went to a four-year institution right out of high school. She explained that what she learned about college prior to attending was primarily from a program called College for a Day where she had the opportunity to tour the college and complete an application for admission in her senior year of high school. Unfortunately, despite her high grades and enthusiasm, her lack of preparation for college caused a barrier to her success.

Um, I really didn't know what was going on, like here I have an advisor, and at IU East, I didn't know even who my advisor was. So I wasn't connected like I am here. And so I was confused and I got frustrated, and I just quit going.

Lack of college preparation served as a significant barrier to the initial pursuit of higher education for many of the participants. For one participant, a lack of preparation for the perceived social aspects of college life was enough of a barrier that she chose initially not to participate in college and when she did decide to come to Whedon College, she took online classes rather than face to face, in part because of concern over the social climate of the classroom.

I didn't particularly like the cliqueiness and from what I heard about uh like colleges that have sororities and stuff, and (inaudible) um, I think, I think it's stupid to get that drunk. I am like the official designated driver but, uh, I don't drink, I don't do any of the things that it seemed that college was all about. It was more (inaudible) learning experiences [child in background], but with uh, things, like uh partying and uh with special (inaudible) added in. So it just seemed like a waste of my time and money!

It is important to note that all but one of the participants indicated that her parents had urged her to go to college, but that her parents did not have the experience with higher education necessary to provide them with the resources to enter a four-year institution with confidence and ease. The exception to this was Gail, whose parents actively disparaged her educational efforts from high school into her current pursuits of a higher education. Gail described her entry into college as a decision based on survival and wanting a better life for her and her son.

Familys a priority. Each of the women saw themselves first as a mother and then as a student. Going to college was intertwined with being a good mother by building a better life for her family. Education was seen as a vehicle to better paying jobs that would contribute to her family's financial security and stability. As their descriptions of their daily schedules indicated, each participant was willing to give up sleep, time with friends and even study time, but they

were committed to carving out time to spend with their children. They did this by incorporating family time into their planned schedules and also by blending their own homework time with their children's homework time. The participants also emphasized the value of setting an example for their children of placing an emphasis on education. Many of them expressed a desire for their children to go to college immediately following high school.

Whitney explains that setting an example for her daughter is important and that she wants to instill the value of higher education in her daughter.

I want the best for my daughter, and the best for my family, and for me. In my mind for me to be able to have the best for my family, I have to be able to keep doing what I love to do, which is learning and applying everything to my everyday life. I just want my daughter to grow up and be like "my mom, holy cow, she has gone through like years and years of college" and I just want her to have that image to know that if "my mom can do that I can do it."

Kim emphasizes the importance of setting an example for her children and explains how she integrates her homework time with her children's homework time.

I think the kids being able to see me working hard, earning good grades, they can look up to me, like they never have in the past, as they get older, they are more aware of what I am doing and what I am trying to achieve for our family. They have an understanding that a college degree is important and meaningful, before they start to have their own families...When it's time for the kids to do homework, I sit down and do homework too. So we all have time together in the evenings, we can all sit down and work together. So now that they are going into the third and fifth grade, we are going to have a whole lot more homework together. That will be a benefit to all of us, sit down, they know it is

study time, we can all work together, and they know if another person has a question, we are all quiet and let that person ask. It's helpful too. Once I graduate from here and then graduate from Purdue, there will be more of a financial benefit to them, we will be able to save more for their college and their future. They won't stand that right away, they do understand that education is important.

Gail described motherhood and the desire to serve as an example for her child as a strong motivator to succeeding at higher education. It was important to her for her son to see her do well and for her to raise the standard of living for her family.

It makes me have to. It's not a matter of want now, not that I want to do it, it's a matter of I HAVE to do it. I have to show him that education is highly important. It is something that you have to have, not only makes your living better, your, you feel better. Education is not something that can ever be taken away from you...and I want to instill that in my child, and if he sees me doing it...I know he's going to do it. Um, also give him a good, a good life. He can have things that I did not have as a child; it's up to me to work for those. So I have to go to school and do well, get good grades and supply for him!

Changing their lives for the better was a strong motivator for academic success for the participants. Spending time with family and pursuing a college degree as a means to a more financially secure future for the family were important motivational factors. Participants were also committed to instilling a high value on education in their children through example.

Education as self-fulfillment. Although none of the women indicated that self-fulfillment was the primary reason for pursuing a college degree, the majority of the participants referred to education as "me time" when they spoke of their time spent in class. They did not

refer to homework time or study time as “me time.” As previously noted, the time spent on homework or completing projects was often integrated into family homework time. However, one participant, who took all online courses, still described her pursuit of a college degree as “something I’m doing for me” and went on to explain that she wanted something “for herself.” In order to engage in the classroom setting, the participants described having to shut out thoughts of their many other responsibilities in order to focus.

Whitney describes an affinity and a passion for learning as being driving forces in her commitment to her education.

I was always the nerd, I liked to read. I was always, and I still do it to this day, um, you never, ever, ever find me without doing something, reading a book...I have been able to learn, I am learning something every day. So, being able to learn, just by being the smaller portion of people who give health care, is fantastic, so it just urges me every day. I am urged to keep going, to school and I am, I am still going to school... Class time is my peaceful time! I know that sounds terrible, because classes can be structural and hectic, but not for me, it is my peaceful time! It is when I finally can sit down, focus and not have to worry about anything or anything else is on my mind. I would much rather have class time instead of online, but you can't always get what you want when it comes to classes!

Jessica explains that education is something that she needs to do for herself and that she has not done many things for herself in several years having made sacrifices as a young mother. For her, education as intellectual stimulation and developing some independence is important.

I don't feel that my brain has turned to mush, I have done something for me which is a pretty big deal, because I sit around 6 years not doing anything for me. And pretty much

just showing everybody else I can do it. It's a pretty good idea; there is really no reason after high school that you should stop learning. It is good for your brain; you won't just feel that you are "just" a wife, "just" a mom. You can do it! You can't view it as dumb! There is all kinds of new stuff! And there is so much more out there, then just high school. Partying or whatever, just the idea of missing out on some of that stuff is not something you should strive for. You can still learn, you can still...it's just better for your head. It's better for my head any way! Just go back to school for something, get a teaching certificate or something! Higher education today, you don't have to be dependent on someone else, you don't have to worry about that.

Gail described the need to shut everything out of her mind in order to be successful in class and identified her class time as her "free hours."

I try to uh...leave everything outside the door when I walk in, and that has been a learning experience because, I have always you know, I am thinking about Mason [my son], I hope he's good, I hope he's being good, checking my phone constantly, especially when he was getting in trouble a lot in school. Checking my phone constantly, I worry about everything else. I have taught myself that I am going to have to leave everything outside the door...That is my free hours, if I don't leave everything outside the door, I am not hearing what the teacher is saying, I forgot everything else and everything else that is going on in my life. So I just sit there and I just focus on my notes, I focus on what the teacher is saying. I try to bring my life in, uh, with being a business student, I realized I was bringing my real life stuff into how this could help me at home, how can it help me budget, how can it help me in the future, you know things like that, that way I stay, you know, right here. That way I'm not thinking, "oh my God I forgot to feed the dog." "Oh

my God I forgot to wash the dishes.” “Oh my God I forgot to wash the outfit that Mason needed for school”...At first I did do that, and it’s a really, it’s a struggle to leave everything, everything at the door. But you have to, or you will fail to get anywhere.

Although none of the participants indicated that self-fulfillment was the primary motivator for pursuing a college education, many of them expressed it as a significant component of their motivation through their descriptions of class time and discussion of the benefits of pursuing a higher education. Class time was considered “me time” and for one participant was an important part of carving out an identity for herself.

Balance. Maintaining balance emerged as a theme amongst the participants.

Maintaining balance between academic, parenting and household responsibilities and, in some instances, work responsibilities was seen as difficult but necessary for success. The participants felt that it was important to carve time out of their busy schedules that was exclusively dedicated to just spending time with family doing activities or enjoying one another’s company.

Jessica described success as “Getting things that I need to get done, give my kids time to spend with their friends, being on time for stuff, doing everything right, and not going crazy while I do it.” She went on to discuss balance further when discussing success and compromises.

So I took the kids to the store with me, nothing broke, so I call that pretty successful. It just goes pretty much with what I want to do and what my kids want to do. Have to balance things, like cooking dinner, keeping the house clean, or whatever. So, yeah there are a lot of compromises...Not being able to go out and not have my kids with me or doing school work. So I guess that means compromises then too.

Kim credits a commitment to the best use of her time as important to maintaining balance between her multiple responsibilities.

Balancing school and life, taking advantages of the times that I have, using my time wisely, the reverse is if I don't use the time and study when I have the quiet, then I have to study when everybody is home and we want to be doing things together. That is something that I have learned, they like hanging out with me and doing little fun things, when I am studying that is just not fun for them. I think that is an important thing for me as a student and a mother.

Finding some time to relax with family was important to maintaining balance for mental well-being. Haley emphasized the importance of being calm and keeping stress to a minimum. "I know what I deal with every day; I try to relax without stressing out all of the time. And I am pretty healthy, my son is healthy." Balance was an important part of success for the participants. For some that meant doing activities together on the weekends, for others that meant sharing family meals together, but each of the women identified the need for a balance between their multiple roles.

Summary

This chapter has provided insights into the lived experiences of seven community college student mothers who are of low socioeconomic status. Five themes emerged from the participant data: support systems, lack of college preparation, family as a priority, education as self-fulfillment, and balance. The themes were consistent with the findings in the literature.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The two original research questions posed in the first chapter are answered in this chapter through the participants' voices in their individual profiles and transcripts. Phenomenology and thematic analysis were used to review the transcripts and identify the answers across the profiles and transcripts generated for this study. The main themes identified were support systems, lack of college preparation, family as a priority, education as self-fulfillment, and balance.

Assumptions made in the first chapter and supported in the literature proved to be evident. The limitations of small sample size, limited demographics, physical constraints of time and compromises to the interview setting with children present did not significantly impact the findings. The information presented in this chapter includes expectations and reflections, conclusions, implications, and recommendations.

Expectations and Reflections

Expectations in this dissertation were divided into two categories: mine and those of the co-researchers. The women wanted to share their stories to inspire and motivate others. I based my expectations on the literary review findings and my personal experiences with poverty, motherhood, and the pursuit of higher education both before and after I became a mother. Reflections were based on the five themes that emerged from the data.

The women participated in this study to tell their stories because they wanted their struggles to be validated, heard and shared. Seven academically successful, community college

student mothers of low socioeconomic status shared their stories for this study. They shared their successes, their tragedies, their struggles and their hopes and dreams for themselves and their children. Along the way, the women gained deeper insight into themselves and the role that higher education has in her life. Kim reflected that she never realized how important education was to her or how important it was to her that her children go to college immediately following high school. Robin realized that she had little support and no time for herself after the second interview in which she described her typical day and myriad responsibilities. Jessica realized that she had been isolated from adult interaction and found the interview sessions cathartic.

I have read the literature about students who are mothers, feminism, poverty and community college. I have worked at a community college as a Student Affairs professional and adjunct faculty member for several years. I have been (am) a student and a mother, both while living below the poverty line and just gasping above it. I expected to hear of busy schedules, internalized expectations of clean houses and emphasis on childrearing, as well as struggles with quality, affordable childcare. All of these expectations were fulfilled. Additionally, I am in awe of how well these women managed their multiple responsibilities and how competent they were at integrating and confidently prioritizing their multiple identities.

As someone who lived this experience with years of little sleep and little to no time for self-care, but who would proudly do it all over again, it was very important to me to clearly demonstrate how strong these women are and how hard they work. One expectation that I had that was not fully met was that my co-researchers in this study would talk incessantly of guilt. Taking time to pursue coursework when so many other, more pressing things, are demanding one's time such always felt very selfish to me and was something I constantly felt that I had to defend. I found, though, that this guilt was largely the luxury of graduate student mothers

(Warren, 2008) because we perceived our education as something extra, above and beyond, for self-fulfillment. For the co-researchers in this study, higher education is a lifeline. Pursuing some level of college education is not optional in our current economy if one is to survive and thrive. Therefore, the participants in this study logically felt validated about pursuing an education to better their lives for themselves and their children.

Conclusions

The initial research question presented in Chapter 1, “Describe the lived experience of community college students who are mothers with low socioeconomic status?” is answered through an examination of the sum total of experiences of the women expounded upon through the transcripts and profiles presented. Their experiences correlate with what is found in the literature regarding women who are students and mothers and who are of low socioeconomic status.

Clearly, each of the participants had full and busy lives with multiple responsibilities necessitating, for the most part, a part-time schedule as a student. None of them had entered community college directly out of high school and if they had attempted higher education immediately following high school at another institution, they were unsuccessful. Working adults represent one-third of the undergraduate population (Berkner & Horn, 2003). Adults delay enrollment for various reasons, including childcare, financial resources, and academic weaknesses (Bozick & DeLuca, 2005; Horn, et al., 2005; Rowan-Kenyon, 2007). One-fifth of students who delayed college no more than one year, and one-third of those who delayed college enrollment between two and four years had child care obligations (Horn, et al., 2005).

Being a parent and a student is negatively associated with persistence in the community college sector (Berkner, et al., 2007) and persistence in higher education generally (Stratton, et

al., 2007). A parent's college commitment is often secondary to family and work (Berkner & Horn, 2003; Wassmer, et al., 2004). Wei, et al. (2005) noted that although it is often age that determines independent status, independent students are most clearly different from their dependent counterparts in their family and work responsibilities. This was found to be absolutely true for the participants in this study. The participants unilaterally indicated that their primary responsibility was to their family and that the pursuit of higher education was something they were doing to further their family's future. While participants indicated that education was partially for self-fulfillment, they viewed this as an almost unexpected positive side effect of the path to a better job, higher income and benefits to themselves and their children. This is in line with the societal narrative of the "good mother" who is consistently self-sacrificing (Chase, 2011).

Lack of preparation for college was an emergent theme for each of the participants in this study. In a study of parental involvement in college going by socioeconomic class, Rowan-Kenyon, Bell, and Perna (2007) found that while multiple factors influence parental involvement in attaining access to higher education, that the understanding of college as an abstract concept, but a lack of knowledge of the concrete steps necessary to achieve success held true. Similar to the Rowan-Kenyon, et al.'s (2007) study participant who attempted to clarify further information about going to college and was told simply that she needed to go, each of the participants in this study responded similarly. The women consistently stated that their parents did not start discussing college with them until their senior year of high school. They were disappointed if they had withdrawn initially, and they were proud and supportive of their current pursuits of a community college degree.

Each of the women who participated in this study was highly motivated to complete her education and instill the value of education in her children. This finding was also supported in the literature. Several studies suggest that despite having doubts about their ability to complete a postsecondary degree, low-income women are strongly motivated by the desire to be a good role model for their children (Attewell & Lavin, 2007; Haleman, 2004; Jennings, 2004; Luttrell, 1997).

This leads to an examination of the second research question presented in this study, “What does success in higher education mean to a mother of low socioeconomic status who lives that experience?” Success was defined as getting good grades, passing classes, having happy, healthy children and keeping clean houses, but what these women really wanted was a better life. Research clearly demonstrates that earning a degree will raise low-income women out of poverty (London, 2006; Pandey, et al., 2006). The degree choices that the women made reflected the need to quickly improve their earning power. Robin spoke of wanting to be a psychiatrist, but changing her dream to be a nurse, so that she could earn money more quickly to support her family.

The desire for improvement was not just a lofty ideal, but an economic necessity. Wei, et al. (2005) reported that 24% of independent students at community colleges reported living below 125% of the U.S. Census Bureau poverty threshold for a family of four (\$21,286). The women in this study were selected as Pell-eligible meaning that they were living below the poverty line. They did not have the luxury of measuring their success as pursuing their ideal career, but rather they needed to attain the job skills necessary to increase their income.

Implications

Open access to education is imperative to a fair and equitable society (Freire, 1997; 2002, hooks, 1994). This is increasingly true in a post-manufacturing economy where it is no longer possible to enter the workforce and earn a living wage directly out of high school. The community college exists to bridge the gap between the masses and their dreams of social mobility. However the community college movement, now celebrating its fiftieth year in the state of Indiana, is failing to deliver its promise of open access to education for all. The tactics of social stratification are different than those utilized in selective four-year institutions and, often are not overt (Warren, 2000).

We know that selective four-year institutions perpetuate the oppression of poverty through access limitations. College preparatory exams such as the PSAT, SAT and ACT are costly. While middle class students can often afford to have tutoring and opportunities to take these exams once or more to obtain the desired score, these hurdles are difficult to maneuver for those in poverty (Rowan-Kenyon, et al. 2008; Payne, 1996). Yet, access is only one piece of the puzzle.

Access to higher education, in and of itself, while it does eliminate some important barriers between poverty and middle class, does not guarantee success. Paulsen and St. John (2002) conclude that for low-income women, especially mothers, the postsecondary system functions as a "class-based constraint" that discourages educational attainment. Rather than a glass ceiling, social stratification serves as a glass wall. As it is currently structured, the higher education system has opened the front door through the use of community colleges, but leaves women of low socioeconomic status who are mothers trapped in the foyer, their faces pressed against the glass, the new life for which they are striving just out of reach.

Using a 30-year time frame, Attewell and Lavin (2007) found that graduation rates among low-income mothers were much higher than is often suggested by research over a six year or ten year time frame. There are several problems with this as our current system of higher education is structured.

First, community colleges, like other public institutions of higher education, are funded by state government. Increasingly, state government is regulating funding based on enrollment, persistence and graduation rates. Graduation rates are measured at 150% of the timeframe anticipated for a student to complete a degree who is going full-time. So, for a student pursuing a two-year degree, they are given three years for their graduation to count. The problem then is that low-income mothers are graduating, but they are not graduating in enough time to count in the funding structure. The result for the institution is that their graduation rate continues to look abysmal, when all the while the measure is set up for both the institution and the student to fail.

Federal financial aid also has a maximum timeframe of 150% per degree. For students who are pursuing two year degrees, this gives them little to no opportunity to try different courses or change majors and still graduate on time. This is a strong example of institutionalized oppression. The students in this study had little to no interaction with, or understanding of, college. They knew education only in the abstract, yet they are expected to walk in the door and immediately begin a course of study that will become their career. Federal financial guidelines are designed to produce good workers to fill gaps in the economic structure and place great emphasis on timely completion of a degree. Federal aid should take into account the fact that people in poverty and people who have childcare responsibilities are less likely to be able to complete their degree in the prescribed timeframe. This is a critically needed change because removing financial aid is removing access.

The current funding model for community colleges is unsustainable both for the institution and the student. Community colleges have little ability to control state funding measures or federal financial aid policy, but they can control what they do to help students be successful and graduate in less time. It is time for community colleges to acknowledge that their student base is comprised of a majority of women, who are under prepared for college and who have childcare responsibilities.

Programmatically, community colleges can and should provide free childcare for students at least while they are in class, and ideally for an additional two hours per class per week for study time. Additionally, the data and literature indicate that support systems are necessary components of student success. Conversely, the students who need support the most have the least amount of free time for co-curricular opportunities. This indicates a need for virtual support groups to be created and that childcare should be provided for programming for students who are parents. Workshops on time management, navigating the systems of higher education, and balance are needed, but they must have childcare available or students will not have access to participate.

Recommendations

Recommendations have emerged from extensive examination of the participant profiles and interview data in this dissertation. These recommendations address the issues of attitudes about learning, socioeconomic status, gender roles, and institutional effectiveness. In order to more fully examine this specific phenomenon with more breadth, additional qualitative research studies should be completed to build the body of narratives from a marginalized segment of the national population.

More data should be collected on undergraduate students who are mothers at four-year institutions. Many of the participants in this study were unsuccessful at four-year institutions initially, yet had aspirations of attaining higher degrees. Community colleges only provide a path to a two-year degree which limits the possibilities for income and career paths. A meta-analysis of programs and services offered at public institutions for students who are mothers would provide a solid foundation for further analysis and recommendations on how to best serve these students. Those programs and services that were the most effective at retaining students could be replicated as best practices on a national scale.

Additional qualitative studies are recommended, such a longitudinal study on the participants in this dissertation as they continue their education at public four-year institutions, to capture the lived experiences of women who are pursuing bachelor's degrees while raising children and living in poverty. Interview questions would focus on daily routines, educational backgrounds, and attitudes about learning. Issues examined could be attitudes as intensity of academic rigor increases with upper level coursework and engagement in the classroom in the changed setting.

A questionnaire could be developed based on the themes found in this study and administered to other economically eligible and community college students who are mothers. The questions could focus on availability of support systems, preparation for college, motivational factors for persistence, and balance between multiple roles. Respondents would then be tracked over the next three years (150% of degree completion timeframe) to determine if these influences correlated with academic success and persistence.

Finally, many individuals provide primary childcare responsibility for young children and pursue higher education. Multiple qualitative studies could be developed to examine the unique

experiences of students who are fathers, single mothers, single fathers, grandparents, or adoptive parents. Each of these perspectives is important in an honest examination of societal gender roles and their impact on the pursuit of higher education.

Summary

This chapter presented the findings of this study. Findings presented included the emergent themes support systems, family as priority, education as self-fulfillment, lack of college preparation and balance. The women in this study were motivated students who maximized the utilization of resources available to them to be successful. The participants in this study were willing to make sacrifices and overcame tremendous barriers to be successful in higher education. The implications of this study with respect to future research in regards to gender, socioeconomic status, learning and institutional effectiveness are discussed.

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APPENDIX A

Dear <<Name>>

I am conducting research for my dissertation, which focuses on the experiences of college students who are mothers, particularly those at _____. I am hoping to interview research participants who fit all of the criteria outlined below.

- Enrolled at least half-time, have a G.P.A. of 2.5 or higher and are pursuing an Associate of Applied Science or an Associate of Science degree.
- Eligible to receive Federal Pell Grant assistance.
- The first in their family to go to college.
- Have one or more children ages 0-10 who live in the home with the student.

If you have additional questions about the study or fit the criteria above and would be willing to be interviewed for this study, please let me know by **(TBD)**. We can make arrangements to schedule a time and location for an interview. If you do not fit all of the above criteria but know of someone who does please pass this email on to them. I can be contacted @*****or at the contact phone numbers below to arrange an interview or answer questions about the study.

Thank you.

Tiffany Erk
Doctoral Candidate
Educational Studies
Ball State University
Muncie, IN 47306
765-730-5392

APPENDIX B

Interview #1 Protocol

Life History

(Each question will be followed by prompts as needed to fully develop the history)

- 1) Demographic Questions: Please tell me how old you are? Where are you from originally?
Where do you live now?
- 2) When did you complete high school? Tell me about your experiences in school from kindergarten to finishing high school
- 3) When did you begin your community college degree? When did you have children? Do you work outside the home?; where?; doing what? How many hours per week?)
- 4) What prompted you to decide to go to college? What experience have you had in college or with higher education?
- 5) How did/does being a mother affect your decision to go on with your education?

Interview #2 Protocol

Current Experiences in Education

- 1) What is a typical day like for you?
- 2) Tell me about homework time in your house.
- 3) What strategies do you use when you have conflicts between work and home?
- 4) What does it mean to be successful in college?
- 5) What do you have to do to be successful in college?

- 6) Do you have to make compromises? If so, what kinds of compromises?

Interview #3 Protocol

Reflection

- 1) Given what you have said before you enrolled in college and your life now, how do you understand higher education in your life?
- 2) What sense does it make to you?
- 3) What are the benefits of going to school for you?
- 4) What are the benefits of going to school for your children?
- 5) What advice would you give to other mothers who are in college?
- 6) What have you learned from this interview series?

APPENDIX C . INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Study Title The College Student As Mother: A Phenomenological Examination of Community College Student Experiences

Study Purpose and Rationale

It is the purpose of this study to identify the essence of the experience of academically successful low-SES mothers enrolled in community college.

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

To be eligible to participate in this study, you must be currently enrolled at Community College, be in good academic standing with the College, and have dependent children living in your home.

Participation Procedures and Duration

For this project, you will be asked to participate in three, one-hour interviews. The first interview will be on your life history as it pertains to higher education, the second interview will focus on your current experiences as a mother and the third interview will focus on your current experiences as a student and the meaning of these experiences to you. You will be asked to review the transcripts from each interview for accuracy and to provide additional feedback on the researcher's interpretations of the meaning derived from the transcripts. The project will occur over the course of the Fall 2012-Spring 2013 academic year. The data obtained from this study will be used to satisfy course requirements for a dissertation as part of the researcher's academic requirements as a doctoral student at Ball State University.

Audio or Video Tapes

For purposes of accuracy, with your permission, the interviews will be audio taped. Any names used on the audiotape will be changed to pseudonyms when the tapes are transcribed. The digital files will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home for the duration of the project and will then be erased.

Data Confidentiality or Anonymity

All data will be maintained as confidential and no identifying information such as names will appear in any publication or presentation of the data. For purposes of the written report, subjects will be given pseudonyms. Subjects will, however, be quoted at length from interview transcriptions. Every effort will be made to remove or change identifying details in the written report and no one other than the researcher will have access to the original audio recordings.

Storage of Data

Paper data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home for the duration of the project and will then be shredded. The data will also be entered into a software program and stored on the researcher's password-protected computer for the duration of the project and then deleted. Only the primary researcher will have access to the data.

Risks or Discomforts

The only anticipated risk from participating in this study is that you may not feel comfortable answering some of the questions. You may choose not to answer any question that makes you uncomfortable and you may withdraw from the study at any time.

Who to Contact Should You Experience Any Negative Effects from Participating in this Study

Should you experience any feelings of anxiety, there are counseling services available to you through Centerstone, a local mental health center with locations in Connersville and Richmond. The phone number for the administrative offices is 765.983.8005. The services are provided on a sliding income scale.

Benefits

One benefit you may gain from participating in this study may be a deeper understanding of your educational experiences.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw your permission at anytime for any reason without penalty or prejudice from the investigator. You have the right to request that information be withheld from the study, and to request a copy of the interview transcript and/or final written report. Please feel free to ask any questions of the investigator before signing this form and at any time during the study.

IRB Contact Information

For one's rights as a research subject, you may contact the following: Research Compliance, Sponsored Programs Office, Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306, (765) 285-5070, irb@bsu.edu.

Study Title The College Student As Mother: A Phenomenological Examination of Community College Student Experiences

Consent

I, _____, agree to participate in this research project entitled, “The College Student As Mother: A Phenomenological Examination of Community College Student Experiences.” I have had the study explained to me and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have read the description of this project and give my consent to participate. I understand that I will receive a copy of this informed consent form to keep for future reference.

To the best of my knowledge, I meet the inclusion/exclusion criteria for participation (described on the previous page) in this study.

_____ . . . _____

Participant’s Signature. . . . Date

Researcher Contact Information

Principal Investigator:.

Faculty Supervisor:

Tiffany Erk, Graduate Student . . .
 Adult, Higher and Community Education. .
 Ball State University.
 Muncie, IN 47306.
 Telephone: (765) 730-5392 (cell). . .
 Email: tmerk@bsu.edu. . . .

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